

Language, Nation and Development in Southeast Asia

EDITED BY

Lee Hock Guan
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Preface

In early 2003, the editors of this volume discussed the possibility of holding a workshop on "National Language Policy and Nation-Building in Southeast Asia". After a few meetings, we agreed that the workshop should add another dimension, i.e., economic development. This is particularly essential in an era of globalization where economic issues often take command. We then began to prepare the topics and identify a few individuals; some were to write papers, while others were to serve as commentators. We immediately discovered that it was difficult to get writers for some countries, and as a result, we decided to leave out Laos, Cambodia and Brunei Darussalam.

The preparation of the workshop was relatively smooth. All of the presenters, except one, came to the workshop and were enthusiastic in presenting their arguments. We were fortunate to have Professor Wang Gungwu who agreed to give a keynote speech. He raised some important issues which were later discussed during the workshop. At the end of the workshop, we agreed that the papers should be revised for publication. Due to unforeseen circumstances, the process was very slow. Some papers were dropped as writers did not have time to do the revisions. Meanwhile, both of us were also bogged down by other responsibilities. At last, the revised papers have been edited and published. We would like to offer our apologies to the writers included in this volume for the belated publication. However, the facts and arguments presented in the papers are still relevant to the current situation.

Finally, we would like to thank Ambassador Kesavapany, Director of the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (ISEAS), for his support for the workshop and Dr Colin Durkorp of the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, who kindly graced the opening of the workshop and financed both the workshop and this publication. Nevertheless, the views expressed in the various chapters are the responsibility of the paper-writers alone.

Lee Hock Guan
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Keynote Address

Wang Gungwu

I am delighted to have the opportunity to participate in this workshop. It was not difficult to get me to come because I have always had a soft spot for language. Of the three important words of your workshop — language, nation and development — my favourite is still language. However, the nature of language and the ways we use it have changed and I now have difficulty following recent language trends.¹ So I welcome this opportunity for me to think about it afresh. Several common and stimulating themes emerged from the workshop papers. Perhaps the most important point is the multiplicity of languages. We are fortunate in Southeast Asia to live in one of the regions where there are so many different languages and language families.² That diversity has enriched all of us.

Let me add a personal note. I was born in a place³ where there were many different languages around me and grew up in another place⁴ where a different set of languages prevailed. I was never able to master those languages, but the exposure to so many of them when young was very important to my life. It meant that I grew up being aware of the importance of language, the various ways people communicate, and the different nuances that surface when similar things are expressed in different languages. All these points I did not fully appreciate when I was young. Only later did I recognize how important they are to us as human beings, and that has left a strong impression on me. My experience was not unusual. Among the people I grew up with, most have had similar experiences. In addition, the people I have known professionally, in the universities and research institutes I have worked in, were also multilingual in one way or another. That confirmed for me that knowledge and sensitivity about language is something that we cannot do without.

Let me briefly discuss the three words, language, nation and development. It is not automatic or natural for us to link the three words together. It may seem obvious today to say language, nation, and development must be connected, but actually this is a very recent occurrence.⁵ Of the three, language is the most basic. It has always been

ethnolinguistic map of Thailand (2x3 feet) and handbook under the auspices of the Ford Foundation and the Office of State Universities of Thailand. The data collected from different sources were analyzed and synthesized before being plotted on a base map prepared by the Royal Map-Making Department. More information on the minority languages of Thailand can also be found in L-Thongkum (1985).

4. Linguistically, some of these languages are in fact dialects or varieties of other languages; for example, Yong is a variety of the Lue language spoken in Mueang Yong, Myanmar. Yong is classified as a separate language in order to comply with the belief of the native speakers.
5. Thai languages mean the Tai dialects/ languages spoken by the majority of Thailand. Those spoken by the members of the Tai race living in China, India, Myanmar, Laos and Vietnam are called "Tai languages". "Displaced Tai languages" are the ones spoken by the Tai immigrants and refugees from the neighbouring countries of Thailand.
6. Except perhaps for the periodic violence in the south.

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Vietnamese Language and Media Policy in the Service of Deterritorialized Nation-Building

Ashley Carruthers

LANGUAGE AND MEDIA POLICY FOR GLOBALIZATION

Until the mid to late 1990s, Vietnam's language and media policies were almost exclusively oriented towards issues of national unity, security and "territorialized" nation-building.¹ In more recent years, a consciousness of the need to re-tool language and media policy to face the challenges and seize the opportunities of globalization has emerged. A subset of this new policy direction is concerned with the Vietnamese diaspora, which the State estimates to number 2.7 million. This population is believed to reside in more than ninety countries, and eighty per cent of it is estimated to be located in developed nations (Politbureau 2004).

