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## Relative Deprivation and Xenophobia: Patterns of Anti-Vietnamese Radicalism among Cambodia's Opposition Parties from 1993 - Present

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## ABSTRACT

### RELATIVE DEPRIVATION AND XENOPHOBIA: PATTERNS OF ANTI-VIETNAMESE RADICALISM AMONG CAMBODIA'S OPPOSITION PARTIES FROM 1993 - PRESENT

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Anti-Vietnamese sentiment has been the most highly displayed rhetoric by generations of Cambodian politicians. In contemporary Cambodia, the opposition parties have actively engaged in tirades aimed at the Vietnamese and the ruling CPP which came to power with Vietnamese military support in 1979. How are we to explain the hatred against the Vietnamese in Cambodia? From the examination of the activities of the BLDP, the royalist FUNCINPEC, and the CNRP, we conclude that relative deprivation of a role of power on the political stage emerges as a potential factor that explains why members of Cambodian opposition parties have taken a stand against the Vietnamese and Vietnam-installed CPP.

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RELATIVE DEPRIVATION AND XENOPHOBIA: PATTERNS OF ANTI-VIETNAMESE  
RADICALISM AMONG CAMBODIA'S OPPOSITION  
PARTIES FROM 1993 - PRESENT

BY

RATANAK KHUN  
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A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL  
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS  
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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACRONYMS .....	iv
INTRODUCTION -----	1
Research background -----	1
Two categories of the Vietnamese in Cambodia -----	3
Research questions -----	6
Research significance -----	7
Structure of the thesis -----	8
LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK -----	9
Approaches explaining anti-immigrant sentiment -----	9
Political discourse as a framework of analysis -----	18
Relative deprivation: who and what are they deprived of? -----	23
Hypothesis -----	29
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY -----	30
PATTERNS OF ANTI-VIETNAMESE RADICALISM AMONG OPPOSITION PARTIES FROM 1993 TO THE PRESENT -----	32
Two main sources of relative deprivation among Cambodia's oppositions -----	32
Old voices of anti-Vietnamese sentiment: BLDP and FUNCINPEC -----	38
New voice of anti-Vietnamese sentiment: CNRP -----	49

	Page
CONCLUSION-----	59
Limitations of the thesis -----	62
Future research -----	64
REFERENCES -----	66
APPENDICES -----	78

## ACRONYMS

BLDP	Buddhist Liberal Democracy Party
CDA	Critical Discourse Analysis
CNRP	Cambodia National Rescue Party
CPP	Cambodian People's Party
FUNCINPEC	National United Front for an Independent, Neutral, Peaceful and Cooperative Cambodia
GDP	Grassroots Democratic Party
HRP	Human Rights Party
KNP	Khmer Nation Party
PDA	Political Discourse Analysis
PPA	Paris Peace Agreement
PRK	People's Republic of Kampuchea
PRPK	People's Revolutionary Party of Kampuchea
RD	Relative Deprivation
SSP	Son Sann Party
SRP	Sam Rainsy Party
UNTAC	United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia

## INTRODUCTION

### *Research background*

Being Cambodia's powerful neighbour, Vietnam remains an important part of Cambodian history and has significantly shaped Cambodian politics since the pre-colonial period of the 1600s. The issue of Vietnamese-Cambodian relations has been highly politicized by different political parties in Cambodia. As such, discourse on the politics of the Vietnamese in Cambodia remains contested and has turned into political games. Contested issues include border disputes, the role of Vietnam in Cambodian politics, the status and rights of the Vietnamese immigrants living in Cambodia, and the legitimacy of the ruling Cambodian People's Party (CPP) that came to power with Vietnamese military support in 1979.

Opposition parties have constantly made use of these contested issues to shore up political and electoral support. The picture has been enlarged over time, particularly during election cycles. A brief illustration shows that most of the twenty parties registered for the UN-sponsored election in 1993 started their anti-Vietnamese campaign aimed both at Vietnam as a country and at the Vietnamese minority in Cambodia (Khmer Times 2014). These nationalist parties included the National United Front for an Independent, Neutral, Peaceful and Cooperative Cambodia (known by its French acronym FUNCINPEC); the Buddhist Liberal Democratic Party (BLDP); the Son Sann Party (SSP); the Khmer Nation Party (KNP), which renamed itself the Sam Rainsy Party (SRP); the Human Rights Party (HRP); and the Cambodia National Rescue Party (CNRP), into which the SRP and the HRP merged in 2012. A direct link between anti-

Vietnamese sentiment and these opposition parties can also be observed during both national and local elections when they told the Vietnamese minority, even though they have proper documents, that they did not belong to Cambodia and would have no right to vote.

Established in 2012, the CNRP was the only viable challenger to the ruling CPP before it was officially dissolved by Cambodia's Supreme Court in 2017. The party has often exploited the sentiment that pictures Hun Sen and his CPP party as Vietnamese puppets, directly attacking the foundation of their legitimacy and alleging an ongoing but hidden Vietnamese control over the Cambodian government (Eckert 2019). In many public and political meetings, its senior members have always made use of anti-Vietnamese slogans by publicly accusing Vietnamese of swallowing up Cambodia's territory along the border and sending tens of thousands of Vietnamese to migrate illegally to Cambodia. In their eyes, the Vietnamese are made to seem like a kind of devil responsible for all kinds of crises occurring in Cambodia. The opposition party portrayed Vietnam as a thief that steals Cambodia's land; tries to colonize Cambodia; causes unemployment in Cambodia; and forces tens of thousands of Cambodians to seek jobs abroad. The Cambodians, their claim goes, suffer serious sicknesses because of consuming food products imported from Vietnam. These narratives have been shared by the opposition's supporters and ramped up in rhetoric targeted against the Vietnamese through social media and the local press. On more than one occasion, such rhetoric has led to group beatings or even killing of the accused and the looting and destruction of property; and for no other reason than those victims were allegedly Vietnamese.



On the opposite side of the equation, the current Prime Minister Hun Sen and his CPP party have emphasized Vietnam's role in liberating Cambodia from the Khmer Rouge regime in 1979. This positive feeling also manifests itself in friendship monuments built to thank the Vietnamese government for their military assistance in overthrowing the Khmer Rouge. The two governments have maintained strong relations since the 1980s, the anniversary of the overthrow of the Khmer Rouge by Vietnamese troops and Cambodian defectors, the 7 January celebration, labelled "Liberation Day" or "Second Birthday of Cambodian people," which has been an important day in the ruling party's propaganda program.

Currently there are two contrasting political discourses about the Vietnamese in Cambodia: pro- and anti-Vietnamese sentiments among Cambodia's mainstream political parties. However, given the limited scope of this research, this thesis seeks to provide in-depth and up-to-date analysis of how the experience of relative deprivation shapes the inner logic of anti-Vietnamese sentiments among Cambodia's opposition parties from 1993 up to the present time. Why do they initiate a xenophobic stand against the Vietnamese, especially but not exclusively immigrants, as a strategy of populist mobilization?

#### *Two categories of the Vietnamese in Cambodia*

Classifying people into "ethnicity" or "immigrants" is tendentious and difficult. This is in part because of difficulties in defining both terms. Scholars have not yet shared a consensus on a single definition of "immigration," and it might be defined differently by many domestic laws of a country, international laws, and international organizations. But generally, "immigration"

refers to the international movement of people to a new country, where they are not a native or permanent resident, in order to live, study, and work there. Despite a variety of theoretical models to explain why international migration begins (Massey et al. 1993, 432), one often hears, simplistically, that there are just two kinds of immigrants: economic and political (persecutions) (South 2008). Alba and Foner (2015, 28-37) are more nuanced and lay out five types to explain immigration: labour immigrations, postcolonial immigrations, high-skilled immigrations, refugees and asylum seekers, and family reunification. The increasing number of these newcomers has often created a catalyst for more or less anti-immigrant feelings and attitudes in the host society. “Anti-immigrant sentiment” then refers simply to the opposition to or hostility toward immigrants expressed by established residents and exploited by politicians in the host societies. This issue has always been one of the most contentious issues dominating political discussions, particularly in Western Europe, North America, and Australia for several decades.

Meanwhile, “ethnicity” is referred to ascriptive group identities such as race, language, religion, tribe, and caste (Horowitz 1985, 41-5). In this sense, “ethnic conflict” is a confrontation between groups distinguished by, for example, between Whites and non-Whites; Protestants Catholics, Hindus, Muslims and Buddhist; even the Shia and Sunni and the Tamil and Sinhala tribes (Varshney 2001, 365). Some scholars such as Varshney (2002, 4-5), Bertrand (2004), and Tajima (2014, 5) use both terms “communal” and “ethnic” conflicts interchangeably. These conflicts can be violent (by the use of armed force) or non-violent (discrimination, exclusion, intentional rumours and falsehoods, verbal abuse, or threat of violence) between groups of people living in the same country (Bowen 1996).

In Cambodia, there is no accurate figure for the actual size of the Vietnamese minority in Cambodia. Some scholars have simply quoted the individual politician's estimation or attempted to justify the figures. The leader of the BLDP, Son Sann, said in 1993 that there were 1.5 million Vietnamese living in Cambodia (Kamm 1993). Minority Rights Organization estimated that approximately 700,000 ethnic Vietnamese were residing in Cambodia (Thul 2014). Other researchers have made more modest estimates, but lower than the opposition parties' claims. Some NGOs estimate in the range of 300,000 to 450,000. The Cambodian government claims that the official number of Vietnamese in Cambodia is just about 180,000, or 50,000 families (Chandran 2019). These estimates are small considering that Cambodia has a total population of about 16 million as of 2019.

There are two general categories of the Vietnamese in Cambodia. Some Vietnamese settlers trace ancestral roots back to those who began to settle in Cambodia ever since the French colonial period of the 1800s. And many others began to migrate to Cambodia after Vietnam's invasion and occupation throughout the 1980s. For the Cambodian authority, these Vietnamese are considered as "ethnic group, minority, legal immigrants, or foreign residents." According to Cambodia's Law on Nationality, Vietnamese children who were born after 1996 should be granted Cambodian citizenship (Radio Free Asia 2014). In the discourses of the opposition and many Cambodian people, all Vietnamese residing in Cambodia are at present regarded as "illegal immigrants" sent by Vietnamese government to colonize Cambodia and exploit her natural resources. The controversy over the status and rights of the Vietnamese in Cambodian society

today largely contributes to intense political tension between the ruling CPP and the opposition parties.

To examine anti-Vietnamese sentiment, we adopt a later definition provided by the opposition parties which view the Vietnamese as “illegal immigrants.” This marks much of the eruptions in their discourse about the Vietnamese. By employing this definition, growing tension between the Vietnamese in Cambodia and the opposition politicians and the people of Cambodia is located under the theme of anti-immigrant sentiment. Adida (2014) argues that an increase in anti-immigrant rhetoric is not just merely a “South-to-North” movement considered problematic in the First World countries, but is a broader, global phenomenon that equally affects “South-to-South” immigrants in the Third World nations. Thus, this thesis complements the growing body of the immigrant exclusion literature in the developing countries but focuses more on the relative deprivation variable, which is still under study in the case of anti-Vietnamese sentiment in Cambodia.

### *Research questions*

The main research question of the thesis is: How does the experience of relative deprivation explain anti-Vietnamese stand among Cambodia’s opposition parties from 1993 up to the present time? The thesis also investigates two sub-questions. 1) What are the sources of relative deprivation among members of opposition parties? 2) Why have they exploited the anti-Vietnamese sentiment for political gains?

These questions are worth investigating, as it allows us to understand how opposition parties feed their relative deprivation into anti-Vietnamese sentiment in post-conflict Cambodian politics. In other words, it brings RD to the forefront of explanatory factors regarding the study of the Vietnamese minority in the post-conflict Cambodian society, thus contributing to the existing literature. However, the scope of the research questions is limited to the initiation of the political actors from the opposition parties who strongly hold anti-Vietnamese sentiments. The research will not cover the discourses of non-political actors nor the period leading to UNTAC intervention in 1993.

