

Reunification without Reconciliation?: Social Conflicts and Integration in Vietnam after 1975

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[ABSTRACT]

This paper discusses the failed policy of reconciliation carried out by the leadership in Hanoi after the collapse of the Republic of Vietnam (commonly known as “South Vietnam”) on April 30, 1975.

It argues that in spite of all promises to the contrary after the end of the war the victorious North systematically discriminated Southern Vietnamese who had worked for the former Saigonese government or the United States in Vietnam. Furthermore, I will analyse in which way the leadership in Hanoi tried to write the Republic of Vietnam out of history by destroying “sites of memory” (*lieux de mémoire*).

In the following I discuss how this policy together with the

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building of socialism in the southern part of the country led to serious social conflicts and finally to a massive exodus of approximately one million Vietnamese.

In the second part of the paper, I will show that since the beginning of the reform policy in Vietnam (*đổi mới*) in the 1980s the failed integration of many defeated South Vietnamese after the end of the war has increasingly been addressed in “memory debates” among Vietnamese abroad and at home. The fate of the former South Vietnamese war cemetery in Biên Hòa will serve as an example.

1. Introduction

In 2020 Vietnam celebrated the 45th anniversary of the victory on April 30, 1975 when a three-decade struggle for the reunification of the country ended.

This paper focusses on one aspect of Vietnam’s postwar development that was not brought up during the celebrations and that so far has not been addressed at length by the historiography in Vietnam: the failed policy of reconciliation of the leadership in Hanoi after the collapse of the Republic of Vietnam (commonly known as “South Vietnam”).¹⁾

I argue that in spite of all promises to the contrary after the end of the

1) This article was originally presented at the Conference of the Korean Historical Association on “Social conflict and integration in history” in October 2020. I would like to thank the organizers for inviting me. Many thanks also to my discussant Professor Park Tae-Gyun for his insightful comments.

war the victorious North systematically discriminated southern Vietnamese who had worked for the former Saigonese government or the United States and even many of those who had opposed the Saigon regime before 1975.

Furthermore, I will analyze how the leadership in Hanoi tried to write the Republic of Vietnam (RVN) out of history by destroying “sites of memory” (*lieux de mémoire*) and cultural items that had been produced before 1975. I will then discuss how this policy together with the building of socialism in the southern part of the country led to serious social conflicts and finally to a massive exodus of approximately one million Vietnamese.

In the second part of the paper, I will show that since the beginning of the reform policy in Vietnam (*đổi mới*) in the 1980s the failed integration of many defeated South Vietnamese after the end of the war has increasingly been addressed in “memory debates” among Vietnamese abroad and at home. The fate of the former South Vietnamese war cemetery in Biên Hòa will be discussed in detail.²⁾

2. Policy in the South after 1975: Building Socialism and Erasing the Memory of the Republic of Vietnam

The political development after the victory on April 30, 1975 in South Vietnam was somehow similar to that after the defeat of the French in 1954 in North Vietnam.³⁾ Like Hồ Chí Minh after the return of the Việt

2) I would like to thank Mr. Nguyễn Xuân Vượng who accompanied me on my visit to the former South Vietnamese war cemetery in Biên Hòa for his precious help.

3) For an excellent overview of the post-war development in Vietnam see Goscha (2016) pp. 407-436.

Minh to Hanoi in 1954, in 1975 the leadership of the Vietnamese Communist Party (VCP) had also promised to carry out a policy of concord and reconciliation towards the former enemy. This promise had already been made in several announcements of the Provisional Revolutionary Government of the Republic of South Vietnam (PRG) and in the Paris Peace Accords (Jamieson 1995, pp. 358-359; Gettleman 1995, pp. 471-487).

However, after April 30, 1975, it became soon obvious that the new administration was neither interested in forming a national unity government nor do carry out a policy of national reconciliation.

Instead, the leadership in Hanoi soon started to consolidate political control by eliminating potential political rivals, sidelining and reeducating all those who had supported the old regime. In addition, it was committed to one overarching ideological project — to liberate the countrymen in the southern part of the country oppressed by capitalism and imperialism. Thus, to build up socialism in the south AND to achieve the reunification of the country had been the twofold aim of the VCP during the Second Indochina War (Vu Tuong 2019 and 2017). This also involved a systematic obliteration of the memory of the defunct Republic of Vietnam.