As part of a more general policy to engage the diaspora's economic and intellectual resources, Hanoi is currently in the process of implementing diaspora-specific media and language directives. These include a project to encourage and support Vietnamese language teaching in overseas Vietnamese communities, and renewed² attempts to project homeland print and broadcast media overseas. This latter initiative is being pursued by means of online versions of domestic newspapers and magazines, and satellite transmission and webcasting of a specially-packaged TV station, VTV4. These media initiatives have the twin goals of breaking the hegemony of anti-communist media producers in the diaspora, and fostering the maintenance and "updating" of the Vietnamese language overseas, especially among the younger generation(s). The ultimate aim of these policies is to create a sense of connectedness and nationalist affect in overseas Vietnamese communities, and thus to sustain links to the homeland across diasporic generations.

THE DIASPORA

The Vietnamese diaspora is made up principally of those who left as refugees during the Second Indochina War and its aftermath. In the United States alone, there were 1,122,528 Vietnam-born according to the 2000 Census. Other significant communities include those in Australia (154,830 in 2001), Canada (148,400 in 2001) and France (about 300,000). Overseas Vietnamese communities also exist in the former Eastern Bloc countries and in Vietnam's neighbours: Laos, Cambodia, Thailand and China. While political contradictions between the latter communities and Hanoi do exist, they are not significant, and these groups are typically considered to constitute a "loyal" diaspora. In the case of the refugee diaspora, however, considerable ideological differences remain.³

Many in the refugee diaspora continue to identify, at least symbolically, with the former Southern regime (the Republic of Vietnam or RVN) and oppose what they see as the illegitimate dictatorship of the Communist Party of Vietnam. Hanoi's attitude to this group remains ambivalent. On the one hand, it fears the destabilizing effect that committed anti-communists and democracy advocates in the diaspora may have on the nation. On the other, it appreciates the potentially enormous contribution this refugee diaspora could make to the project of national development. It is estimated that up to three billion U.S. dollars are now remitted each year from the diaspora to Vietnam, roughly equivalent to ten per cent of Vietnam's GDP, and constituting a major source of foreign exchange. In the first half of 2004, Ho Chi Minh City alone received some US\$900 million in remittances, a total exceeding the amount of foreign direct investment in the city for the same period ("Viet Kieu Expected to Send Back \$3 Bln", 2004). When one adds the cash and gold brought back by some 300,000 annually returning relatives, and the significant small to medium unofficial investments that overseas Vietnamese or *Việt kiều*⁴ make in the names of their domestic relatives, the actual figure could be substantially higher. It is also estimated that there are some 300,000 tertiary educated *Việt kiều* who could provide much needed brainpower for Vietnam's national development. While admittedly the *Việt kiều* are not in control of a strongly developed diasporic economy such as that of the Overseas Chinese (Dorais 2001, p. 6), the resources sketched above are obviously of significance to the Vietnamese State.

DETERRITORIALIZED NATION-BUILDING

Vietnam is currently seeking to harness the nation-building potential of its overseas subjects through a set of policy initiatives that...

logic of "deterritorialized nation-building" (Glick Schiller, Basch et al. 1994). Such strategies are emerging as important pillars of development policy for Third World nations with sizeable overseas populations. While policies differ significantly between nations, all forms of deterritorialized nation-building involve extending national belonging in one form or another to those who have left, despite the fact they may have taken out citizenship in and undergone social and cultural integration into second nations. Diasporic subjects might, for instance, be offered dual citizenship, "national" status, voting rights, special visa conditions and investment rights. As well as re-imagining citizenship in a more flexible mode, deterritorialized nation-building policies also necessarily make some movement towards re-defining the nation itself as an unbounded territorial, political, social, cultural and temporal entity. In such constructs, territoriality shifts from a literal to a symbolic sense, whereby diasporic "citizens" can be imagined to belong to a virtual national territory that exceeds the physical borders of the nation. Jean-Bertrand Aristide thus referred to Haitians abroad as the country's *Dizyèm Depatman-an* or "Tenth Department", Haiti being divided into nine administrative regions or "Departments" (Glick Schiller, Basch et al. 1994, p. 146). The concept of "Greater China" employs a similar sense of inclusive unbounded territoriality (Ong and Nonini 1997; Ong 1999; Yang 1999).

The goal of such strategic re-imaginings is, by and large, to "capture" the material, social and symbolic capital of diasporic populations for the nation-building endeavour. Through the diaspora-as-bridge, developing nations may seek such things as access to hard currency (through remittances and Foreign Direct Investment), knowledge and technology transfers, entry into overseas markets, and even political influence in host nations via ethnic community politics. I would assert that deterritorialized nation-building also necessarily involves the attempt to project governmentality beyond the national territory to try to discipline national subjects at a distance — despite the fact they are subject to the governmental power of host nations. This activity may be as subtle as the appeal to "remember one's roots", a gentle symbolic violence the Vietnamese State is fond of enacting on its overseas constituents. It should be noted that the State's power to discipline diasporic populations at a distance is necessarily relative and attenuated. Where such populations have access to permanent residency and citizenship in developed nations, as is the case with the Vietnamese refugee diaspora, the State will be less able to exercise transnational governmentality; where the diaspora is a transient labour diaspora, as in the case of the Philippines, the State will

failure of attempts in 1982 to force Filipino Overseas Contract Workers to remit fifty per cent of their earnings through Philippine banks, an initiative that was defeated primarily by means of grassroots political organizing by domestic workers and NGOs in Hong Kong (Gibson, Law et al. 2001, pp. 367–69).