#### *Research significance*

Recent contested discourses of the Vietnamese in Cambodia have been increasingly receiving attention, albeit still in scholarly infancy, and their focus centres around the research of the Khmer Rouge Tribunal and the prosecution of genocide against the ethnic Vietnamese. One case, that of 002/02, for example, is the study of the legal status of Vietnamese civil parties (Nguyen and Sperfeldt 2014). Derks (2009) notes the challenge of integration, economic activities, and inter-ethnic relations of Vietnamese living in Cambodia. Amer (1994) and Ehrentraut (2011) touch on the development of the situation of Vietnamese in Cambodia from pre-colonial times to the UN intervention in the early 1990s. Chhim et al. (2014) focus on the life histories that provide rich insights into the migration history of the ethnic Vietnamese along the Tonle Sap Lake in Cambodia. The study by Sion (2011) examines how different discourses of the violent past shape the Cambodian traditional justice system, both in the context of the Khmer

Rouge Tribunal and beyond, as well as in major memorials and commemorative practices, spaces that displace the discourses of victims that diverge from the official script. Thus, since very limited research has been conducted on the discourse of ethnic Vietnamese in Cambodia in the post-UNTAC period, the thesis aims to contribute to the filling in the literature gaps.

### *Structure of the thesis*

This thesis is divided into five parts. Part I introduced readers to the understanding of anti-Vietnamese sentiment in post-UNTAC period. Part II reviews the literature and theoretical model we use as a tool to examine the causation of RD and anti-Vietnamese sentiment within the opposition parties. We also sum up alternative theories that have been undertaken, such as a cultural approach, structural approach, religious approach, color-coded race, nationalism, or the combination of these approaches. Part III explains the research design and methodological approach. We decided to focus on the BLDP, the royalist FUNCINPEC, and the CNRP as these parties share anti-Vietnamese stands and gain popular votes relative to other oppositions in Cambodia. Part IV presents an in-depth and up-to-date analysis of each political party's view toward Vietnamese immigrants, based on the RD theory and empirical evidences. This allows us to explain why the oppositions, rather than the incumbents, choose to adopt anti-Vietnamese sentiment. Part V summarizes the findings and discusses the limitations and future research.

## LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### *Approaches explaining anti-immigrant sentiment*

The question that frames immigration literature is “how has growing tension against immigrants been precipitated and by whom?” The most dominant approaches that have been applied to such rising tensions include a cultural approach, structural approach, religious approach, color-coded race, nationalism, or a combination of these approaches. A cultural approach identifies cultural difference as the main point of confrontation between different groups of people. As such anti-immigrant sentiment might arise when host communities feel that they have little in common, such as beliefs, language, customs, and a long history on which they can build trust and communicate with immigrants. Conversely, the immigrants can easily integrate into the host societies when they share cultural overlap, leading to pro-immigrant behaviors (Adida 2014).

Such cultural arguments have been challenged over the years. For example, in *Immigrant Exclusion and Insecurity in Africa*, Adida (2014, 147) uncovers a curious fact: cultural similarity offers no advantage for immigrants; instead it may even worsen immigrant exclusion and insecurity. Immigrant exclusion often occurs when immigrant group leaders have incentives to build cultural boundaries in order to avoid member defection, group identity loss, and finally the loss of their status and power (Adida 2014, 17). When the “dominant culture” is threatened by the intrusion of familiar cultures, those in power decry a loss of unity, of national coherence. Society is under attack. This assumption is built on Horowitz’s claim:

“Whereas groups threatened with differentiation turn to the past to reduce their internal diversity, groups threatened with assimilation resort to their history to affirm their distinctiveness from those around them. Often begun by group members who are furthest along in the individual assimilation process, these movements commonly result in an explosive and violent assertion of group separateness” (Horowitz 1985, 72).

Horowitz (1985, 96) also argues that conflicts between different groups of people is mostly associated with modernization processes. Modernization or a structural approach argues that in many cases, the benefits of modernity have not been equally distributed among various groups. This uneven distribution of economic opportunity has been the source of confrontation between groups (Horowitz 1985, 101). In essence, the use of violence is often practiced as a means of competition for economic benefits. Scholars such as Hainmueller and Hiscox (2007) and members of the media have provided empirical evidence that cultural difference, Muslim marginalization, and employment opportunities have fueled confrontations between immigrant groups and the established resident communities in industrial countries.

Adida (2014) also uses an economic argument in claiming that local communities feel threatened by those immigrants with high cultural overlap when it offers the latter an opportunity to access local patrons and scarce resources. Empirically, immigrant exclusion and insecurity in West Africa involves both cultural traits and economic competition which are the sources of contention. In support of her arguments, she offers empirical evidence drawn from a combination of survey data and quantitative interviews with two ethnic groups: Nigerian Yorubas and Nigerian Hausa, and their host communities in three West African cities: Cotonou, Niamey, and Accra, in Benin, Niger and Ghana, respectively. These fieldwork sites were specifically selected



because each immigrant group had some cultural traits not shared with host communities. In Christian Accra, the Christian Yorubas group is religiously similar to native Ghanaians while the Muslim Hausa group is distinct. But Adida's finding indicates that Muslim Hausa are better integrated than Christian Yorubas in Accra city in Ghana because they are not viewed as a threat by the local people (Adida 2014, 35). The situation in the other two cities are the same as in Accra.

In short, observers share the common point that the uneven distribution of modernity benefits and cultural difference (e.g., practicing different customs and culture, speaking very different language, and having different ancestor and race) inevitably lead to feelings of hatred, and eventually violent confrontation between different groups of people. Such continues to be the case in Indonesia and Myanmar, not to mention China and India. However, each approach has its own merits but have fallen short in providing a coherent and comprehensive explanation. For example, a cultural approach focuses much on either cultural difference or similarity and is thereby lacking in detail explanatory powers, and it is in danger of excluding other important factors in the conflict, such as the role of history, political institutions, emotions, and distorted information. Whereas, modernization theory cannot satisfactorily explain why confrontation between groups took place in the beginning (in pre-modern time) – unless we have a different definition of modernization. Perhaps the complexities of immigrant conflicts require a more integrated and multi-disciplinary approach (Horowitz 1985).

Scholars such as Alba and Foner (2015) stress the importance of color-coded race and religion as the culprits which have fueled anti-immigrant sentiment. The two authors provide a comparative study of immigration in two North American countries (the U.S. and Canada) with four Western European nations (France, Germany, Great Britain, and the Netherlands). Their comparative argument is quite straightforward: color-coded race presents a unique challenge and symbolic boundary in the U.S., while Islamic religion is highly apparent in Western Europe. They argued that the U.S. was created as a nation based on the legacy of black slavery/immigrants, and the country experienced inequality and racism between the whites and black Americans. As a result of this, the U.S. became an internally fragmented society, leading to a bloody war to end black slavery in 1865. Even today, the issue of anti-immigration behavior has often provoked political debate between Republicans and Democrats.

By comparison, religion, especially anti-Muslim sentiment, matters more for Western Europe, than for the U.S. and Canada. It demarcates a clear boundary between established residents and immigrants and poses real challenges for immigrants. The rise of the right-wing parties with their populist anti-immigrant policy that marked recent elections, particularly in Germany and Hungary, have been widely propagating opposition to Islamization. They publicly oppose the construction of mosques. Muslim women wearing the scarf in public resulted in public policies and debates between many political parties. Many European citizens still perceive Islam as opposing values contrary to the Christian values and democracy of many European states. Islamic practices of arranged marriages, stone throwing, honor killings are viewed as contradictory to Christian and democratic values. To them, Islam is also purposely “illegible,”

hiding weapons and bombs underneath garments and allowing cheating on school exams or hiring a look-alike to take exams for the deficient student.

Of course, anti-Muslim rhetoric also exists in the U.S. and Canada, especially in the wake of September 11 terrorist attack, but both countries do not face big challenges in integrating them. In short, the argument of Alba and Foner (2015, 140) is “a combination of factors: religious similarity between natives and immigrants; Muslim immigrants’ socioeconomic status; the religiosity of the native majority; and historically rooted institutional structures. These components explain why religion is less of a barrier to inclusion of immigrant minorities in the U.S. than in Western Europe. The Canadian case also points to the role of state institutions and identities in creating difficulties for the incorporation of religious minorities.” Both authors argue that religiosity is highly accepted as a part of Americanization; and people are more tolerant of differences in beliefs (Alba and Foner 2015, 140).

Some other scholars blame nationalism for anti-immigrant sentiment, from anti-Semitism in Nazi Germany to recent anti-Muslim rhetoric in Western Europe and anti-Vietnamese sentiment throughout Cambodia’s history. When conflicts broke out, scholars have cited nationalism as a party to the conflict, either as a political tool that would enable political parties to entice the masses into fighting, or as fuel which stoked a popular outcry. For example, one might think of Germans brainwashed by the Nazi party during World War II to hate Jews and bear a grudge against neighboring France. The violence against Croats in the former Yugoslavia was a reaction to continuous nationalist propaganda disseminated by Serbian

politicians and the media, especially on Serbian TV, that broadcast old fears and hatreds (Mueller 2000, 45).

Anderson (1983) conceptualizes nationalism as an “imagined community” which takes place through mass media. This requires the widespread literacy of evolving communities with the potential to create social institutions. Karl Marx calls nationalism “the class struggle,” while Karl Deutsch (1966) viewed it as positive historical structure which facilitated racial mobilization in the period of rapid urbanization and promoted cultural mobilization in the period of social alienation. There are many other scholars who have viewed nationalism as a manifestation of a certain ideology strongly rooted in the thoughts and attitudes of people; as a process through which an ethno-cultural identity moves towards self-determination (Boy 1972); as well as the rise of indigenous movements to fight against the colonial power (Upreti 2006, 536).

Indeed, nationalism may have additional different expressions in different situations and in different regions. And as a domestic political tool, it may also include different facets, symbols, and values for different countries. As for Cambodian nationalism, Kiernan (1997) argues that generations of Cambodian politicians have developed their nationalist ideology based on a fear of foreign domination and interference. Nationalism and defense against foreign invasion became important motivations for racialization and discrimination. As Pilger (1993) put it: “no country has been brutalized by foreigners as Cambodia.” In this sense, nationalism in the Cambodian context is always a search for an enemy and remains one of the main sources of anti-

Vietnamese sentiment. The search has a neat circular logic: “The Vietnamese are enemies because they are foreigners. They are foreigners because they are enemies” (Mauk, 2018). Under the Khmer Rouge regime (1975–1979), Pol Pot introduced his internal purge policy of cadres to look for enemies and many of them were arrested and killed because of Vietnamese-related allegations (Hinton 2005, 11). In addition, ethnic Vietnamese became one of the target groups for execution through Pol Pot’s genocidal policies that gave “vent to his hatred of the Vietnamese and encouraged everyone else ... to do the same” (Chandler 2000, 133).

Ever since the 1993 election, the opposition parties have always claimed themselves as “democratic,” while allegedly accusing the ruling CPP of being “communist” closely linked to Vietnam. Being a democratic opposition, according to Norén-Nilsson (2016, 117), can be understood to have double-faced politics – both exhibiting tendencies to be simply called democratic and those that can be interpreted as xenophobic, racist, and nationalist. The distinction between the two in party discourse are generally explained by reference to how the democratic parties in Cambodia are seen to play the “nationalist card,” referred to anti-Vietnamese discourse and xenophobia, to triumph over the CPP (Norén-Nilsson 2016, 117). Elections are thought of as a special occasion for these nationalist parties to voice their negative feelings toward the Vietnamese who were told that they did not belong to Cambodia and would have no right to vote. Evidence, for example, has been reported by the UNHRC (2014) that anti-Vietnamese sentiments caused racist attacks on the day of the election in 2013. In short, Norén-Nilsson (2016, 26) argues:

“Contemporary nationalism is typically treated with near-exclusive focus on the anti-Vietnamese discourse of the political opposition, read as a simplistic strategy of populist mobilization.”

Historical animosity towards Vietnam has always been cited as the major factor that has contributed to the growth of Cambodia’s nationalism. For example, going back to the remote origins of anti-Vietnamese hatred, historian David Chandler (1992) wrote:

“A Cambodian king was tricked into marrying a Vietnamese princess in order to grant Vietnamese access to trade and temporary settlement along the Mekong Delta in the 1630s.”

The geographic area is referred to by Khmer speakers as “Kampuchea Krom,” also known as Cochin-China under the French colonization. It was officially annexed to Vietnam on March 8, 1949 through the Elyse Agreement granting the area to Bao Dai’s Auriol and New Associated State of Vietnam, later known as South Vietnam. This represents a major loss of Cambodian territory to Vietnam and remains deeply rooted in national memory today, as many opposition parties still promise to claim the area with the International Court of Justice (ICJ) once they win the election. They also refer to the loss of “Kampuchea Krom” and border dispute with Vietnam as a “Vietnam’s expansionist plan toward the East.”