Before the People's Army of Vietnam (PAVN) and the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam (NLF) entered Saigon on April 30, 1975, about 65,000 South Vietnamese — mostly those who had held high-level positions within the former administration or had directly worked for the U.S. — had fled. Many South Vietnamese were afraid that the North Vietnamese victors would create a bloodbath among the defeated like in Huế during the Tết Offensive in 1968. Other South Vietnamese had decided to stay to contribute to the reconstruction of the country (Hardy 2004, p. 227).

The bloodbath did not materialize. Instead, the communist security apparatus announced that the South Vietnamese population had to register and to make a personal history statement (*lý lịch*). These rather detailed personal accounts had been obligatory in the North since the 1950s. Now southerners had to provide not only personal information such as one's class background and political activities in support or against the revolution, but also about one's family. The *lý lịch* served "as the basis for classifying southerners in political terms as supporters or opponents of the revolution and in economic terms by documenting their peasant, worker, or bourgeois capitalist origins." (Leshkovich 2014, pp. 149-150). Those with a "bad *lý lịch*" (*lý lịch xấu*) would suffer discriminatory measures in post-war Vietnam. Their children, for example, would not get access to universities, and they themselves would not be allowed a job in the state sector (ibid.: 150; Denney 1990, Lê Việt Thọ 2020).

First of all, however, those with "negative political backgrounds" who had used to work for the "puppet government" (*ngụy quyền*) or served in the "puppet army" (*ngụy quân*) and even many who had opposed the former Saigonese government and had been part of the so-called "Third Force", but were also deemed disloyal by the victors, were sent to re-education camps (*trại cải tạo*). The internees had to attend regularly struggle sessions where they had to commit self-criticism and to perform hard work (Sagan and Denney 1982). Many families that had been classified as unreliable were forced to resettle in 'new economic zones' in remote places. In sum, more than a million of southerners spent some time in re-education camps; some stayed more until the 1980s (Goscha 2016, p. 419). To punish the defeated enemies and even some who had fought against the Saigon regime before 1975 was detrimental to national reconciliation.⁴⁾

Besides sending people associated with the former RVN regime to re-education camps and thus purging South Vietnamese society the leadership in Hanoi took also systematic measures to monitor and silence alternative forms of thinking and belief. This applied, for example, to the South Vietnamese culture that the VCP had classified as “decadent” and “poisonous” and that had been much more heterogeneous than the uniform state-controlled culture in the North. The campaign that was launched to restrict the influence of “decadent South Vietnamese culture” aimed at the “music of the former regime” (*âm nhạc chế độ cũ*) that was labelled “yellow music” (*nhạc vàng*). Records with romantic songs about love and peace were forbidden (Denney 1982; Taylor 2001, pp. 23-55) and destroyed.⁵⁾ Similarly, books, magazines, newspapers and other printed material that were considered to be “reactionary” and part of the “neo-colonialist culture” of the Saigon regime were confiscated and burnt. The authorities classified all publications that had originated in the South before 1975 into different categories. Works of writers belonging to the Existentialist school such as Jean-Paul Sartre came into Category B “Decadent works” and were banned (Denney 1982). That Sartre’s books were attacked during the Cultural Revolution in South Vietnam after 1975 was an irony of history since he had actively opposed the Vietnam War and the U.S. intervention.

4) Reeducation camps had already been established in the Democratic Republic of Vietnam at the beginning of the 1960s to re-educate those who had worked with the former French colonial administration and were suspected of disloyalty like those (Grossheim (2014). p. 20).

5) It is also an irony of history that many of the old *nhạc vàng*-songs that had been banned in Vietnam for decades have resurfaced and started to be performed again during the reform period — but under the new name “bolero” music. Those vinyl records from before 1975 in South Vietnam that had escaped the northern cultural czars are now a much sought-after collector’s item (Cuong Pham 2017).

In addition to destroying music records and other cultural products of the former RVN, the North Vietnamese also tried systematically to erase the memory of the collapsed regime. This “condemnation of memory” (*damnatio memoriae*) had been the policy of many victors in the past.