REINCORPORATING THE VIỆT KIỀU

Prior to the Sixth Party Congress in 1986, post-war Vietnamese emigrants living in the developed world were generally read under the sign of the Western enemy, and referred to in official communications as Reactionaries [Kẻ Phản động] and Puppets [Ngụy]. Hanoi's policy priorities vis-à-vis the refugee diaspora revolved around monitoring and defending against possible anti-regime activities. Việt kiều were permitted to remit money and send gifts to relatives during this "closed-door" period, but the regime envisaged no greater economic role for them than this. With the onset of economic reforms, however, Hanoi began to look towards the post-war diaspora as a source of capital for its programme of economic revitalization, and offered Việt kiều investors tax incentives and liberalized rules of business participation (Stern 1992, p. 16). Something of a backlash against these reforms occurred in 1989, when the re-emergence of security concerns in the context of events in Eastern Europe led to a return to a more cautious policy, and the Politburo acted to roll back some of reformer Nguyen Van Linh's more daring initiatives (Stern 1992, p. 19). Nevertheless, a fundamental shift in conceptualizing the role of the Việt kiều had occurred, and the State went on to grant more and more entitlements to them as the 1990s progressed. Milestones in this process have included: the liberalization of visa conditions; parity with domestic citizens on tariffs for transport, accommodation and other services (while foreigners had to pay higher prices for some goods and services under a two-tiered system); right to choose whether to invest under the domestic or foreign investment law; lower rates of tax on business profits; and limited rights to purchase land and houses.⁵ The recently promulgated Resolution 36 on Việt kiều promises to continue in this vein, stressing the need for policy initiatives that will:

Facilitate their return to visit their homeland, relatives and pay tribute to their ancestors; further streamline regulations on immigration, residence and travel of Việt kiều in Vietnam; quickly process applications for repatriation or return to work or live in

Vietnam for a limited period; continue to solve outstanding issues that involve Việt kiều such as house purchase in Vietnam, inheritance, marriage and family, adoption and so on; introduce a single price system for all Vietnamese, domestic and overseas alike (Politbureau 2004).⁶

Resolution 36 even appears to hold out the promise of limited political participation to Việt kiều, stating that it is a goal to "Put in place an appropriate mechanism for consultations with Việt kiều before the promulgation of legal documents and policies that concern them" (Politbureau 2004). Other issues highlighted include the need to facilitate Việt kiều wishing to do business and make investments in Vietnam, and encouraging the cooperation of Việt kiều professionals and intellectuals in local research and training. A concrete instance of this latter policy initiative is Vietnam's participation in the UNDP's Transfer of Knowledge Through Expatriate Nationals (TOKTEN) programme, now administered by the Committee on Overseas Vietnamese.⁷

Despite these encouraging signs, we should note that, as with all legislation in Vietnam, laws regarding Việt kiều are implemented irregularly and with much latitude for local non-compliance and obfuscation. There is much evidence that both institutional and informal discrimination against Việt kiều continues to be rife (Carruthers 2002; Long 2004). For their part, Việt kiều have tended to sidestep the legal investment channels that have been created for them by putting capital into property and small to medium enterprises under the names of their domestic relatives, a phenomenon referred to as đầu tư "chui" or "contraband" investment. Việt kiều small and medium investors have chosen this path because it makes more economic sense, and in many cases because of a desire to avoid (being seen to be) "collaborating" with the Hanoi regime. Those with Vietnamese community-based businesses in the U.S. quite rationally fear that these will be boycotted if it is known they are involved in official investment in Vietnam. Thus total unofficial Việt kiều investment in the country may be in the realm of tens of billions of dollars, while official Việt kiều FDI constitutes only a negligible proportion of total FDI.

As well as the promise of further rights and entitlements, signs of conservative opposition to the rehabilitation of the diaspora are in stark evidence in Politbureau Resolution 36, in which it is stated:

A number of Việt kiều, whether because they have not had the opportunity to come back to their homeland to see with their own

eyes the achievements of Đổi mới, or because of their prejudices or sense of inferiority, don't fully understand the situation in the country. A small number [continue to] go against the interests of our nation, seek to destroy the country, and disrupt relations and cooperation between their country of residence and Vietnam (Politbureau 2004).

The controversial use of the terms thành kiến and mặc cảm, translated as "prejudice" and "sense of inferiority", seems unlikely to endear Việt kiều who remain sceptical about returning to participate in a State-defined project of national development. It is difficult to imagine the choice of a more insulting term than mặc cảm, which is often translated as "inferiority complex", but in Vietnamese means a strong sense of shame and unworthiness because of one's dishonourable and underhanded actions towards a person or community.