After the Vietnamese encroachment into the Mekong Delta, there was also an absolute “Vietnamization” of Cambodia (1835 – 1840) (Pouvatchy 1986, 441). The Vietnamese court installed a puppet Queen Ang Mei on the Cambodian throne, and an Annamese/Vietnamese administrative system was imposed on Cambodia. Khmer citizens were forced to adopt

Vietnamese Mandarin religion, customs, and language (Chandler 2000, 125; Strangio 2014, 5). Cambodia's 56 provinces were reduced to 33 and renamed with Vietnamese names; a Vietnamese advisor was assigned to work with every Khmer governor. Chandler (2000, 126) argues that Vietnamese policies toward Cambodia in the 1830s followed the French *mission civilisatrice* (civilizing mission). This implies that there was not only the loss of territory, but also the culture, and politics had been heavily affected.

Another historical event is the legend of the Master's tea. Hinton (2005) narrates the tale that in the 1800s, the Vietnamese soldiers intentionally buried Cambodian servants up to their neck so that they could balance a wooden stove on their heads to boil water for their tea. Then, they told the servants not to move their heads to avoid spilling their master's tea. This story has been told from generation to generation, and the Khmer began to call the Vietnamese "Yuon," meaning barbaric (Hinton 2005), death, and disunity (Strangio 2014, 5). This is an example of verbal discrimination, as the opposition parties claim that the "Yuon" is a devil responsible for all social and political crises in Cambodia.

Moreover, the influx of Vietnamese migrants following the 1979 invasion and occupation of Cambodia also is attributed to the rise of nationalism in Cambodia by shaping the mindset of young generations of Cambodian politicians who have grown up seeing the presence of the Vietnamese military and civilians as an unforgivable violation of national sovereignty (Millar 2018). In brief, "past events contributed to anti-Vietnamese sentiments through historical accounts and story-telling" (Chandler 2000).

These foregoing studies have all pushed forward the scholarly analysis of anti-immigrant sentiment with increased rigor and empirical analysis. However, they offer only partial explanations for why and how some political parties came to embrace this negative rhetoric against the Vietnamese while others do not. By adding to the above literature, this thesis delineates the theme of RD in order to understand why the opposition parties, rather than the incumbent party, hold anti-Vietnamese sentiment from 1993 up to the present time.

*Political discourse as a framework of analysis*

The theme of RD used in this thesis can be delineated through political discourse analysis (PDA) most notably proposed by Isabela and Norman Fairclough (2012). The PDA model is an integration of critical discourse analysis (CDA) concepts with the analytical framework of argumentation theory (Van Dijk 1997). The PDA is basically practical argumentation that can ground decision (Fairclough and Fairclough 2012). Among several definitions, the argumentation is better understood as a social and rational activity of trying to justify or deny certain claims and attempting to encourage an audience to share or refute the claim (Van Eemeren and Grootendorst 1992). For example, a politician expressing his opposition to the construction of nuclear power plants in a campaign speech given to a group of environmentalists is said to be acting rationally for political gains.

The political discourse is primarily based on a view of politics which is intrinsically about making choices about how to act on a matter of common concern and apply it to a context of disagreement and conflict, in which what is needed to act in response to these situations



(Connolly 1993, 12; Fairclough and Fairclough 2012; Van Dijk 1997). For instance, in 2005 a burka ban on wearing head covering in public in the Netherlands was initiated, placing an obvious stigma on Muslim women, a kind of forced integration and public stigmatization or moves that were intended to “cleanse the domain of society from unwanted elements in order to create a purified image of society, what Durkheim calls the ‘ideal society.’” (Schinkel 2017, 233). In effect, the issue of immigration integration becomes “problematized.” The problematization of immigrant integration appears in all political parties, from the left to the right and they have long been preoccupied with marking out which immigrants should be a part of society (Schinkel 2017, 233). So, the question of action and of what to do is fundamental in political discourse; and deliberation plays a crucial role in examining a wide range of views leading to a better and reasonable argumentation.

Throughout the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, anti-Semitism was on the rise across many European countries, particularly in Germany. A popular explanation for the rise of hatred against Jews has been the basis of the RD theory. Much of the literature posits that modernization, liberalism, and capitalism resulted in the economic, social, and political emancipation of Jews (Brustein and King 2004, 36). These asymmetries then provoked fears among many non-Jews, reinforcing anti-Jewish behavior. Advocates of RD theory also argue that Jews represented a minority group which had prospered in many European societies and became the object of popular frustration and aggression. For example, the emancipation of the Jews, such as in landowning, jobs in civil service, the military, the financial sector, among other areas, created the impression for some others, particularly those who felt unable to achieve their

job satisfactions and to better their economic status. Hitler and his Nazi party saw these popular traumas as an opportunity for mobilizing supporters. Hitler adopted a global Jewish conspiracy theory: the Jews were the diabolical agents of a world plot to destroy the German people, which became a key element motivating him to carry out genocide as “the final solution of the Jewish question” (Spoerl 2020, 211).

The key players in political discourse are political *actors* – individual (politicians and citizens), political *institutions* and *parties*, engaging in political *processes* (Van Dijk 1997). For example, one of the main functions of a political party is to maximize and/or maintain electoral success and popular support. In so doing, parties seek to strengthen existing partisan loyalties. This means making them more attractive to the groups that share the same views and concerns. With respect to anti-Semitism, the Nazi’s stance had remained constant over time before and during its control over Germany. Political parties in this case possibly serve as an instrument through which deprived individual members seek to improve their own situation. For example, a Nazi party member said in 1993:

“People foreign to our land and race made up the government; the middle class was ruined through the scarcity of food and the depreciation of money; scoundrels and parasites cheated and robbed us, and in an incredibly brief time ruined undertakings it had taken a whole people centuries to build. People lacked the very essentials of living... Having felt the results of the economic collapse on my own pulse, I was only too happy to take my place in the van of the movement” (quoted in Gurr 1970, 59).

In addition to RD, nationalism also contributed to the rise of anti-Semitism in Germany before and during World War II. To the nationalist egotists within the Nazi party, the Jews

appeared a danger, as they belonged to a different group of people than the Germans. For instance, Joseph Goebbels, the Nazi propaganda chief, wrote in his diary entry in November 1941 that: “The Jews are the lice of civilized humanity. They have to be exterminated somehow... When you spare them, you subsequently become their victim” (Herf 2006, 114). Meanwhile, Goldhagen (1996, 32-54) explains that German anti-Semitism originates from a long tradition of “racial eliminationist anti-Semitism.” This means that Hitler did not invent the political discourse of the hatred against the Jews. Instead, Jews had long been victims of discrimination and persecution since the Middle Ages, and they were prevented from joining political participation and holding official position. This was usually for religious reasons, while some Christians have viewed the Jewish beliefs as an aberration that needed to be gotten rid of.

One might draw an assumption that anti-Semitism in Germany during World War II reflected cultural differences, historical animosity, nationalism, and relative deprivation, i.e. Jews were disliked and were feared because of their religious faith and attitudes; their perceived economic well-being and power; their social and political status; their racial characteristics and identities; and their assumed leadership or support of subversive political and social groups. Borrowing from the concept of PDA, the political discourse of anti-Semitism, thus, can be divided into epistemic (or theoretical) and practical reasons. The epistemic reasons are those which originate from the nature of the sentiments as such. There are two main variants: those which attribute anti-Semitism to a form of historiography, and those which attribute it to the notion of nationalism. These are often cited as causes of racial rhetoric.

Whereas, practical reasons attribute the origins and causes of anti-Semitism to the feelings of anger and frustration of people with responsibility for or within the national political power and the native citizens who felt that the Jews were doing much better than what they should have achieved as the majority group. We distinguish two main accounts which blame political actors and parties, by focusing upon individual deprivation and group deprivation, which we discuss in the following part.

We then can summarize the distinctions which shall be used as the framework of our analysis of anti-Vietnamese sentiment as follows:

Discourses of anti-Vietnamese sentiment – what's to blame?

- Epistemic reasoning – historical animosity
- Epistemic reasoning – nationalism
- Practical reasoning – personal relative deprivation
- Practical reasoning – group relative deprivation

For Fairclough and Fairclough (2012, 3), epistemic or theoretical reasons which examine narratives, explanation, and imaginaries cannot function as a part of action. So, with this thesis, we will treat them as subordinated to the practical reasons that provide political agency with reasons/scapegoats for holding anger against certain groups of people. Moreover, in order to research the causes, we must also have a more comprehensive view of the 'subjective' aspects,

i.e. the aspect which has to do with the political agents in making decision and developing strategies and policies in response to the problem.

*Relative deprivation: who and what are they deprived of?*

Pettigrew and Katz (1967, 266) defines relative deprivation (RD) as feelings of unfairness and deprivation. Scholars such Tyler and Smith (1998, 597) referred RD as a judgment which is linked to “feelings of anger and frustration.” The judgment about what is “deserved,” “fair,” “just,” and what an individual is “entitled” to receive, have determined people’s feelings, behaviors, and attitudes in their interactions with others. Gurr (1970, 24) describes RD as “actors’ perception of discrepancy between their value expectations and their value capabilities.” Value expectation refers to the goods and conditions of life to which people feel they are entitled to; whereas value capability is the goods and conditions people perceive they are capable of receiving and keeping.

Three elements in RD are important. The first is that the feelings of deprivation with one’s own outcome depend more on “subjective” aspects of deprived perceivers, such as levels of outcome achieved in comparison to others, rather on “objective” indicants (Dion, 1986, 159; Olson and Hazlewood 1986, 2). Second, “negative” comparison has been cited as the important element or precondition for RD to occur (Suls 1986, 95). Third, RD is not all about practical needs or wants alone, but the wants and needs that a person feels they deserve. In other words, the feelings of RD will not happen if a person has no reason to expect more than what they can achieve; they will be less dissatisfied with what they own, or even be happy to maintain their

status quo (Runciman 1966, 9). If a person fails to get a promotion they want and feel that they deserve, they will feel deprived. If a person fails to get a promotion, they want but feel that they do not deserve they will not feel deprived.

Theoretical works by Crosby (1982), Gurr (1970), and others have clarified the nature and preconditions of RD. Earlier models included only two preconditions for a person to experience deprivation. For RD to occur, it is necessary, first, that individuals actually experience a desire for the attainment (wanting). Second, those individuals feel that they deserve what they want (feelings of entitlement) (Crosby et al. 1986, 18). In later models, for instance, Crosby (1982) proposed five necessary and sufficient preconditions for a deprivation to be experienced: for a person to feel resentful about not having his desired object X, they must (1) see that someone else possesses X, (2) want X, (3) feel entitled to X, (4) think it is feasible to obtain X, and (5) lack a sense of personal responsibility for not having X.

Perhaps, the most influential model of RD was proposed by Ted Gurr in *Why Men Rebel*. He views RD, formulated as frustration-aggression model, as potential for collective violence. Violence varies strongly with the scope and intensity of RD. Gurr argues that:

“In summary, the primary source of the human capacity for violence appears to be the frustration-aggression mechanism. Frustration does not necessarily lead to violence, and violence for some men is motivated by expectation of gain. The anger induced by frustration, however, is a motivating force that disposes men to aggression, irrespective of its instrumentalities.... To conclude that the relationship is not relevant to individual or collective violence is akin to the assertion that the law of gravitation is irrelevant to the theory of flight because not everything that goes up falls back to earth in accord with the basic gravitational principle. The frustration-aggression mechanism is in this sense analogous to the law of gravity:

men who are frustrated have an innate disposition to do violence to its source in proportion to the intensity of their frustration....” (Gurr 1970, 36-7).

On one hand, it is noticeable that those who are most repressed, most deprived, most in danger, are those who often revolt. On the other hand, there are some riots and peasant uprisings, but most often collective violence has occurred among those who are not the most deprived. In *Moral Economic of Peasant* by James Scott (1997), peasants don't care about who is richer than others, but the worst-case scenario is starvation. Peasants seek to minimize the risk of this, and as such, they rebel for the sake of their own security, to not experience deprivation. The explanations vary, but we can draw assumptions that RD creates potential for anger and frustration. Collective violence will occur, depending on the intensity and scope of RD which a person has encountered. Collective violence then may serve as an instrument, a psychological choice of a means to improve one's own situation.