Thus, war cemeteries that had been built before 1975 and memorial sites of the defunct regime were levelled. As one of the first measures, the memorial statue of South Vietnamese marines in the park in front of the Opera House Saigon was pulled down by young supporters of the NLF (Nguyễn Ngọc Chính 2016). In the weeks following the liberation of Saigon the victors continued to demolish other memorial sites and to desecrate war cemeteries of the defeated Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) (Nguyễn Công Luận 2012, p. 462).

In 1983, the Mạc Đĩnh Chi cemetery in Hồ Chí Minh-City where many leading politicians and officers of the RVN had been buried was levelled down on the orders of the local People’s Committee. Instead the authorities built the Lê Văn Tám park — named after an alleged 14-year-old martyr of the First Indochina War (Logan and Witcomb 2013, p. 270).⁶⁾

Since 1965 fallen ARVN soldiers had been buried on the largest war cemetery of the RVN, the National Military Cemetery in Biên Hòa near Saigon. With an area of 125 ha this war cemetery became the final resting place for approximately 16,000 fallen South Vietnamese soldiers — many of them had died during the Tết Offensive in 1968, the invasion of Cambodia, the Lâm Sơn Offensive in 1971 or the Easter Offensive in 1972.⁷⁾

6) A few years ago Vietnamese historian Phan Huy Lê revealed that the whole story about the martyr Lê Văn Tám had been fabricated for propaganda purposes (Phan Huy Lê 2009).

7) For the history of Biên Hòa cemetery see the documentary produced in the U.S.:

A high tower surrounded by a wall used to be the center of the cemetery. This memorial was called *Nghĩa dũng đài* which means “brave and righteous”. It was planned to engrave the names of the fallen soldiers on the inside of the wall and to decorate the area outside the wall with monuments representing the history of Vietnam.

The entrance of the war cemetery was marked by a statue of a weary ARVN soldier with his rifle in his lap that would be called “*Thương tiếc*” (mourning).

The site *Nghĩa dũng đài* was supposed to be accomplished and inaugurated on June 19, 1975 on the memorial day of the ARVN, but this plan did not materialize because the Saigonese regime was defeated at the end of April 1975. Right after the collapse of South Vietnam, the National Military Cemetery in Biên Hòa was put under the administration of Military Zone Seven under the Defense Ministry in Hanoi, and renamed Bình An Cemetery.

After the collapse of the RVN the cemetery in Biên Hòa was desecrated like many other South Vietnamese cemeteries. These desecrations are visible until this day.

Next to desecrating many tombs North Vietnamese soldiers also demolished the statue *Thương tiếc*. It is rumored that later on the statue was melted down. Only the pedestal of the statue survived; however, it now stands outside the cemetery on private property (Anon 2015, Nguyễn Ngọc Chính 2012, Tường An 2013).

The Military Zone 7 that administered the former RVN National Military

Vietnam Film Club, Hồn Từ Sĩ. “Nghĩa trang Quân Đội Biên Hòa [The souls of the fallen soldiers. The war cemetery Biên Hòa]. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ahw7gF5VPw> (Accessed August 13, 2020).

did not grant families of fallen soldiers access to the cemetery. As a consequence, they were neither able to care for the tombs nor to make offerings to their deceased family member as it is custom in Vietnam on the death anniversary day, lunar New Year (*Tết*) etc.

In the course of time the cemetery Biên Hòa more and more fell into decay; the tombs started to be overgrown by weeds. In addition to that, many tombstones made of concrete were stolen. Thus, after 1975 the North Vietnamese victors had erased the memory of the defunct RVN.



[Figure 1] Desecrated tomb on the former War Cemetery of Biên Hòa
(©Grossheim March 2016).

To consolidate complete control in the South after the military victory in April 1975 the VCP also eliminated potential political rivals such as the NLF. The NLF also comprised some non-communist leaders who hoped

that an independent southern state would co-exist until northerners and southerners had agreed on how to unite the two Vietnams via elections or negotiations. That was the procedure stipulated in the Paris Peace Accords. However, also in this case the VCP did not care about its previous commitments; “the victors wanted their people in command.” (Goscha 2016, p. 409). Therefore, the NLF troops were merged with the PAVN shortly after the end of the war without consulting the NLF leadership (Truong Nhu Tang with David Chanoff and Doan Van Toai 1986, pp. 264-265). Similarly, in June 1976 the two Vietnamese states were unified into a single state, called the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, without any meaningful debate in the Political Conference for the Reunification of the Country or in the National Assembly. The southern delegation at the reunification conference was not represented by a NLF leader, but by Phạm Hùng, the number four in the Politburo of the VCP in Hanoi (ibid.: 284-286; Goscha 2016, pp. 412-413).