What kind of transnationalism is this, then? At present, I believe one can argue it is a reluctant and conservative one, born of the fact that Vietnam's structural position in the global economy obliges it to rely on its large and well-placed diaspora in the West, despite the fact that some in Hanoi continue to fear and suspect these former "enemies". Unsurprisingly, the form of transnational citizenship offered to Việt kiều is empty of political agency. The absence of political pluralism and the limited content of domestic citizenship in Vietnam, as well as the resolutely oppositional nature of public homeland politics in the diaspora, mean that there is no question of real political rights being extended to Việt kiều. Further, the Vietnamese State's capacity to exercise any sort of long-distance governmentality over former refugees in Western nations is negligible, due both to the stability of their residency in host nations and their ideological commitments.⁸ Ditto its capacity to offer any real protection of their "cultural rights" in host nations that already enact liberal multicultural policies. These facts mean that Vietnamese deterritorialized nation-building policies towards the refugee diaspora have to date necessarily been limited to: (1) investment policies, designed to (conservatively) encourage Việt kiều FDI, remittances, tourism and knowledge transfer; and (2) symbolic policies, designed to foster feelings of enduring membership in and love for the homeland.⁹ In other words, what has been offered is a limited form of market and symbolic "citizenship". Despite this relatively restricted definition of transnational citizenship, and a relationship that has waxed and waned, I concur with Long when she asserts that Việt kiều have played a "pivotal role" in

Vietnamese society in the transition period, and have increasingly been accepted as a "critical kinship link" to outside markets (2004, p. 70). Significantly, this participation has occurred in a largely grassroots and spontaneous manner rather than waiting for or following the channels set out in state policy.

METAPHORS OF INCORPORATION

As in conventional modes of nation-building, the dimension of affect is central to the processes of transnational nation-building. Diasporic investors and professionals are asked to "contribute" to the nation not simply in a self-interested or economic rationalist way, but rather to take risks and put up with lesser returns for the sake of love of their homeland. In order to make such a proposition palatable, discourses of transnation must successfully produce "homelands of identification" in which diasporic subjects can invest their desires. This process euphemizes the more exploitative dimensions of transnational nation-building, as well as suppressing the disjunctures between and within overseas and domestic populations.

The current "working definition" of the Vietnamese transnation came out of the Eighth Party Congress in 1996. There, it was resolved that "Việt kiều are an inseparable part of the community of the Vietnamese dân tộc" — dân tộc being translatable variously as race, nation or people. It was explained that the State seeks, through this recognition, to better "mobilise the strength of the entire dân tộc, including Vietnamese overseas, for the goal of a wealthy people, a strong country and a just and civilised society" (Tran 1997, p. 5). The final phrase of this formulation is of course the official slogan of contemporary Đổi mới Vietnam (Dân giàu, nước mạnh, xã hội công bằng, văn minh), a discursive attempt to steer through the contradictions of a socialist society with capitalist markets, and to colour the disjunctures of the Đổi mới reforms as an "extension" of the socialist revolution (Greenfield 1997, p. 124). Note that in this official formulation, the term "dân tộc" is used in preference to "nhân dân", which signifies a social (and socialist) collectivity rather than one based on ethnicity. Le Sy Giao notes that "in thought and feeling, when we speak of the community of inhabitants of Vietnam, using the concept of Dân tộc Việt Nam creates a closeness, an intertwining, a unity greater than the concept of Nhân dân Việt Nam" (Le 1999, p. 35).¹⁰ Thus, ethnic and racial similarity are emphasized over ideological and historical differences, and Việt kiều are invited to participate in a warm sense of

Vietnamese *communitas* rather than a political community. Also significant is the fact that this metaphor is based on a temporal rather than spatial conceit. Fournon and Glick-Schiller note that such national projections revive “nineteenth century equations of race and nation in which a nation is understood as rooted in blood ties rather than in national territory” (Fournon and Glick-Schiller 2001, p. 543). One might argue that this bracketing of the national territory as the absolute referent of nationness serves the purpose of symbolic inclusiveness well, since the idea of a global community of blood ties does not privilege Vietnam as the sole site in which legitimate Vietnamese identities can be formed. Neither does it claim a monopoly over the nationalist identifications of diasporic subjects, but accommodates their ties to host nations. One might add that such a metaphor is more palatable than one of spatial deterritorialization to Vietnamese war veterans and other patriots, given the price that Vietnam has paid in blood for the “salvation” of the national territory.