Gurr (1970, 29) measures the intensity of RD by the extent of negative effect perceived by individual, or in Runciman's words (1966, 10), the degree of deprivation refers to “the intensity with which it is felt.” The greater the perceived gap we see between our value expectations and value capabilities, the greater is our anger and discontent. For example, Sullivan (1994) has made a comparative interview study of Chinese student participation in violent riots against African students in Nanjing, China, between 1988-1989. He concludes that the local Chinese students had experienced considerably greater deprivation relative to the African scholarship holders in terms of difficult living conditions. As one African student said:

“...We’re less restricted in a way. Yeah, in a way we live better than they do. They [the Chinese students] have more restrictions. They live six to a room and have to be in the dorm by ten o’clock, turning the lights off by 10:30 or 11:00. They can’t have foreign guests sleepover. They have to shower outside, in a separate building; they don’t have showers in the dorms. So, it’s really unfair in a way, it’s unfair....” (Burgess 2016, 82).

In addition, time is also important. The greater the intensity of deprivation is, the longer our anger and frustration persist. People might hold their grievance for the rest of their lives and even pass it on to their children. Moreover, the number of opportunities also determines the intensity of deprivation. People might defer discontent over their failures if they have many alternative ways to try to meet their expectations. Conversely, if they have few choices, they might feel angry. Furthermore, people are likely to tolerate and control their tempers if they can still maintain or receive something else comparable to their previously desired object. If not, this will increase the intensity of RD. Lastly, comparisons with one’s own outcome in the past have also resulted in deprivation experience (Suls 1986, 96). Such a temporal comparison might yield dissatisfaction if past outcomes exceed the present one. In order to measure the intensity of RD, it is possible that one can clarify a number of properties of value expectations and capacities that decrease or increase the intensity of deprivation, by conducting surveys or interviews with the proportion of people in any groups that feels deprived in relative to any specific group (Gurr 1970, 29).

According to Gurr (1970, 29), the scope of RD is associated with either individuals or each class of values among group members. Runciman (1966) divided the scope of RD into “egoistical” and “fraternal” deprivation; recent literature distinguishes between “personal” and



“group” deprivation (Tyler and Smith 1998). Egoistical or personal deprivation refers to the perception that one’s own outcome falls below a subjective standard which is usually based on others’ outcomes. Fraternal or group deprivation is the perception that a person’s group as a whole is deprived, compared with other. For example, if I think that I get paid less relative to my Teaching Assistant colleagues, I have a feeling of individual deprivation. If many of my colleagues and I feel that TA are paid less relative to TA at other departments, we have a group deprivation.

According to Taylor (2002, 15), the distinction is very important because group deprivation only produced agitation for or against structural change. Similarly, Tyler and Lind (2002, 45) also stress the importance of the division, which leads to different behavioral consequences. Consider, for instance, the rise of anti-Chinese sentiments in Cambodia. The influx of Chinese people and money, especially in Sihanoukville, had impacts on the lives of local people and caused dissatisfaction. If an individual Cambodian feels that he is not doing well relative to the Chinese, he responds in an individual way. If he feels that his current situation is likely to change, he could work harder. If he feels the change is not feasible, he might also end up blaming his own fate. In either case, his reaction is individual. In contrast, if he sees that many Khmers are deprived relative to the Chinese minority, he is likely to join a political party that shares a similar cause or goes on strike to demand the changes of the situation. This means that RD can create collective feelings of hatred to the extent that many people feel frustrated about the same thing.

For Gurr (1970), some topics have the characteristic of a group level: the oppression of a political party, anti-racial sentiments, or the decline of national economy. Saleh (2013, 92-103), for example, identifies the causes of ethnic conflict in Iran as being “widespread discontent over economic conditions, leading to a huge gap between urban peoples and the ethnic minorities’ traditional regions; frustration about the lack of opportunities for political participation and ethnic rights; widespread anger about foreign intervention and official corruption; and rural hostility toward Tehran’s repressive policies of centralism.” Such events and issues are likely to provoke feelings of RD among the majority or category of people and are, therefore, wide in scope and high in intensity. Conversely, individual or small group deprivations such as failure to be promoted, for instance, affect few people at a specific time and in specific place and are, therefore, small in scope and low in intensity.

Based on the overview of RD literature, we operationally included forms of RD: the use of non-deprived group’s social and emotional feeling, such as its outcome, opinion, or ability; self-evaluation or comparisons with other group which create feelings of frustration about its own group’s outcome or feeling of dissatisfaction with its own group’s ability; as well as relevant *attributes* which give rise to non-deprived groups (e.g., the privileges that lead to better outcomes, the information that contributed to the opinion, or the skills that promote the performance).

*Hypothesis*

There are two different political discourses: pro- and anti-Vietnamese sentiments among Cambodia's mainstream political parties. Though cultural differences, historical animosity, and nationalism serve as factors which influence the intensity of anti-Vietnamese sentiments, these variables do not explain the complete story. Instead, the thesis argues that RD serves as a potential factor which accounts for the negative rhetoric towards the Vietnamese in the country. Thus, the thesis formulates as hypothesis that:

H<sub>1</sub>: Anti-Vietnamese sentiment within Cambodia's opposition parties is associated with relative deprivation which each individual member of opposition parties has experienced.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The thesis employed the methodology of “inductive theory building from political discourse analysis” (Jäger 2004; Fairclough and Fairclough 2012). It refers to the analysis of empirical raw materials and information as discursive forms (Howarth and Stavrakakis 2000, 4). This means that we treat a wide range of linguistic and non-linguistic data – speeches, reports, manifestos, historical events, interviews, policies, ideas, even organizations and institutions – as “text” or “writing.” This enabled us to draw upon and develop two distinct inroads for the empirical analysis of anti-Vietnamese sentiment in Cambodia’s political discourse.

First, we carefully selected secondary data, including historical texts, newspapers, leaders’ biographies and speeches, and political party’s policy texts, through background checks: the language the source was written in; what country and place it was from; who wrote it; and who published it and when (Jäger 2004, 175). This allowed us to establish the context fitting the major events of xenophobia and racial sentiments.

Second, we conducted 10 interviews with members of the Sam Rainsy Party (SRP) and the Human Rights Party (HRP); both merged together to form the Cambodia National Rescue Party (CNRP) in 2012. Interviewees were sampled from three categories from a diverse spectrum of the contemporary political climate for whom we assume differing narratives – the list can be adapted to new insights from interviews. The first involved mid-range members of these opposition parties with policy influence, (forcibly dissolved in 2017). The second category dealt with local officials who are former commune chiefs or commune councils, as these people wield

significant power over local interpretations on any issues within communities. The third was academic scholars who were engaged more broadly in Vietnamese issues to assess recent political conflicts in Cambodia, especially towards the Vietnamese minority.

Interviewees were – in semi-structured interviews – asked to tell the history of Cambodia in as much detail as they feel comfortable. By avoiding a specific framing of the Vietnamese role in Cambodia, possible biases will be avoided and the actual relevance of the topic for the individuals can be more easily gauged. The thematic focus of the Vietnamese can then be introduced in follow-up questions that delve into the topic. In addition, follow-ups during and after interviews were also employed. For example, the researcher evaluated the interviewee's response and requested them to elaborate on the anti-Vietnamese discourse topic and be more precise.

In sum, these primary data were analyzed using PDA framework that draws on careful text analysis and 10 qualitative interviews. This frame analysis allowed us to interrogate the discourses purported by different actors more thoroughly in order to understand how the discourses differ precisely and what consequences these have for political discourse studies in Cambodia. This analysis allowed the nuanced differences between the various discourses to be rendered visible and understandable.

## **PATTERNS OF ANTI-VIETNAMESE RADICALISM AMONG OPPOSITION PARTIES FROM 1993 TO THE PRESENT**

### **Two main sources of relative deprivation among Cambodia's oppositions**

*Military occupation of Cambodia by Vietnam (1979 – 1989):* A combination of the Khmer Rouge's repeated savage raids into Vietnamese territory and its massacre of the Vietnamese in Cambodia drove Vietnam to counter-attack Cambodia in late 1978. One of the most powerful armies in Asia, Vietnam was able to overthrow the Khmer Rouge with little resistance. Then, Vietnam installed the People's Republic of Kampuchea (PRK) in January 1979. With increasing international pressure, Vietnam withdrew its troops from Cambodia in 1989.

A first particular source of relative political deprivation was the fact that a decade-long period of Vietnamese occupation created a new elite group drawn from the mid-level Khmer Rouge defectors and the former Khmer Vietminh, such as Hun Sen (now prime minister), Heng Samrin (now president of the National Assembly), Chea Sim (former president of the Senate who died in 2015), Pen Sovann, Chan Sy, Say Phouthang, and others. Most of them were not previously members of the Cambodia's elites, but they have led the People's Revolutionary Party of Kampuchea (PRPK). Then after October 1991 it renamed itself the Cambodian People's Party (CPP), which has remained in total control of Cambodia for over forty years. In fact, this new elite group came from lower social status but rose to a higher position and secured a central role in Cambodia's government through Vietnamese military support in 1979 (Slocomb 2003; Bultmann 2018). Actually, Vietnam developed political and military structures and training for

the CPP (Gottesman 2003, 48-55). Along with steady military aid from the Soviet bloc, the CPP controlled army and has been the best equipped and strongest force among other political factions in Cambodia.

The old elite group, including the royal family, intellectuals, and the former senior military officials of Lon Nol regime (1970 – 1975), was reconstituted in the diaspora and along Thai-Cambodian border as anti-Khmer Rouge and then anti-Vietnamese movements from the 1970s to the 1980s. Following the 1991 Paris Peace Agreement (PPA), the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC) was formed to supervise elections in Cambodia in 1993. It was the 1993 UN-supervised election that paved the way for the return of Cambodia's old elites into Cambodia's political arena, leading to ongoing violent clashes with the CPP's new elites (Bultmann 2020). Indeed, the old elites were deprived of their social status, lost their entitlement to power, and were unable to win total state control, at least until now. They are currently searching for political space in Cambodia, by employing anti-Vietnamese sentiment and directly attacking the foundation of legitimacy of the ruling CPP. Therefore, the comparatively strong anti-Vietnamese rhetoric of this old elite group (who then became leaders of opposition parties) was largely attributed to the relative deprivation from the loss of their social status and political power through what they called the rupture caused by the Khmer Rouge and the subsequent Vietnamese invasion.

The royalist FUNCINPEC won the 1993 election, receiving 45.5% of the popular vote, while the CPP received 38.2% and the BLDP received 3.8% (Strangio 2014, 58). However, the

CPP rejected the election results and threatened to divide Cambodia into two; the late King Norodom Sihanouk intervened in the political deadlock, proposing the 50/50 power-sharing between the CPP and FUNCINPEC. They agreed to the system of two prime ministers and equal representation in all important ministries (Roberts 2002, 103). Sihanouk's son, Prince Ranariddh (FUNCINPEC), served as first prime minister, while Hun Sen (CPP) became second prime minister. The two main parties were joined by two other small parties, the BLDP and Molinaka, to form a quadripartite coalition government.

However, the military coup by the CPP on July 5-6, 1997 permanently changed the political landscape by ousting FUNCINPEC leader Prince Ranariddh as first prime minister, while strengthening Hun Sen's CPP strong grip over Cambodia. As the author of *Hun Sen's Cambodia* Sebastian Strangio (2014) argues, since 1997 Cambodia has gradually slipped under full control of Hun Sen and his CPP. Meanwhile, the emergence of the Sam Rainsy Party (SRP), the Human Rights Party (HRP), and the Cambodia National Rescue Party (CNRP) into which the SRP and the HRP merged in 2012, replaced FUNCINPEC as the anti-Vietnamese expansionist opposition party and the only viable challenger to the ruling CPP.

*Rising power of Hun Sen and CPP:* A second major source of the sentiment of relative political deprivation within the opposition parties has been the rise of Hun Sen and the CPP over the last four decades, leading to personal feelings of deprivation and frustration over Hun Sen's unexpected rise and asymmetry in the level playing field between the incumbents and oppositions. In fact, Hun Sen has strengthened his power by gaining social and political status as



“Cambodia’s strongest man,” and according to 2016 Global Witness’s report *Hostile Takeover*, Hun Sen’s family members are amassing vast personal fortunes in many giant companies approximately worth between \$500 million and \$4 billion. The rise of Hun Sen and his family over the last few decades have been in parallel with the rise of what Strangio (2014, 135) calls “Hunsenomics” which refers to a blend of old-style patronage system, elite charity, and free-market economy. Hunsenomics has succeeded in creating a stable protection pack among Cambodia’s incumbents, while it has also succeeded in marginalizing Hun Sen’s opponents, including Prince Ranariddh (FUNCINPEC), Son Sann (BLDP), Sam Rainsy and Kem Sokha (CNRP), and made it clear that King Norodom Sihamoni, who plays a ceremonial role, has no place in the country’s political life.