While discriminating against those associated with the defeated “puppet regime” (*ngụy quyền*) and thus purging the old administrative apparatus, Hanoi sent thousands of northern cadres south to extend the “Sino-Soviet state-building project” (Goscha 2016, p. 414). They established party cells and mass organizations at all administrative levels, and built up an efficient security apparatus in the South that was integrated into the Ministry of Public Security in Hanoi (*Bộ Công An*). Many of the victorious northern cadres who were instrumental in transferring the political and economic system to the territory of the former RVN enjoyed privileges and often behaved arrogantly towards the local southerners and seldom had an understanding of the specific local conditions.

This did not help when the northern cadres tried to establish a centrally

planned economy in the south as well, which meant the confiscation of private property and the nationalization of private businesses. The first measure was implemented soon after the end of the war whereas the large-scale nationalization of the commercial sector especially in Saigon-Cholon started later in March 1978. The crackdown on capitalist trade affected primarily ethnic Chinese (*Hoa*) who constituted the majority of the businessmen and traders in South Vietnam (Goscha 2016, pp. 415-416).

In March 1978, the leadership in Hanoi also decided to launch the collectivization of agriculture in the South. Theoretically, peasants were supposed to enter agricultural cooperatives voluntarily, but in most cases they were forced to contribute their land, tools, and equipment. Their lack of enthusiasm to join the cooperatives was caused by the fact that most peasants in the Mekong Delta, Vietnam's rice bowl, were not landless, but could be classified as middle peasants. During the French colonial period big landlords had still owned most of the land in the delta, but during the First Indochina War the Việt Minh had started to redistribute land and later in the 1960s the NLF had continued to do so. In addition, the Nguyễn Văn Thiệu-government had launched the land-to-the-tiller program in 1970 which completed the land redistribution in the South. Another contributing factor was the fact that due to the escalation of the war many landlords had fled the cities.

Against this background many peasants could simply not understand why they were supposed to join the cooperatives. The whole system of collectivized farming with fixed prices and no reward for individual hard work removed incentives. Many peasants offered passive resistance to agricultural collectivization (Kerkvliet 2005, Trung Dang 2018). As a result, productivity decreased and at the end of the 1970s Vietnam was experi-

encing a famine.

As another reaction to the crackdown on private business and the collectivization of agriculture many southerners decided to leave the country. Not only because of the nationalization of private commerce, but also due to the deterioration of Sino-Vietnamese relations after the end of the war in 1975 ethnic Chinese constituted a large group among the refugees.

In the weeks before April 30, 1975, about 150,000 Vietnamese mostly associated with the crumbling Saigonese regime had left the country. After the end of the war smaller numbers continued to flee usually via the South China Sea. In 1978, due to the radicalization of Hanoi's economic policy the number of refugees increased dramatically. Most of them went by boat and luckily ended up in Hong Kong or on the shores of Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines or Malaysia. Those less fortunate perished in the South China Sea or were killed by pirates.

When at the end of 1979, Indonesia and the other maritime Southeast Asian countries declared that they could not accept any new arrivals, Vietnam agreed with UNHCR on the Orderly Departure Program (ODP) that allowed Vietnamese to leave their country for family reunion. Approximately 600,000 Vietnamese made use of the ODP. In sum, between 1975 and 1995 about 840,000 Vietnamese had fled (Goscha 2016, pp. 422-423).

Many of those who had left Vietnam after 1975 were originally from North Vietnam and had come to the South after the end of the First Indochina War and the signing of the Geneva peace accords in 1954.⁸⁾

8) See the example of the family of Duong Van Mai Elliott whose father had worked for the French colonial administration, fled in 1954 to the South and then had to leave Vietnam for the U.S. in 1975 (Duong Van Mai Elliott 1999).