Other developments suggest that this de-centering of the nation is subject to oscillation in the discourse on *Việt kiều*. A recent shift in official terminology from “*Việt kiều*” to “*Người Việt Nam ở Nước ngoài*” parallels a Chinese shift from *huaqiao* to *haiwai huaren*. According to Nonini and Ong, with this move “China is reinstalled as primal source and centre, the Middle Kingdom, *fons et origo* of ‘Chinese culture’” (Nonini and Ong 1997, p. 9). Similarly, we might point to the Vietnamese State’s attempt to regain its position as the absolute referent of Vietnamese nationhood and culture, thus displacing the defunct RVN as the locus of diasporic nationalism. Finally, we should note that the above are all metaphors that assume an almost perfect degree of racial homogeneity, and put forward a self-evident definition of a *Việt kiều*. Those belonging to ethnic minorities, those of mixed ancestry, and those claiming a cultural membership of the nation are ambiguously positioned, if not excluded outright.

LANGUAGE TEACHING

The maintenance of Vietnamese language and culture falls within the scope of deterritorialized nation-building insofar as the second generation (born overseas) will only be “useful” to Vietnam if its members retain a sense of Vietnamese cultural identity rather than assimilating. As stated in Resolution 36, the Politbureau does not believe that sufficient “means of maintaining Vietnamese culture and tradition” are in place in the diaspora, and considers that “there are difficulties around the preservation

of the Vietnamese language and national character in the young generation” (Politbureau 2004). We might read this as anxiety about the deracination of *Việt kiều* in Western host nations, combined with the fear that they are undergoing an “inappropriate” acculturation at the hands of anti-communist cultural pedagogues.

While plans to send language teachers to diasporic communities have been mooted for many years, in 2004 a concrete project to send language teachers from Vietnam to work overseas “where it is possible” was launched (Politbureau 2004). It is envisaged that this will initially mean sending teachers to neighbouring countries including Thailand, Laos and Cambodia (“*Hội nghị phổ biến...*”, 2004). Also involved is a project of “cultural exchange”, including running summer schools in Vietnam for *Việt kiều* youth to undertake intensive language study,¹¹ as well as the production of language materials, including textbooks and CD-ROMs. Transnational media are seen as important vehicles for making these learning materials available, and virtually all of the online domestic magazines and newspapers already have links to a “learn Vietnamese” page, which may include practice dialogues and even sound files. At present, the content of these online courses tends to be extremely limited, formulaic and generally unconvincing, and it makes no concessions whatsoever to the diasporic context and differences between homeland and *Việt kiều* usage. The Politbureau has targeted these materials for improvement.

The “Supporting Vietnamese language teaching and learning for *Việt kiều*” project reportedly has a duration of four years (2004–2008) and a US\$500,000 budget, which is to be used for research into the Vietnamese language teaching situation in the diaspora, building syllabi, publishing, and organizing and supporting classes in community and cultural centres and associations (Prime Minister, 2004). It appears this project is indeed being implemented, although there is reportedly some difficulty in spending the money, as any SRV-funded language school that was set up in a Western diasporic context would immediately be boycotted and picketed. Anecdotal evidence suggests officials have approached Vietnamese nationals working as academics overseas to offer them financial and other support to develop syllabi and set up classes. It is envisaged that such teaching would offer: (1) “neutral” language-learning materials, in order to “update” the “old-fashioned” Vietnamese spoken in overseas communities; (2) a level of professionalism in a community teaching context, where language instructors are often not trained or qualified; and (3) a forum free of the homeland politics that is a feature

of community-organized “Saturday schools”. Interest in this topic in Vietnam is reflected by the fact that newspaper editors are petitioning Vietnamese citizens working overseas with some knowledge of Vietnamese language teaching in their locales to write reports on the *Việt kiều* language situation. Hence the appearance of a long interview with former Ambassador to Belgium, Tôn Nữ Thị Ninh, in VnExpress.net. Tôn warns:

If the State doesn’t create favourable conditions for teaching Vietnamese to *Việt kiều*, two things will happen. The first is the next generation will lose their Vietnamese roots entirely, and know nothing about the culture and language of the place they were born. The second is that now in many places, reactionary elements organise Vietnamese classes. A number of *Việt kiều* parents who don’t want their children to lose Vietnamese resign themselves to shutting their eyes and let their children go to these classes only to have politics brought in (“*Người Việt ở nước ngoài được hỗ trợ học tiếng Việt*”, 2004).

The spectre of the failure of linguistic maintenance across generations is of significant concern to Vietnam, since this could lead to the “loss” of the second generation of *Việt kiều* who, not speaking the language, would not consider themselves to have any special relationship with Vietnam. However, the difficulty in delivering SRV-funded language tuition in diasporic contexts means that for the moment, electronic delivery (via the internet and satellite TV) remains the most feasible way of offering “homeland-friendly” language tuition materials.