Since 1993, Cambodia has practiced a multi-party system. However, Heder (2012, 113) calls Cambodia’s current political system an “electoral system with many un-free and un-fair aspects.” Levitsky and Way (2012) refer to it as “competitive authoritarianism.” It has now moved to authoritarianism (Un 2019). The CPP has a near monopoly of military force, control of the courts, patronage resources, performance legitimacy, as well as Hun Sen’s benefactions to society, which in total has placed the CPP at a significant advantage vis-à-vis their opponents (Norén-Nilsson 2016, 7). Even state-owned TVK, many private stations, including Bayon TV owned by Hun Sen’s daughter, have broadcasted pro-CPP news and propaganda while either ignoring or criticizing the opposition (Human Rights Watch 2013). According to Human Rights Watch (2016):

“[in 2015, Hun Sen] used his control of Cambodia’s security forces, courts, and civil service to force the opposition leader into exile, beat up opposition politicians, jail critics, pass draconian laws, and increase the ruling party’s stranglehold on the country’s institution.”

Of other importance is the extent of the CPP’s continuing control over the national economy and a major part of the civil administration, making it difficult for the opposition to operate. Kang (2002, 186) quoted Alexander Kim as saying: “No party could be effective unless it had many wealthy members, or unless it could secure secret, illegal donations – something the ruling party could do, but which an opposition party would find immensely difficult.” Over the past four decades, tycoons and businessmen in Cambodia who have supported the CPP and Hun Sen are thought to be granted access to the country’s lucrative business and resources, including land, forests, oil, mining concession, telecom, financial banking, air routes, sea ports, export/import monopolies, real estate, and tourism (Verver 2019, 7). One of the main beneficiaries has been a Cambodian-Vietnamese tycoon, Sok Kong, who started his business from scratch and rose in parallel with Hun Sen (Strangio 2014, 133).

In exchange for these business privileges, these tycoons and businessmen must be loyal and financially contribute to individual officials and the CPP party as a whole (Verver and Dahles 2015). Often seen as an exchange for votes, hundreds of schools, pagodas, irrigation systems have been constructed across the country donated by these groups of benefactors in the name of Hun Sen and CPP as gifts to the villagers (Human Rights Watch 2012). These constructions gain momentum before each election event (Craig and Prak 2011, 219). Since the election in 1998, these activities are called “Working Group Helping the Local Level” (Craig and

Pak 2011, 223). Meanwhile, non-CPP parties lack such human and financial resources. This was clearly expressed in the ubiquitous CNRP campaigns slogan in 2013 election: “My gasoline, my motorbike, my money, my morale, save my nation. Change! Change! Change!” (Norén-Nilsson 2016). The slogan implied the way the CNRP supporters spent their own money to rally and campaign.

In short, Hun Sen and the CPP have consolidated their position as unchallenged political actors that predominate Cambodia’s economy and politics by drawing the wealthy business community, including Cambodia’s tycoons, into their patrimonial networks, and strengthening relations with powerful provincial families and the military (McCargo 2005; Jacobsen and Stuart-Fox 2013, 6). It has clearly generated imbalance on the playing field between the CPP and the oppositions. It has electorally marginalized the opposition parties.

These visible facts allow us to make an assumption that: anxiety about the Vietnamese in Cambodia and the CPP can be understood as the side-effect of a decade-long period of Vietnamese military occupation over Cambodia and the rising power of Hun Sen and the CPP with Vietnamese linkage over the last four decades. These two main factors have in turn created feelings of relative deprivation among the old elites who then became founders, leaders, and members of opposition parties. With the examinations of the political discourses of the BLDP, the royalist FUNCINPEC, and the CNRP, as well as interviews with mid-level members of former CNRP, to resist the Vietnamese is synonymous with clashing with the Hun Sen’s new

elite group. In the following section, we will elaborate more on how the experiences of relative deprivation by trio opposition parties shapes their inner logic of anti-Vietnamese sentiment.

### **Old voices of anti-Vietnamese sentiment: BLDP and FUNCINPEC**

*The BLDP:* One of the three resistance movements against Vietnam's control over Cambodia in the 1980s came out of the Khmer People's National Liberation Front (KPNLF), with former Prime Minister Son Sann as president and other five to ten exiles from Lon Nol's Khmer Republic, all of which were strongly anti-Vietnamese nationalists (Andersson and Reed 1983, 32). The movement transformed itself into the Buddhist Liberal Democratic Party (BLDP) to compete for the UN-organized election in 1993. The party received a lot of popular support inside Cambodia and many overseas Cambodians because it provided an alternative between those who supported the royalists and the communists (Khieu 1993, 291). The BLDP's core identities included liberating Cambodia from Vietnamese military occupation, preventing the return to power by a communist regime in the country, and rebuilding a new free and independent Cambodia (Peang-Meth 1990, 173). Thus, adherence to these identities would not allow the party to suppress anti-Vietnamese rhetoric.

Many Western-educated members of the BLDP were the prime examples of a deprived intellectual, highly educated old elite group that developed a strong anti-Vietnamese sentiment out of the Vietnamese invasion in 1979 and the clash with the CPP's new elites. Specifically, the leader of the BLDP, Son Sann, was born to a prosperous family and graduated from the elite *Ecole des Hautes Etudes Commerciales* in Paris. He assumed many important leadership

positions, including minister in many old regimes, prime minister in 1967, and founder of a non-communist movement and a political party. However, it was really a shabby end to his six decades of political career. As Son Soubert, BLDP senior official and son of Son Sann, recalled:

“My father is clever, you know. He had shown himself to be patriotic and clean from corruption scandal. When he served as prime minister, Cambodia’s economy was doing well. [...] He spent the last 15 years of his life liberating Cambodia from the Vietnamese aggressors, but now Vietnamese are coming every day, more and more. The Vietnamese and their “puppet” masters undermined all of my father’s efforts, achievements, and visions to build a new free Cambodia. So, I feel sad for him since he died without achieving his goals. [...] Cambodia under the CPP is not a good government, and it serves the interests of Vietnam, not Cambodia” (Bultmann’s interview with Son Soubert 2011).

From the RD perspective, Son Soubert’s remarks were marked by expressions of resentment of his father’s loss of social status and entitlement to power, and he complained about the barriers constructed by the Vietnamese and the CPP that precluded the gratification of Son Sann who had struggled for years for the national liberation from Vietnam. Of course, Hun Sen’s rivals, including Son Sann and other BLDP members, were always resentful that the former, who is uneducated and comes from a farming background, has gained such prestige and wealth (Bultmann 2018). They are jealous of Hun Sen’s unusual rise.

In addition, looking back at the failure of the BLDP in the 1993 election, Ieng Mouly, then vice president of the BLDP, argued:

“This is why we failed [...] We were only an elite group with certain ideas. [...] You can say that the CPP only are strong because they wield power and because they have money. [...] You can say that they are corrupt, and we, we are not corrupt. But since we don’t have any money, we cannot help anyone. You can say

that this is the politics of charity in Cambodia. They are corrupt and wealthy, but they give a little to the people, and so they help the people – that is why they have their support. People like us, who have no money, cannot even help the people” (quoted in Norén-Nilsson 2016, 139).

Ieng Mouly’s speeches are important to show the clear disparity in the level of the playing field between the CPP and the BLDP. And due to having no money, these are manifest signs of relative deprivation, disappointment, and severe dissatisfaction over years of resistance against the Vietnam and the CPP. The feelings of deprivation experienced by members of the BLDP appears to be the potential factor that has contributed to the hatred of the Vietnamese and its puppet masters, while the BLDP labeled them as:

“an infectious invading germ ... poisonous to living things, both plant and human ... all Khmer brothers and sisters who lives their natural resources, their territory, their culture and their rights ... must help in the preservation and defense of the territory belonging to the race” (quoted in Chanda 1993; Edwards 1996, 68).

Expressing negative rhetoric against the Vietnamese allowed the party to continue a low-cost electoral campaign and became a rallying point for the party to extend the scope of anti-Vietnamese sentiment, particularly among those who suffered from the mishaps in the CPP governance. For example, during the 1993 election campaign, the BLDP directly linked the misery of Cambodian people with three Vietnamese-related sources: foreign aggression, genocide, and corruption (Edwards 1996, 67). First, talk of foreign aggressors refers to the Vietnamese and that they may be the Vietnamese soldiers who disguised themselves in the CPP or maybe as a civilian. In either case, the two posed the same danger to Cambodians: civilians

stole livelihoods and land, and soldiers stole lives and land. They undermined Cambodia's future through voting for the CPP. Therefore, the right to vote, as the party claimed, must belong exclusively only to Cambodians, not foreign residents, referring specifically to the Vietnamese living in Cambodia.

Second, those who committed genocide were individual ethnic Vietnamese and Vietnamese subordinates, referring to the CPP who attempted to kill Cambodians through Vietnamization and forced labor (Edwards 1996, 67). The BLDP viewed it as the "second genocide," resulting from the K5 Plan or "Bamboo Wall" guided by Vietnamese General Le Duc Anh and Vietnam-installed PRK between 1985 and 1989. The K5 Project was designed to seal the Thai-Cambodian border and prevent the re-infiltration of the Khmer Rouge guerrilla and anti-Vietnamese resistance troops into Cambodia. Substantial efforts were made to build barbed wire barricades, construct roads on the frontline, and clear roughly 700 km of patches of tropical forest full of land mines and malaria. The gains of the K5 Plan, however, were made at the cost of people's bitter resentment when thousands of Cambodian civilians were forced to leave their hometown again since the Khmer Rouge period (Slocomb 2001). The biggest consequence was the fact that many workers died of malaria, malnutrition, overwork, land-mine explosions, and battlefield crossfire (Huxley 1987, 172). Moreover, it also led to popular outcry against the Vietnamese and a large number of people fleeing the forced labor camps to join the resistance fronts in refugee camps along the Cambodian-Thai border (Slocomb 2001).

Lastly, those who were corrupt were the CPP administrators viewed as Vietnamese stooges. Corruption in the CPP-led government was thought to be at all levels from the grassroots to the top level and existed in every institution. It was hierarchically structured as “the big eats big, the small eats small.” So, anti-Vietnamese sentiment was one part of the campaign issues for the BLDP. And the party was created to serve, rescue, and defend the Cambodian citizens from all Vietnamese-created devils (Ngo-Son 2015, 20).

It is hard to determine to what extent the success of the BLDP’s discourse and electoral capacities were against the Vietnamese in Cambodia, since the party received only 3.81% vote share and ten seats in the National Assembly in 1993. However, this does not mean that anti-Vietnamese sentiment was not an effective tool for mass mobilization. While anti-Vietnamese rhetoric itself is more than acceptable to the masses, the party’s reputation is not. Since the majority of Cambodians could only remember the peaceful period of Sihanouk’s reign, which they referred to as “Cambodia’s golden era,” people chose to support the royalist FUNCINPEC which appeared to be the only capable forces to expel the Vietnamese (Ngo-Son 2015, 26; Edwards 1996, 59). In addition, the low number of votes received by the BLDP may be the result of the fact that all non-CPP political parties participating in the 1993 election shared anti-Vietnamese election campaigns aimed both at Vietnam as a country and at the CPP as Vietnamese puppets (Khmer Times 2014).

The BLDP was divided by internal strife leading to the removal of Son Sann by his own members. It was dissolved officially in 1997. Son Sann created a new party with his own name,



the Son Sann Party, to compete in the 1998 election; however, it won no seats in the parliament. After Son Sann passed away in 2000 at the age of 89, many party members established the Cambodian Centre for Human Rights in 2002, whose president Kem Sokha decided to set up as the Human Rights Party (HRP) in 2007. The HRP claimed to be the revival of the BLDP and the Son Sann Party while the party leadership was the same: Son Soubert, son of Son Sann, and Keat Sokun who rallied behind the HRP leader Kem Sokha. All of them are well-known as outspoken politicians with a long and undistinguished track record of bashing the Vietnamese and peddling anti-Hanoi conspiracy theory (Strangio 2014, 198; Willemys 2017). The HRP won three seats in the 2008 general election before it merged with the Sam Rainsy Party (SRP) in 2012 to become the Cambodia National Rescue Party (CNRP).