Although in 1954 they had lost their home, they could at least stay in Vietnam. In contrast, in 1975 they experienced a much bigger loss, they had to leave their home country. This fate of several generations of Vietnamese and their painful experiences are reflected in a nostalgic song by composer Phạm Duy that became popular among the overseas communities in the U.S. and elsewhere: “1954 cha bỏ quê, 1975 con bỏ nước” (1954 you, father, lost your home, in 1975 I left my home country).⁹⁾

Historian Christopher Goscha offers a clear explanation for the exodus of hundreds of thousands of Vietnamese: “This internal hemorrhaging of modern Vietnam was proof that national reconciliation had been a failure.” (Goscha 2016, p. 423).

3. Reform Policy and National Reconciliation? The Case of the ARVN Military Cemetery of Biên Hòa

When, in the 1990s the number of refugees decreased and Vietnam embarked on the *đổi mới* reform policy, the former National Military Cemetery of Biên Hòa was still off limits to visitors and continued to decay. Sometimes soldiers who guarded the place turned a blind eye on civilians who wanted to visit the graves of their relatives; however, it was still not possible to care for the graves on a regular basis (Dan Southerland 2005, Mydans 2000, Xuân Ba 2014).

Since Vietnam had launched an open-door policy at the beginning of the 1990s more and more overseas Vietnamese returned to Vietnam for

9) See the version of Elvis Phuong: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wTZPIQYD-CY> (Accessed August 13, 2020).

family visits or to work. This was also due to a fundamental change in the policy of the Vietnamese government towards the diaspora. Whereas before overseas Vietnamese (*Việt Kiều*) such as “boat people” were usually considered a threat, now the Vietnamese authorities encourage them to come home and invest. Thus, in May 2004 in the important Resolution 36/NQ-TW the Politburo of the VCP officially recognized “the Viet Kieu community and their potential in making a significant contribution to Vietnam’s economy.” (Pham 2011, p. 17).

In spite of this general policy shift, in 2005 the Binh An cemetery was still a no-go zone and guarded by soldiers; signs warned “No pictures!” (Southerland 2005).

Slowly, however, things took a turn for the better. In the same year, Nguyễn Cao Kỳ, former RVN Vice-President, suggested to Vietnamese Prime Minister Phan Văn Khải that the authorities should restore former ARVN war cemeteries and allow family members to care for the tombs of their deceased (Anon 2005b).

In April the same year, former Vietnamese Prime Minister Võ Văn Kiệt opened a debate in Vietnam and with overseas Vietnamese on the question of national reconciliation. In an interview he said “If there are a million people who feel joy on the 30th April, there are also a million people who feel sad on this day.” In 1975 — Võ Văn Kiệt argued — the conditions for a fast reconstruction of the country had been good, because many South Vietnamese had been prepared to make a contribution and almost all officers, soldiers and civil servants of the former Saigon government just wanted to live a peaceful life. However, after defeating the Republic of Vietnam and the United States the leadership in Hanoi had been drunk with victory and self-complacency — Võ Văn Kiệt added. If the VCP had

opted earlier for an economic policy similar to the economic reforms launched after 1986, Vietnam would not have experienced the period of the “lost years” from 1975 to 1986.

Võ Văn Kiệt had sufficient prestige to make such bold statements that differed from the celebratory narrative of the 30th April as a “Day of Liberation” for the whole Vietnamese people (Anon 2005a; see Trần Hữu Quang 2013, p. 418, 424).

His comments were welcomed by many Vietnamese inside and outside the country and led to some interesting debates about the question of national reconciliation (Grossheim 2008). Võ Văn Kiệt himself supported the idea of opening the Biên Hòa cemetery to the public and had talks with representatives of Bình Dương province and Hồ Chí Minh City (Trần Hữu Quang 2013, p. 421).



[Figure 2] People’s Cemetery of Bình An = Former National Military Cemetery of Biên Hòa, after 1975 administered by the Vietnamese Ministry of Defense (©Grossheim, March 2016).

As a result of all these efforts, at the end of 2006 the new Vietnamese Prime Minister Nguyễn Tấn Dũng decided on the transfer of the Binh An cemetery from the administration under the Defense Ministry to the civilian authorities of Binh Duong province. The formerly closed military cemetery thus became a normal civilian cemetery (BBC 2007).