TRANSNATIONAL MEDIA

It seems clear that Hanoi sees diasporic anti-communist elites as its enemies in the endeavour to woo the *Việt kiều*. The State is well aware that anti-regime elites control the diasporic media and community organizations,¹² and is addressing the problem of how to reduce their influence, particularly on those recently arrived as economic or family reunion migrants. Indeed, there is evidence that Vietnam sees itself as being in struggle with elites in the diaspora not only for influence over the *Việt kiều* “masses” in the Western countries, but also for the loyalty of the communities in the former Soviet bloc. As discussed above, the State has quite consciously cast itself as the defender of communal rights of *Việt kiều*, most particularly, the right to extranational loyalty to the homeland, and also to more basic rights such as those of linguistic and

cultural maintenance. In this it seeks to usurp the role of anti-communist diasporic elites as the guarantors of these communal rights in the host nations (see, for instance Tran 1997, p. 3; Nguyen 1998, pp. 267–68; Politbureau 2004).¹³ While diasporic elites stress the “naturalness” of the anti-communist orthodoxy and promote essentialist representations of a unified refugee diaspora, homeland scholars represent the anti-communist element as a small but powerful minority that has self-interestedly seized control of diasporic media and community organizations. The picture most frequently drawn here is of an exploitative elite, drawn strictly from the military and administration of the old regime, foisting its outmoded Cold War politics on a silent majority of homeland patriots that does not identify with this exile identity (Pham 1997, p. 298; Tran 1997, pp. 157–81). Homeland scholarship usually emphasizes the disunity and internal contradictions of the diaspora, authors stressing that those departing Vietnam left at many different times and for many different reasons, and thus have diverse orientations to the homeland.

In order to address the near hegemony of anti-communist producers in the diasporic media, the State has sought to bring into being a “loyal” transnational media. This political function is, understandably, not spelt out in policy documents and press releases. Rather, the function of transnational media is typically described in apolitical terms: to further the use of the Vietnamese language outside the country; to encourage cultural maintenance and foster patriotic feelings towards the homeland; to inform *Việt kiều* of the “realities” of life in contemporary Vietnam; and to provide them information on laws, policies and other issues that affect them. State-managed¹⁴ Vietnam Television (VTV) has introduced a new channel, VTV4, specially packaged for satellite broadcast to *Việt kiều* communities in Asia, Europe, Australia and North America.¹⁵ Those possessing the appropriate satellite dishes could receive around eight hours of programming a day as a free-to-air broadcast until 15 May 2005, and since then have been able to enjoy the channel twenty-four hours a day. VTV4 carries a mix of programming from the other three VTV stations, including leisure, sports, children’s, music and game shows.¹⁶ In addition, VTV4 airs programmes made specifically for overseas broadcast, such as the vox pop shows *Tin tức cộng đồng* [Community Information] and *Trả lời khán giả VTV4* [Audience Responses], which visit *Việt kiều* communities in Asia and Europe, but reportedly never in North America or Australia. Other programmes include news broadcasts in Vietnamese, French and English; informational shows such as *Việt Nam hôm nay* [Vietnam Today], which covers topics such as retiring and

investing in Vietnam; and shows that encourage Việt kiều tourism to Vietnam by dwelling on the nation's beautiful scenery. Some programmes broadcast on VTV4 have English subtitling, particularly dramas. While having a more narrowly defined brief than domestic television stations in Vietnam, programming on VTV4 is to some extent at least a reflection of the local media environment, which is characterized on the one hand by a frank commercialism and sometimes surprising cosmopolitanism, and on the other by continuing State control and tedious parochialism. Pettus has recently gone so far as to argue that the press in Vietnam constitutes "a new, liberalized space of public discourse" that shares some characteristics of the public sphere as defined by Mayfair Yang in the Chinese context, i.e. as a process of struggle to define a space independent of the State, market and family (Pettus 2003).

At present, screening VTV4 in public contexts such as restaurants and cafes in the refugee diaspora is difficult if not impossible, and few are willing to speak out publicly to admit they watch the broadcasts, much less enjoy them. On the part of those who do not dismiss the channel outright as a tool of communist propaganda, there is a mixed response, which certainly includes the perception that it serves the ideological and information needs of the Party and Government rather than the entertainment needs of Việt kiều audiences. Swiss Vietnamese commentator Hồ Thị Minh notes that her feelings of excitement and fascination on first seeing VTV4 quickly gave way to tedium and disappointment. She complains of the heavy ideological overtones of the programme *Việt Nam qua Con mắt Người Nước ngoài* [Vietnam through Overseas Eyes], in which "'Việt kiều who love their country', are affectionate towards the regime, and support the State, are put up on the VTV4 screen for display and used as 'decoys' to lure 'Việt kiều' back to invest and co-operate with the regime. These 'decoys' ... have been carefully chosen and coached so they know to say what the Party wants" (Ho 2004). Hồ's comments about other programmes reveal a highly oppositional and even paranoid mode of interpretation. She claims that films shown on VTV4, such as *Khi đàn chim trở về* [When the Flock Returns] and *Phía sau một cái chết* [The Other Side of a Death], which air issues of corruption and the inadequacies of Vietnam's legal system, are not in fact evidence of liberalization and media diversity in Vietnam, despite their appearance. Rather, her explanation is that these films are not in fact seen in Vietnam, and are made only to be shown on VTV4 to convince the overseas audience that there is freedom of speech in Vietnam, that the regime is open, and that it can face the truth of corruption. Such