*FUNCINPEC*: The royalist FUNCINPEC party was established in 1981 by the late king Norodom Sihanouk to resist the pro-Vietnam Heng Samrin's regime and Vietnam's military occupation throughout the 1980s. A great majority of the party leadership and senior members came from the old elite group, especially the royal family, with diverse political tendencies, ranging from Marxist, socialist ideology, republican to liberal democracy (Norén-Nilsson 2016, 68). The party's core identities were that of royalism, Sihanouk's old regime legacy (1941 – 1970), as well as resistance to Vietnam-backed PRK, later on renamed as the CPP, and Vietnamese military occupation over Cambodia (Hughes 2001, 20). Hence, one could assume that loyalty to these identities would not promote good perceptions of and attitudes towards the Vietnamese.

RD theory argues that the comparison of one's own outcome and situation in the past leads to a high intensity of feelings of deprivation, since temporal comparison may result in dissatisfaction if the past outcome has exceeded the present one. To the Cambodian royal family in general, and royalist FUNCINPEC in particular, Vietnam has portrayed itself as a potential threat to the very survival of the Cambodian kings – a discourse that is also closely connected to the post-UNTAC political trajectory. This has been shown in Cambodia's historical accounts since the 1600s, when Vietnam annexed Cambodia's territory and controlled Cambodian kings until the French came in mid-1800. Moreover, since Cambodia's independence in 1953, the ability of Cambodian leaders, including the royalists, to protect Cambodia's territory from powerful neighboring countries, specifically Vietnam, has been the foundation of their political legitimacy (Soeung 2016, 112). For example, it was particularly true for the late king Sihanouk, who had earned his credit by fighting against Vietnamese expansionists. He had dominated Cambodian modern history since his coronation by the French colonizers in 1941; he ruled Cambodia as king, head of state, prime minister, and president of the main political movement and party. During this long period, he was regarded the father of Cambodia (Widyono 2007, 4). Many members of Cambodia's royal family have enjoyed full privileges and power in Cambodia's politics, which sharply contrasted with the horrors of war and the Vietnamese invasion and occupation that deprived them of their royal status.

A comparison of the outcome and situation of Sihanouk and Cambodia's royal family in the 1940 – 1970 with the current status yields dissatisfaction/deprivation among the royalists,

particularly within the founders of FUNCINPEC. This can be reflected in Sihanouk's interview with David Ablin and Marlow Hood, the editors of the book *The Cambodia Agony*:

“I don't pretend, I repeat, to be perfect, but when Cambodia was under my leadership, Cambodia was in much better shape than ... now under Heng Samrin and the Vietnamese. And as far as my resistance against foreign intervention in my country is concerned, I don't have to criticize myself because I have always been ... anti-expansionist [anti-Vietnamese] ... As far as Vietnam is concerned, people must know that the Vietnamese have difficulties at home...over-populated. They lack land and food for their own people. So they send more and more Vietnamese settlers into Kampuchea in order to take our land, to take our food, to exploit our natural resources” (Ablin and Hood 1985).

Prince Ranariddh added that:

“I grew up eating from a silver plate, to be honest, and all of a sudden, [...] Everything was changing from white to black. My life took a 360-degree [sic] turn” (Bulmann 2019).

He continued saying that:

“The constitution of 1993 is above all the restoration of the legitimacy of Norodom Sihanouk. But it does not realize the effective return to power of the prince, it only assures the recognition of his work and the restitution of a *symbol where the man and action are inseparable, the monarchy*. [...] History teaches us that restorations are generally a compromise between the past and the integration of revolutionary steps. [...] In certain respects, this analysis, devoid of illustrations holds true for Cambodia. In others not: we need to take note that authority was restored not only as an abstract principle, but on a *personal basis in Sihanouk as an uninterrupted incarnation of the national struggle and fight against oppression*” (Norén-Nilsson 2016, 80).

From the RD standpoint, these remarks were marked by expressions of melancholy, frustration and deprivation, and both complained often about the abuses and current decline of royalist

powers of what they thought “were caused by the Vietnamese invader and its puppets, specifically referring to the CPP.” This is the way that the RD experienced by royalist FUNCINPEC has contributed to the xenophobic feelings against the Vietnamese and the CPP which it allegedly charged with being as “Khmer heads with Vietnamese minds.”

Fighting a war of liberating Cambodia from Vietnam provided the party with a *raison d’être* and promoted its legitimacy, and became an important factor helping the party to expand the scope of anti-Vietnamese sentiment to build popular bases, particularly among a long-repressed and most deprived chore of Cambodian citizens, intellectuals and nationalists who have sensed common deprivation. Although the Vietnamese immigrants do not pose a major social and economic threat to Cambodians, as FUNCINPEC has asserted, the popular sense of deprivation was clearly seen during the nineteen months that UNTAC was present in Cambodia. For instance, *the Economist* has noted that:

“The almost daily struggle for survival is ... the economic basis of massive national resentment of the Vietnamese immigration and Vietnamese success in securing a near monopoly on jobs opening up in the construction sector” (quoted in Abuza 1995, 441).

When Cambodia changed from a planned economy to a free-market economy in 1993, there was a boom in the construction sector and real estate across the country. Due to the lack of skilled workers in the country following the Khmer Rouge genocide, construction jobs were largely dominated by Vietnamese immigrants. This created popular fear and frustration that any shortage in skilled workers would be filled by the Vietnamese, as many Cambodian portrayed the

Vietnamese as opportunists and parasites who deprived Cambodians of gainful employment (Jordens 1996, 138-40).

In addition, many Cambodians view Vietnamese prostitutes in the cities, especially in Phnom Penh, as the most insidious agency sent by Vietnamese government. These women's role is to mislead and trick Cambodian men. Even worse, these women are believed to reproduce Cambodians with half-Vietnamese blood; in the future they would serve the Vietnamese interests. Hatred against the Vietnamese was also high in rural areas as fishing has been dominated by the Vietnamese newcomers. Fishing meant a threat to the survival of Cambodian fishermen and robbed them of their livelihood (Jordens 1996, 138-40).

These observable facts strengthened FUNCINPEC's discourse and electoral capacities by providing the party with logical explanations to persuade the electorates that Vietnam was the devil exploiting the Cambodian economy, creating social and political disorder, and destroying natural resources. For example, during the 1993 election campaign, the four main themes in FUNCINPEC propaganda were dominated by accusations that the CPP remained as a creature of Vietnam; promises to expel the Vietnamese in Cambodia; promises to end Cambodia's civil war. And claims that voting for FUNCINPEC was to restore the "good old days" of Sihanouk's period were enunciated (Frieson 1996). At the same time, the party's propagandist machine repeated the warnings about Vietnamese spies in the country and thousands of Vietnamese immigrants who allegedly disguised themselves as Cambodian in order to vote for the CPP that they believed were tainted by its linkage with Vietnam (Frieson 1996, 199). The party's repeated

message to the voters was that the CPP came to power with military support from Vietnam in 1979. As one Cambodia's famous proverb put it: you must be indebted for the rest of your life to people who offer you just one meal. Since Cambodia is a poor country, the debt would be repaid with national resources and territory. Thus, voting for the CPP would mean keeping those Cambodians beholden to Vietnam in power and further impoverishing Cambodia (Guan 2000, 67). As a FUNCINPEC's candidate recognized that: "People are not interested in the economic policy" of the party (Hughes 2001), but a large majority of the population knew that FUNCINPEC was the party of the king, representing the most capable forces that expelled Vietnam's expansionists from the kingdom. Undoubtedly, one can hypothesize that FUNCINPEC's entitlement to power through its nationalist credentials that it had earned by fighting a war of liberating Cambodia from Vietnam contributed greatly to the party's electoral victory in 1993.

However, the military coup by CPP of July 5-6, 1997 changed the political landscape by weakening FUNCINPEC while cementing the CPP's strong grip over Cambodia's politics. The next few elections were marked by the steady decay of FUNCINPEC, as it has been plagued by corruption scandals and institutional ineffectiveness and entered into successive coalition governments with the CPP that often painted them as Vietnamese puppets in 1998, 2003, and 2008. In 2013 and 2018, FUNCINEPC won no seats in the parliament.

### **New voice of anti-Vietnamese sentiment: CNRP**

A new voice of anti-Vietnamese sentiment was the Khmer Nation Party (KNP) founded in 1995 by Sam Rainsy, along with a small circle of senior members of the CPP and FUNCINPEC. The party renamed itself as the Sam Rainsy Party (SRP) in 1998. According to Strangio (2014, 71), its main political priority was the “liberal rhetoric with warmed-over references to the Vietnamese threat.” In 2012, the SRP merged with the HRP to form the Cambodia National Rescue Party (CNRP) in an effort to mobilize groups of democrats from various backgrounds to protect those deprived, oppressed and victimized by the ruling CPP government (Norén-Nilsson 2016, 139). The newly-formed CNRP consolidated its position as the major opposition party in the country when it performed very well in the 2013 general election and 2017 commune elections, dramatically reducing the number of CPP seats in the parliament and local councils. In interviews with mid-range members of opposition CNRP party, to oppose Hun Sen’s government and elite group is synonymous with clashing with the Vietnamese.

Like members of the BLDP and royalist FUNINCPEC, the situation of RD is similar for the CNRP leaders and other high-ranking members, who have been banned from politics; therefore, many are currently living in the diaspora and some are put in prison in Cambodia. Over the last decades they have clashed with the CPP elites and searched for a political space by adopting anti-Vietnamese sentiment, directly challenging the ruling CPP which many Cambodians still believe to be a Vietnam-created party or Vietnamese puppets. The crackdown

on and finally dissolution of the CNRP in November 2017 seemed to increasingly intensify the RD within the party while indicating the return to one-party rule under Hun Sen's leadership.

Another example of the most RD intellectuals who has developed strong anti-Vietnamese rhetoric is Sam Rainsy, co-founder of the CNRP. The relative deprivation can be justified in his book *We Didn't Start the Fire: My Struggle for Democracy in Cambodia* co-authored with British journalist David Whitehouse in 2013. Rainsy described, in the first half of the book, the course of his family life. He was born to an elite family and graduated from elite *Science Po* in Paris. His family has a long-standing elite family heritage in politics, reaching at least as far back as the Democratic Party in 1949. His father, Sam Sary, served as Deputy Prime Minister in Sihanouk's government in the 1950s, but lost favor with the king and in 1959 he was charged with treason, and eventually assassinated. His family was forced to leave Cambodia and start a new life as refugees in Paris in 1965. By that time, he acknowledged that his family privileges came to an end (Sam and Whitehouse 2013, 13).

After Vietnam's military intervention in bringing down the Khmer Rouge in 1979, Rainsy firmly believed that Vietnam's invasion was a humiliation by a historical enemy and expansionist neighboring country, rather a liberation as claimed by the CPP and Vietnam (Sam and Whitehouse 2013, 51). The effect of RD influencing Sam Rainsy's anxiety about the Vietnamese arose when he heard of the sufferings of the Cambodian people that took place under the Khmer Rouge and subsequent Vietnamese occupation. He said he decided to return to Cambodia in 1992, feeling it was his "entitlement, duty, and responsibility" to remove the



Vietnamese-installed CPP and Hun Sen from power and establish a democracy in Cambodia (Sam and Whitehouse 2013, 68). Take the example of Rainsy's speech delivered to CNRP supporters in 2013:

“If we are not careful, Cambodia will become a Vietnam, Cambodia will become Kampuchea Krom, we will be a province under control of Vietnam. The current leaders [referring to Hun Sen and CPP] are really corrupt, so please, all compatriots, make a change and have a clean leader, so that our country will be just. [...] All compatriots – this is the last opportunity, if we don't rescue our nation, four or five years more is too late, Cambodia will be full of Vietnamese, we will become slaves of Vietnam” (Sokha 2013).

From a RD perspective, Sam Rainsy's writing, firstly, makes it clear that his family was really deprived of the social status it had enjoyed in the pre-civil war period. Second, with his resentment that was caused by the Vietnamese occupation and Vietnam-backed CPP, he is struggling to depose Hun Sen whom he often refers to as a Vietnamese puppet “who has no vision for Cambodia” (Sam and Whitehouse 2013, 46). Lastly, he clearly stated in his book that his full effort to protect Cambodia's territory through the 1991 Paris Peace Agreement continues to be undermined by Vietnam and the CPP (Sam and Whitehouse 2013, 114). Thus, these represent important elements of RD that potentially influence Rainsy's attitude and rhetoric against the Vietnamese and the CPP.