On a state visit to the U.S. in 2007, Vietnamese President Nguyễn Minh Triết confirmed the decision and emphasized that overseas Vietnamese would also be allowed to visit the Binh An cemetery. In the same year the Vietnamese Deputy Foreign Minister visited the cemetery together with Nguyễn Đạc Thành, ARVN veteran and President of the Vietnamese American Foundation (VAF), an American and paid his respect to fallen South Vietnamese soldiers. The VAF and other NGOs were allowed to restore hundreds of tombs (Trọng Thành 2014, Tường An 2013.).

This also applied to family members in general who wanted to restore the tombs of relatives. In many cases families decided to build new tombs while preserving the original tombstone. Thus, since more than a decade the building of new tombs on the former National Military Cemetery of Biên Hòa has been in full swing (Thành Trung 2013, T. T. 2007).

Besides, a memorial tablet and an incense burner were erected in front of the former memorial site *Nghĩa dung*. However, the new memorial tablet has no inscription and thus looks somehow incomplete.

The Vietnamese press covered the opening and restoration of the former ARVN Military Cemetery, albeit not the official party organs such as *Nhân Dân* (The People), but only more open-minded newspapers like *Thanh Niên* (Youth). Several blogs in and outside Vietnam also reported the news and uploaded stories about visits to the Binh An cemetery (e.g. Tuấn Nguyễn 2015).



[Figure 3] Old gravestone in front of new tomb on the former National Military Cemetery of Biên Hòa (©Grossheim, March 2016).



[Figure 4] Empty memorial tablet and incense burner in front of the former memorial site *Nghĩa dung* (©Grossheim, March 2016).

The opening of the former ARVN Military Cemetery is certainly an important contribution to national reconciliation. More efforts by the Vietnamese authorities also to look for the remains of fallen ARVN soldiers that are still missing in action in great numbers would be a further step towards reconciliation with the former enemy.

However, initiatives by overseas Vietnamese NGOs or the U.S. government that promised financial support to look for the remains of fallen Vietnamese soldiers on the condition that the Vietnamese authorities should also look for those of ARVN soldiers have so far been rejected by Hanoi (BBC 2011, Hà Mi 2010).

Those who search the remains of fallen South Vietnamese soldiers do this quietly lest to arouse the attention of the local authorities. Until this very day it remains a difficult task and they lack official support (Bùi Thu 2020).

4. Conclusion

The limits of national conciliation are still drawn by the Vietnamese Communist Party and its Central Department of Propaganda and Education (*Ban Tuyên Giáo Trung ương*). The Vietnamese “memory machine” (Grossheim 2020) continues to cling to the orthodox binary narrative of the war. Thus, in museums, history textbooks and news reports it celebrates those who fought and sacrificed their lives on the side of the victors as heroes and martyrs (*liệt sỹ*) whereas those who had worked for the defunct RVN are labelled as American “puppets” (*Mỹ ngụy*).

Likewise, the VCP aggressively defends the official master narrative

against any challenges. The important Resolution 4 issued by the Central Committee of the VCP in October 2016 (Ban Chấp Hành Trung ương. Đảng Cộng Sản Việt Nam 2016) explicitly warns against “the distortion of history, making fabrications, and slandering [...] of the leaders of Party and state.” (ibid). In this context to uphold the celebratory narrative of the Vietnam War and the post-war development becomes instrumental. That is why the gatekeepers in Vietnam lash out at those who try to revise the orthodox picture of the Republic of Vietnam as a completely illegitimate political actor and who depict the Vietnam War as a civil war (Hà Nguyễn Cát 2020).¹⁰⁾

The fact that the relevant volume of the new history of Vietnam also made use of the term “*chính quyền Saigon*” (Saigon government) and only rarely used the term “*ngụy quyền*” (puppet government) is a mere flash in a pan (Trần Đức Cường (ed.) 2017). It is characteristic that the volume on Vietnam’s post-war development only addresses the story of the boat people in the chapter on security issues without providing any contextual information of why almost one million of Vietnamese fled their home country (Trần Đức Cường (ed.) 2017, p. 447.)