readings demonstrate both the resolutely oppositional nature of the subject position occupied by this Việt kiều viewer, as well as her incapacity to correctly "read" the VTV4 media text in relation to its context of production (Vietnamese reporters have been exposing low- to mid-level official corruption since the advent of *Đổi mới*, and the partial marketization of the media has encouraged the reporting of salacious "social facts" to satisfy viewers' curiosity for the macabre and seamy side of Vietnamese life (Marr 1998; Tran 2002)). We should note this oppositional mode of viewing does not preclude some genuine satisfaction of viewer desire, especially in terms of the nostalgia factor associated with the presentation of Vietnamese scenery and cultural events. Indeed, the author's intimate knowledge of programming — she names some eleven shows! — belies her antagonistic stance.

The public attitude of the Vietnamese community in Australia towards the transnationalization of Vietnamese media was vividly demonstrated in early 2004, when multicultural broadcaster SBS began to screen VTV4 news broadcasts as part of a relaunch of its WorldWatch programme. Screened early every morning, WorldWatch is intended to provide migrant audiences in Australia with native language news services. It re-broadcasts news programmes produced by national networks in China, France, Italy, Spain, Indonesia, United Arab Emirates, the Philippines and a number of other nations.¹⁷ On the completion of a new SBS satellite dish capable of receiving Thaicom 3, one of the satellites on which VTV4 is broadcast, SBS management decided the time was right to include a Vietnamese language news bulletin on the programme. Management was aware of the backlash this would provoke in the Vietnamese Australian community, but committed to what they saw as SBS's charter of providing a Vietnamese language news broadcast for Australia's significant Vietnamese-speaking population (Interview with SBS management, 31 August 2004).¹⁸ SBS's initial approaches to VTV were ignored, and WorldWatch had to take the expedient of using TV Canal France International, which was collaborating with VTV on a *Diễn Biện Phủ* anniversary broadcast, as a go-between. Once communications had been established, SBS reports VTV was "keen but reserved", and their impression was that VTV executives did not want to be seen as "pushing" the re-broadcast of their *Thời sự* [Current Events] programme.¹⁹

The Vietnamese community's reaction was dramatic. Callers deluged SBS's 1800 feedback number, one person ringing twenty-three times. The Vietnamese Community in Australia's (VCA) campaign website forwarded to SBS messages from some 30,000 petitioners, the large

majority coming from the United States (demonstrating the global diasporic dimension of this event). Thousands protested outside SBS's studios in Sydney and Melbourne, prompting VCA Head Trung Doan to call this the "single biggest event in the 28-year history of the community in Australia". So many travelled to the protests by train that Cabramatta railway station sold out of tickets and had to let people travel free ("Behind the Vietnamese Siege of SBS", 2004). Shocked by the scale of the protests, criticized by conservative talkback radio hosts and newspaper columnists, and pressured by both major political parties, SBS's management decided to indefinitely "suspend" the broadcasts. SBS predicts that it will not be possible to attempt to broadcast a domestic Vietnamese news service again for another ten years. For their part, Vietnamese community leaders complained that an existing written undertaking by SBS to consult with community was not honoured, and that the programme had been announced only one day before it aired. They suggested that a Vietnamese language news programme be sourced from Saigon Broadcasting in California, an option not acceptable to WorldWatch. VTV's reaction to the suspension of broadcasts was "regretful but resigned", and no further contact has taken place between them and SBS since they called to break the news about the cancellation.²⁰ Intriguingly, at the time of the protests, the SEA Games in Hanoi and the war in Iraq were both under way. *Thời sự*'s broadcasts were notable at this time for their celebration of the novel spectacle of a modern, global sporting event taking place in Vietnam, and their bland and even pro-United States reporting of the Iraq invasion, the vision for which was taken from BBC World. The fact that the protestors labelled this "communist propaganda" speaks not a little of the ironies of the post-Cold War world order. *Thời sự* reportedly attracted up to 28,000 viewers in its two months on air ("Behind the Vietnamese Siege of SBS", 2004), and it is a safe bet that many in the protesting crowds were watching the broadcasts, if only to be informed about what they were protesting against. Not all in the Vietnamese Australian community opposed the broadcasts, and some privately lament the loss of this brief flowering of diversity in the Vietnamese language media sphere in Australia.²¹