The scope of RD is not limited to CNRP leaders and high-ranking members. Mid-range officials also experienced RD which can be observed, specifically when they compared their own or Cambodian people's socio-economic situation and outcome with those of their CPP counterparts and the Vietnamese minority in Cambodia. Such social comparisons at the same

point in time has in turn intensified the feelings of deprivation, frustration and aggression. With the rupture caused by the Vietnamese in Cambodia and the CPP, the CNRP's interviewees said that they and many Cambodians often struggle in their difficult lives. They are increasingly marginalized. This situation is encapsulated during one of my fieldwork interviews. For example, during my fieldwork in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, last winter break (2019), a former CNRP official invited me to wander around Phnom Penh's Chbar Ampov, known as one of Vietnam's largest communities in the country. He often talked of Vietnamese immigrants as a disease sickening Cambodians and how these newcomers have become the real cause of national economic failure, but he refused to elaborate more on how the Vietnamese cause the collapse of the economy (author's interview with an official of the opposition party 2019a).

On multiple occasions, I witnessed interviewees who worked for the former SRP and HRP parties engage in tirades aimed at Vietnamese without being challenged. For instance, one correspondent explained to me that the Vietnamese immigrants in Cambodia have been secretly supported by the Vietnamese embassy and association, and they are also protected by Cambodia's authority and lax laws (Author's interview with official of opposition party 2020a). As a result, they have access to resources and financial aid to live and run business inside Cambodia, whereas Cambodian citizens lack such support, forcing them to migrate abroad to seek jobs.

Others even believed that Hanoi has actually been behind the political conflict in Cambodia, secretly commanding the CPP so that it appears as if Cambodians are killing

Cambodians. These agents moreover are now making and implementing the laws, so they often oppose those who want to make a change, specifically referring to its CNRP party. Take one narrative as an example:

“We see a massive flow of the Vietnamese in Cambodia. Personally, I think *Yuon* has intention to swallow Cambodia. I don’t want to see them living nearby me. [...] During my study, there was a former Vietnamese expert who disguised himself as a teacher. My classmates and I boycotted class and demonstrated for his removal. Recently I saw him wearing a military uniform and working in the Ministry of Interior. You see, he has the right and choice to do whatever he wants. [...] I also know another former Vietnamese expert living nearby my house. He told everyone that he is a Chinese and now serves in the government. He has his network; every weekend they come to his house, discussing about Cambodian issues. I am very painful because being a Khmer, you can’t do anything” (author’s interview with official of opposition party 2020a).

In short, all these remarks made by the CNRP mid-range officials reflect the elements of relative deprivation: their comparison using personal opinion and self-evaluation with the CPP counterparts and the Vietnamese in Cambodia; and other important attributes (financial support from the Vietnamese government and Cambodia’s favorable policies towards the Vietnamese and corruption), all of which gave prominence to the Vietnamese immigrants and the CPP officials in contrast to Cambodian citizens and the CNRP members, respectively. Whether their accusations are correct or incorrect, the comparatively strong anti-Vietnamese feelings of the CNRP is the result of their relative deprivation through their comparison and the recognition of their own prowess, and their current situation and socio-political outcome vis-à-vis their opponents.

The racialization of political discourse against the Vietnamese in Cambodia and the CPP remains in the form of the contentious politics for the CNRP to foster mass mobilizations, particularly among those who feel deprived, oppressed, and victimized by the Vietnam-installed CPP regime. Or at least, it has drawn the attention of those who have sought to identify the major causes of the country's political and social problems and economic failures. Although the ethnic Vietnamese in Cambodia are not economically, at least not politically, dominant as the CNRP has claimed, the popular sense of deprivation and resentment of the Vietnamese in Cambodia was clearly seen over the last few decades. For example, when Kem Lay, founder of the Grassroots Democratic Party (GDP), was tragically shot dead in downtown Phnom Penh, Cambodia on July 10, 2016, a crowd of people tried to prevent police officers from moving the body because they were afraid of police covering up crucial evidence (Frewer 2016). But what was abnormal was the angry crowd screaming the Khmer-language term "*Yuon*" at the police, accusing them of being Vietnamese (Frewer 2016). This example demonstrates that people are so quick to judge without hesitation that the officers were Vietnamese in the sense that they were trying to threaten any cherished Cambodian hero who dared to talk much about the Vietnamese. In fact, we often observe that it was rare for Kem Lay not to bring up the issue of Vietnamese in one of his public discussions. Specifically, the example also illustrates that anxiety about the Vietnamese was politically exploited by the CNRP when Sam Rainsy directly linked the assassination to Hun Sen and the CPP, arguing that there was "no other explanation" for Kem Lay's murder (BBC 2016).

Equally of note are the emotions of frustration and aggression of Cambodian majority about the current boundary with Vietnam. During Vietnam's military occupation over Cambodia from 1979 to 1989, the CPP signed several border agreements with Vietnam, and these treaties have never been accepted by the Cambodian ultranationalists, including the opposition, royalists, and Cambodian diaspora. In spite of the intense challenges, Cambodia under the CPP has almost completed a roughly 1,270-kilometre border demarcation with Vietnam, and many Cambodians in general are deeply unhappy since they believe that the border line is being drawn in favor of Vietnam (Wain 2012, 51). This has proven to be a boon for the opposition leader Sam Rainsy who encouraged villagers to uproot temporary border markers along the Cambodian-Vietnamese border in Svay Rieng Province in 2009 (Subhan 2018). Later on, the intensity of hatred against the Vietnamese arose when former CNRP parliamentarians led approximately 1,800 supporters to the border areas where many border poles were going to be demarcated, resulting in bloody clashes with the armed forces in June 2009 (Heder 2018, 120).

Another emotion of resentment for the majority of Cambodian population is the loss of Kampuchea Krom, territory covering most of today Southern Vietnam. This has in turn influenced Khmer xenophobic nationalism against the Vietnamese up to the present day. The CNRP politicians have so far focused campaigns to reclaim the area through the International Court of Justice (ICJ) and to protect the Cambodian people who are currently living in the region. The CNRP's sponsorship of an annual ceremony marking the loss of Kampuchea Krom remains one of the party's most important political programs, which has attracted thousands of participants, both inside Cambodia and abroad, who shared the sense of grievance. Kem Sokha,

co-founder of the CNRP, directly linked the suffering of Khmer Kampuchea Krom to the Vietnamese government who allegedly use “Hun Sen and the CPP to eliminate the Cambodian race, tradition and culture” (Willemyns 2017).

Following the Vietnamese invasion and installation of the PRK in 1979, there was a massive influx of the Vietnamese in Cambodia, including those Vietnamese returnees who escaped the anti-Vietnamese Lon Nol and Khmer Rouge regimes. Estimates suggested that there were approximately 300,000 Vietnamese and tens of thousands of Vietnamese soldiers and military experts during that time (Minority Rights Group International 2017). According to many organizations and politicians, this number keeps increasing. Indeed, the growing size of the Vietnamese communities in Cambodia’s society shaped the mindset of young generations of Cambodians who have grown up seeing the Vietnamese presences as an unforgivable violation of national sovereignty (Millar 2018). Moreover, the Vietnamese newcomers have brought with them more differentiated social structures, as well as the increasing differentiation of their profession, custom, language and culture. These have in turn fueled popular hostility against the Vietnamese in general. Evidence is obvious, for example, during protests by garment workers along Veng Sreng Street in early 2014 when many protestors reportedly looted and destroyed Vietnamese-owned business and property, forcing many Vietnamese residents of the area to flee the country (Wallace and Neou 2014). The CNRP has often been involved in many incidents against the Vietnamese by inflaming popular suspicious about the ambition of Vietnam to infiltrate its own people to exploit Cambodian natural resources, take Cambodian lands and control the whole Indochina peninsula, constituting Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam.

Lastly, frustrated by land grabbing, deforestation, and corruption, many affected Cambodian people have made allegations about Vietnam's state-owned companies in collusion with the CPP government. They described, with their smart phone cameras, the loss of their lands, threats of violence, social injustice, and apparent impunity of the culprits. For example, a report by Global Witness (2013) listed two of Vietnam's largest companies, Hoang Anh Gia Lai (HAGL) and Vietnam Rubber Group (VRG) to whom the Cambodia's government granted tens of thousands of hectares of land on the border region of Cambodia's Ratanakiri Province. Many Cambodians, human right activists, civil society, and opposition parties have viewed such economic land concessions as abuses of Cambodia's existing constitutional principles, 2001 Land Law, and human rights principles (Bugalski and Thuon 2015). As a result, many landless people's movements, mostly unregistered, have emerged to resist the forced evictions and systematic land grabbing, and some of the resisters have been facilitated and politically exploited by the CNRP. Take the example of Sam Rainsy's speech delivered to thousands of screaming supporters in Kampong Speu province on July 2013:

“I would like to appeal to all Cambodia who love the nation, who love justice, who are sympathetic to the victims, poor people and weak people, who were badly treated by land grabs and home grabs, to join together to save the nation” (Sokha 2013).

Kem Sokha, co-founder of CNRP, promised to cancel the contracts with all Vietnamese companies if the CNRP won the election (Thul 2014). Even on Facebook pages set up by many CNRP functionaries and bloggers and even CNRP's online SUNTV, they have broadly expressed dissatisfaction over CPP's ineffective measures and the incidents, including border

issues with Vietnam, Vietnam's discrimination and intimidation of the Khmer Krom people, relocation policy of the Vietnamese immigrants in Cambodia, chemical foods imported from Vietnam, the January 07 Holiday, and construction of Vietnamese-Cambodian Friendship Monuments across the country. The CNRP argues that such favorable policies and CPP's stance toward the Vietnamese undermine Cambodia's territorial integrity and make the citizens suffer even more.

A combination of these observable incidents and events caused by the Vietnamese and the CPP has largely promoted the CNRP's discourse and electoral capacities and provided the party with even stronger logical explanations to convince the electorates that the devils are the Vietnamese and the CPP who deprived the Cambodian people of their livelihoods, lands, and rights. As the CNRP suggested, the only solution for the citizens is to vote against what it sees as the subservience of Hun Sen and CPP to Vietnam. The popular support for the CNRP in 2013 general election and 2017 commune election, combined with the only available and latest IRI opinion polls (2013), proposes that anxiety about the Vietnamese continues to be an important issue in Cambodian society, and the popular feeling of deprivation, frustration, and aggression at the Vietnamese will not vanish very soon.



## CONCLUSION

Just like any other country around the world, Cambodia is also home to anti-immigrant populist movements, and anti-Vietnamese rhetoric has been the most highly displayed sentiment by generations of Cambodian politicians. In contemporary Cambodia, the opposition parties that have actively engaged in tirades aimed at the Vietnamese and the ruling CPP include the BLDP, the royalist FUNCINPEC, and the CNRP. As Norén-Nilsson (2016) notes, the discourse of these non-CPP parties is that the ruling CPP regime is a puppet under the domination of Vietnam, which has always nurtured its intention to swallow Cambodian territory. In their own views, to go against the Vietnamese is equally treated as opposing the Vietnam-supported CPP.

Two major sources of relative political deprivation of oppositions are a decade-long period of military occupation of Cambodia by Vietnam (1979 – 1989) and the rising power of Hun Sen and the CPP over the last four decades. These two factors caused a deep rupture among Cambodia's old elites who then become the party founders, leaders, and members of the BLDP, the royalist FUNCINPEC, and the CNRP. During that time, Vietnam installed the CPP by promoting new elites drawn from the mid-range Khmer Rouge defectors and former Khmer Vietminh, many of whom do not belong to members of Cambodia's elites from the pre-Khmer Rouge period. Even though the 1993 UN-supervised election opened the way for the return of the old elites into Cambodia's political arena, the new elites, specifically Hun Sen and his CPP, succeeded in capturing total control of Cambodia since the 1993 up to the present time.