In the same vein, in an interview to the Vietnamese television on April 30 2020 Vice-Minister of Defense Nguyễn Chí Vĩnh praised the post-war development in Vietnam as a huge success enjoyed by all Vietnamese (Phạm Duy Thành and Minh Tuấn 2020). He argues further that due to the policy of the VCP and the state those associated with the old regime in the South “did not feel discriminated as long as they were patriotic” (ibid.). National reconciliation, Nguyễn Chí Vĩnh says, had been im-

10) For an example on new research on the Republic of Vietnam see Tuong Vu and Sean Fear (eds.) 2020.

plemented successfully because of the lenient policy of the Party and Vietnamese state. Furthermore, the victory on April 30, 1975 first of all had brought profit to the revolution, but when the country started to develop even those Vietnamese linked to the defeated RVN had benefitted from the victory.

When Nguyễn Chí Vĩnh talks about “development” he certainly does not mean the economic and social development between 1975 and 1986 which had been devastating and disappointing, but probably refers to the subsequent *đổi mới* policy. The development after 1986 has indeed been a success story that brought prosperity to a majority of Vietnamese.

However, to make this possible the VCP first had to give up the Stalinist central-planning model and establish a market-oriented model based on supply and demand. This applied first of all to the agricultural sector that became a motor of economic development after agricultural co-operatives throughout the country had been dissolved.

In other words, Vietnam’s successful reform policy was contingent on the abandonment of a communist vision that had dominated the worldview of the VCP for decades. As mentioned before, to build up socialism had been one of the main aims to wage a war against the US-backed regime in the South — next to reunification (Goscha 2016, pp. 441-442). By embracing capitalist-oriented reforms the Party also implicitly admitted the failure of its policy in the North after 1954 and in the South after 1975.

This is a causal relationship that Nguyễn Chí Vĩnh preferred not to mention.

If one compares his self-complacent comments about the great victory in 1975 that supposedly all Vietnamese enjoyed and about an alleged successful national reconciliation made possible by a tolerant policy of the

VCP with the thought-provoking words of late Prime Minister Võ Văn Kiệt had said in an interview 15 years earlier, then they are certainly a step backwards on the road to national reconciliation.

It is no wonder that Nguyễn Chí Vĩnh's views caused indignation among many overseas Vietnamese (see e.g. Nguyễn Quang Duy 2020).¹¹⁾

The gist of the matter is this: to truly recognize the Republic of Vietnam as a legitimate actor in the modern history of Vietnam and to analyze why so many Vietnamese left in 1978 and the following years would simply undermine the celebratory master narrative propagated by VCP and as a consequence undermine its legitimacy. For the moment the gatekeepers in Hanoi have prevailed and it seems that the Vietnamese Communist Party only allows reconciliation on its own terms (Cao Đức Thái. 2020).

11) For a non-Vietnamese view of the state of national reconciliation in Vietnam see Thayer 2020.

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초 록

화해 없는 통일?

— 1975년 이후 베트남의 사회적 갈등과 통합

마틴 그로스하임*

이 논문은, 1875년 4월 30일 베트남공화국(통칭 ‘남베트남’)이 붕괴된 이후 하노이(통칭 ‘북베트남’) 지도부가 추진한 화해 정책의 실패에 대해서 다룬다. 본 논문에서는 우선 북베트남이 전쟁에서 승리한 이후, 그동안 하노이 지도부가 공언했던 것과는 다르게 사이공 정부나 미국을 위해서 일했던 남베트남 사람들을 체계적으로 차별했음을 지적한다. 나아가 하노이 지도부가 베트남공화국을 역사에서 지우기 위해서 소위 “기억의 장소”(lieux de mémoire)들을 파괴하는 과정을 분석한다.

하노이 지도부가 베트남 남부에서 사회주의 체제를 구축하는 과정에서 위와 같은 정책을 추진함으로써 심각한 사회적 갈등이 발생하였고, 이는 결과적으로 약 100만 명에 이르는 베트남인들이 대거 국외로 망명하는 사태로 이어졌다.

1980년대 베트남의 개혁정책(đổi mới)이 시작된 이래, 국내외의 베트남인들 사이에서는 “기억 논쟁”(‘memory debates’)이 활발하게 진행되고 있으며, 이 과정에서 전쟁에서 패배한 남베트남 사람들을 통합하는 데 실패하였다는 사실도 자주 지적되고 있다. 비엔호아(Biên Hòa)에 소재한

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남베트남 전몰자 공동묘지가 겪어야 했던 부침은, 본 논문의 주장을 뒷받침하는 좋은 예시가 될 것이다.