Hun Sen has strengthened his power by earning his social and political status as “Cambodia’s strongest man” and his family has gained amassing vast personal fortunes in many giant companies inside Cambodia. Hunsenomics has succeeded in creating a stable protection pact among Cambodia’s incumbents, while it has electorally marginalized its opponents, including Prince Ranariddh (FUNCINPEC), Son Sann (BLDP), Sam Rainsy and Kem Sokha (CNRP), and made it clear that King Sihamoni and members of royal family have no place in the country’s political life. Meanwhile, Hun Sen’s CPP party has a near monopoly of military force, control of the courts, patronage resources, performance legitimacy, as well as Hun Sen’s benefactions to society, which, in total, has placed the CPP at a significant advantage vis-à-vis the opposition parties. So, the rise of Hun Sen and the CPP generates an asymmetry between the incumbent and the opposition, making it difficult for the latter to operate. Therefore, the deep rupture caused by a combination of earlier Vietnamese military occupation and the rise of Hun Sen and the CPP over the last four decades, is an important undercurrent explaining the occurrence of relative deprivation among members of opposition parties.

With the examination of the activities of the BLDP, the royalist FUNCINPEC, and the CNRP, anti-Vietnamese sentiments within these parties come from deprived and angry members of the parties who mostly have experienced relative deprivation. The most highly deprived perceivers include late King Norodom Sihanouk, Prince Ranariddh, former Prime Minister Son Sann, and CNRP leader Sam Rainsy. All of them were stripped of their social status, lost their entitlement to power, and are unable to win state control at least until now. Their feelings of relative deprivation have often intensified and can be seen through their expressions of

melancholy, frustration, and anger, as well as their complaints about the abuses and current decline of their powers through what they believe “were caused by the Vietnamese agents and its puppet referring to the CPP.” Ten interviews with former mid-range CNRP officials illustrated that anxiety about the Vietnamese arose as a result of relative deprivation when they compared their own or Cambodian people’s situations and outcomes with their CPP counterparts and some ethnic Vietnamese in Cambodia, respectively. We conclude that our results support our research hypothesis: anti-Vietnamese sentiment within Cambodia’s opposition parties is based on political discontent over Vietnam’s military occupation, combined with the rise of Hun Sen and the CPP, and is clearly an attempt to remove the CPP from power (main goal) and, therefore, is indicative of relative deprivation among the individual members of the opposition parties. Without understanding the relative deprivation experienced by these angry old elites and members of the opposition parties, it is hard to fully understand the patterns of anti-Vietnamese radicalism in Cambodia.

In spite of the fact that very few academic studies have been conducted to measure the level of anti-Vietnamese rhetoric in Cambodia, the frequency of the incidents against the Vietnamese, combined with popular support for the opposition parties and the only available and latest IRI opinion polls in 2013, are clear indicators of the antipathy. Indeed, the racialization of political discourse against the Vietnamese and the CPP possibly serves as a low cost, but effective, propagandist tool for the opposition parties to build popular bases, particularly among those who appear to experience deprivation caused by the CPP. Moreover, anti-Vietnamese sentiment might also draw the attention of those who may not experience deprivation but share a

sense of frustration and display aggression over the CPP-led government and its peaceful accommodation toward Vietnam.

### *Limitations of the thesis*

While the emphasis of this thesis is on the relative deprivation that explains why individual politicians from opposition parties have taken anti-Vietnamese positions and exploited them as a contentious politics for mass mobilization, the thesis does not discuss the effect of the positive perceptions of the Vietnamese displayed by the current CPP. This possibly has an effect on the younger generation of the CPP politicians because they didn't live through the earlier period of the Vietnamese military occupation (1979 – 1989). The overall effect of the CPP position toward the Vietnamese may be even more complex. There are at least three potential factors that could make it difficult to argue that anti-Vietnamese sentiment is dramatically suppressed within the CPP. First, the departure of the Vietnamese advisors and military experts more than four decades ago have made them no longer being in the accompany of the Vietnamese. Second, anti-Vietnamese attitudes remains as contentious politics and sensitive issue for the Cambodian population, and what the CPP needs to do the most is to convince people that they are not Vietnamese puppets or a Vietnam-created political party, as charged by the opposition parties. Third, many political commentators have observed Cambodia's pivot toward China in recent years, automatically reducing Vietnamese influence in the country, since China and Vietnam view each other as rivals.

Moreover, since we did not interview ordinary people, this thesis leaves some questions open. Does the political party draw its base of support from social groups who face greater relative deprivation than the CPP supporters? Or does it instrumentally choose to embrace anti-Vietnamese nationalism in order to try to win the support of disaffected Cambodians? It seems as if there is no “relative” in the discussion of relative deprivation that would allow us to discern which social actors within Cambodia would be more or less likely than other to harbor anti-Vietnamese sentiments.

Lastly, the research design of this thesis is limited in scope. First, generalization of relative deprivation as potential culprit for anti-Vietnamese sentiment cannot be made beyond the activities of the three opposition parties: the BLDP, the royalist FUNCINPEC, and the CNRP. The cases are biased in that they represent examples of relative deprivation experienced by the most deprived members of opposition parties who are the pre-Khmer Rouge elites, thus telling us nothing about recent examples of the post-Khmer Rouge politicians who also share anti-Vietnamese rhetoric. It is important to note that anti-Vietnamese sentiment also goes well beyond just the mentioned trio parties. High-profile leaders of, for example, the League for Democracy Party, the Grassroots Democratic Party, the Khmer Power Party, and the Khmer Rise Party, are all well-known for their bizarre anti-Vietnamese speeches and their emphases of the urgency to liberate Cambodia from Vietnam and its puppet CPP government.

Second, the analysis is cast at the microlevel of analysis through the histories of a few founders of political parties and ten mid-level CNRP members. Thus, inference made about

relative deprivation needs to be confirmed at the organizational level, which requires a quantitative survey and more elite interviews. Third, we depended more on secondary data, thus source selection and bias may impact the analysis. We will need more primary data drawn from the pulse of ordinary, working Cambodians to find out their sentiments about the Vietnamese and why they hold their beliefs. Do they really believe what the opposition is saying? Or are they just reacting emotionally to the political noise generated by the opposition?

#### *Future research*

As the researcher moves forward with this project as his PhD dissertation, some sorts of variation in anti-Vietnamese sentiment will be identified, either at the organizational (political party) or individual level. In other words, which groups of people tend to have anti-Vietnamese sentiment and which groups do not? By so doing, it will allow us to further investigate the questions of why opposition parties take an anti-Vietnamese line while the ruling CPP is pro-Vietnamese. Or why do some Cambodian politicians personally hold anti-Vietnamese views? Thus, it helps to settle the limitations of this thesis.

Moreover, we will need to focus on features of the discourses which are relevant to the aim or function of the political process or events whose discursive dimension is being investigated. So, these discourses do not just exist in relationship to the political agents and organizations; but are also emplaced by these actors both spatially in specific *sites* and temporally in specific *events*. Discourse theory assumes that all objectives and actions have meaning. Thus, for future research, we will analyze relevant sites, such as the Cambodian-

Vietnamese Friendship Monument, Vietnamese communities in Cambodia, Koh Tral Island, and Khmer Krom territory, will be analyzed regarding their discourse on the Vietnamese in Cambodia from 1993 to present. In addition, an event will be analyzed in order to gauge how discourses of Cambodian history are constructed, with participant observation of commemoration events, such as Liberation Day, 07 January 1979, and the Paris Peace Agreement on 23 October 1993. Further related materials, such as flyers, websites, social media accounts and apps will be analyzed. These messages open a discussion thread; they are followed by reactions, and messages of confirmation or disagreement. In this context, we plan to use survey questionnaires incorporating all these materials to see whether the ordinary citizens agree or disagree with the discourses about the Vietnamese which have been generated by Cambodia's mainstream political parties.

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## Interviews

Official of opposition party. 2019a. Interview with former HRP mid-ranged official, December 15, Phnom Penh, Cambodia.

Official of opposition party. 2019b. Interview with former SRP mid-ranged official, December 19, Phnom Penh, Cambodia.

Activist of opposition party. 2019c. Interview with official at National Radio of Kampuchea with political tendency toward the CNRP, December 17, Phnom Penh, Cambodia.

Official of opposition party. 2019d. Interview with former CNRP local councilor, December 20, Phnom Penh, Cambodia.

Official of opposition party. 2019e. Interview with former CNRP mid-ranged official, December 19, Phnom Penh, Cambodia.

Official of opposition party. 2020a. Interview with former CNRP mid-ranged official, January 07, Phnom Penh, Cambodia.

Official of opposition party. 2020b. Interview with former CNRP mid-ranged official, January 15, Phnom Penh, Cambodia.

Expert interview. 2020c. Interview with Dr. Khin Phea at Royal Academy of Cambodia, January 07, Phnom Penh, Cambodia.

Expert interview. 2020d. Interview with Dr. Lao Mong Hai, independent research, January 10, Phnom Penh, Cambodia.

Official of opposition party. 2020e. Interview with former CNRP mid-ranged official, January 15, Phnom Penh, Cambodia.

Son Soubert. 2011. Bultmann's interview with former senior BLDP official, May 19, Phnom Penh, Cambodia.

APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

**Objective:** The brief objective of this fieldwork is to learn anti-Vietnamese sentiments among Cambodian elites through interviews. The aim is to establish the “who, why and how” anti-Vietnamese rhetoric has been constructed, by learning directly from those who engaging in the political discourse about the Vietnamese. We want to assess both urgent threats and long-terms risks, focusing particularly on the impacts of anti-Vietnamese sentiment on Cambodia’s politics.

### **Background**

1. Could you please tell me briefly about your personal background?
2. Which historical events do you think the most important in Cambodia’s history? Please explain
3. What are the major ethnic groups in Cambodia?

### **The Vietnamese in Cambodia**

4. Do you agree that the Vietnamese in Cambodia are immigrant or indigenous ethnicity?
5. How would you describe your feelings towards the ethnic Vietnamese in Cambodia?
6. Are the ethnic Vietnamese in Cambodia contributing to unemployment, health problem, and political and economic issues in Cambodia?
7. What do you like and dislike about the ethnic Vietnamese in Cambodia?
8. What does the term “Vietnamese” and “Youn” mean to you?

### **Vietnamese-Cambodian Relations**

9. What do you think of the current relationship between Cambodia and Vietnamese governments?
10. Are there current border disputes with Vietnam?
11. What does the “7 January” mean to you? What does the “23 October” mean to you?
12. What does the “Cambodian-Vietnamese Friendship Monument” in Phnom Penh and other provincial towns mean to you?

APPENDIX B

IRB APPROVAL NOTICE



NORTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY

**Office of Research Compliance,  
Integrity & Safety**

*Division of Research & Innovation Partnerships*

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**Approval Notice**  
**Initial Review**

05-Dec-2019

TO: Ratanak Khun (01854533)  
Political Science

RE: Protocol # HS20-0171 “**Relative deprivation and xenophobia: Patterns of anti-Vietnamese radicalism in the Cambodia elite**”

Your **Initial Review** submission was reviewed and approved under **Member Review** procedures by the Institutional Review Board on **05-Dec-2019**. Please note the following information about your approved research protocol:

Protocol Approval period: **05-Dec-2019 - 04-Dec-2020**

If your project will continue beyond that date, or if you intend to make modifications to the study, you will need additional approval and should contact the Office of Research Compliance and Integrity for assistance. Continuing review of the project, conducted at least annually, will be necessary until you no longer retain any identifiers that could link the subjects to the data collected. Please remember to use your **protocol number (HS20-0171)** on any documents or correspondence with the IRB concerning your research protocol.

**Please note that the IRB has the prerogative and authority to ask further questions, seek additional information, require further modifications, or monitor the conduct of your research and the consent process.**

Unless you have been approved for a waiver of the written signature of informed consent, this notice includes a date-stamped copy of the approved consent form for your use. NIU policy requires that informed consent documents given to subjects participating in non-exempt research bear the approval stamp of the NIU IRB. This stamped document is the only consent form that may be photocopied for distribution to study participants.

It is important for you to note that as a research investigator involved with human subjects, you are responsible for ensuring that this project has current IRB approval at all times, and for retaining the signed consent forms obtained from your subjects for a minimum of three years after the study is concluded. If consent for the study is being given by proxy (guardian, etc.), it is your responsibility to document the

authority of that person to consent for the subject. Also, the committee recommends that you include an acknowledgment by the subject, or the subject's representative, that he or she has received a copy of the consent form. In addition, you are required to promptly report to the IRB any injuries or other unanticipated problems or risks to subjects and others. The IRB extends best wishes for success in your research endeavors.