For those without the inclination or means to invest in an A\$2,000 satellite dish, VTV4 is now accessible relatively cheaply on a DTH (Direct-to-Home) platform offered by Taiwanese company Pacific Media.²² This supplier reportedly captures the signal for VTV4, as well as domestic Vietnamese stations VTV3 and HTV7, from the Thaicom 3 satellite, and

then rebroadcasts them in an encoded form via Asat 4. Subscribers in Australia pay a third party supplier A\$550 for a sixty-five cm roof-mounted dish and set-top decoder, and then A\$328 per year after an initial six-month free service. One of the two suppliers operating on Pacific Media's behalf in Sydney, a Vietnamese-Australian former refugee of very marked and independent opinions, told me that he had installed around fifty of the dishes in the six months the service had been available (Interview, 3 October 2005). I was able to spend a number of evenings viewing Pacific Media's Vietnamese service with the Nguyễn family in Marrickville in Sydney's inner west, an area that is associated with more recently arrived "economic refugees" from Vietnam's north. The members of the extended Nguyễn family fit this profile, having departed from a town a few kilometres from the Chinese border by boat in the late 1980s after enduring a long period in a New Economic Zone (NEZ). This family has an enormous plasma television in its living room, which is so often full of family members, friends, visitors and card-players (not to mention anthropologists) that at times it feels like a quasi-public space. The first time a huge image of Hồ Chí Minh loomed up on the screen to the accompaniment of rousing revolutionary music I was more than a little disoriented, but the assembled company took this apparition entirely in its stride. On any given evening, the members and friends of the Nguyễns watched a succession of programmes including domestic soccer, music, drama and the more interesting of the "social information" documentaries with obvious pleasure. When I mentioned that some overseas Vietnamese critics had found the VTV4 broadcasts boring, Mrs Nguyễn irately barked "What boring?!" [Chán gì?!] at me. Particularly memorable was viewing the second instalment of the two-part telemovie *Bồ ơi!* [Dear Father!], a drama about the travails of a man who sells boiling water for tea on the grounds of a Ho Chi Minh City hospital. Everyone in the room but me seemed to have seen the first part of the movie, and they filled me in as they emoted along with the man's harsh struggle for everyday economic survival, and admired his touching devotion to his sick daughter. Never did the TV-side conversation stray into the realm of politics, either in a "loyal" or critical mode. The elder members of the Nguyễn family certainly had their gripes with the Government for the way they had been relocated and forced to endure difficult conditions in the NEZ, but in general, they related to the nation in an apolitical mode, simply proud of Vietnam and its rapid economic development, and nostalgic for the pleasures of their seaside home town just below China.

A long-time informant who has recently migrated from Ho Chi Minh City to California as the spouse of a former refugee reported that she was struck by how many people seemed to be aware of VTV4 and its content. While her own household did not have a satellite dish, she was able to watch VTV over the Internet. For this young woman, who was experiencing considerable difficulty fitting into the Vietnamese community in Little Saigon, watching VTV and reading *Tuổi Trẻ* were important daily rituals that eased the pain of migration (communication by Yahoo Chat, 1 August 2005). Other evidence of viewing in the United States can be found on the websites of companies such as Sadoun Satellite Sales and Eman Technology, which both host Vietnamese television fora. There, one can find technical advice about how to configure equipment to receive VTV4, complaints about the “boring” nature of broadcasts, advice about when is the best time to watch, and even requests to be told how a certain film ended! The VietSatellite company, which is proudly located in Little Saigon and carries images of local Vietnam war commemorations on its homepage, gives instructions about how to tune into VTV4 using its ASIA satellite system. Admittedly, however, among viewers happy to publicly announce their pleasure in watching VTV4, we find few who identify with a “refugee” identity, and more Vietnamese citizens studying overseas, recent migrants, and those in non-Western parts of the diaspora. In *Tuổi Trẻ Online*, viewers in Russia, Iran and Belgium report tuning into VTV4 for information and, more importantly, to get in touch with the spirit of Tết in distant Vietnam (Ngô Văn Long 2004, Nguyễn Thị Thục 2004, Quê Viên 2004).

CONCLUSION

To date, commercial music and music video are the only fields of domestic media production to have produced genuinely and popularly transnational Vietnamese texts, programmes and celebrities (Carruthers 2001; Valverde 2003). After music, the main contenders are online newspapers such as *Vnexpress.net* and *Tuổi Trẻ*, which bring more of the diversity and topicality of the domestic press environment to overseas readers, and are frequently scoured for articles by diasporic newspaper editors (many of whom unscrupulously cut and paste them without crediting the source). In addition, the “unmediated” field of Internet chat is emerging as an exciting frontier of grassroots transnational communications between those in Vietnam and their counterparts in the diaspora (Valverde 2002). By contrast, it seems clear at the present moment that VTV4 is failing in its

mission as a public or official transnational broadcaster, dedicated to informing and educating Việt kiều, and promoting a sense of enduring membership in and loyalty to the homeland. However, its persistent presence on the periphery of the diasporic mediasphere is significant in itself, and one can predict that over time this will create a familiarizing and naturalizing effect. While efforts have been made to keep VTV4 news broadcasts neutral, the station’s ideological function is still marked, especially for those committed to an anti-communist or pro-democracy homeland politics. In my opinion, VTV4 would need to improve its production values, let go of a significant amount of its ideological function, and concede more to the influence of market forces and their orientation towards audience desire to increase its appeal to overseas viewers. Finally, the only way a Vietnamese transnational broadcaster will genuinely engage diasporic audiences is by moving towards a public sphere model which would permit some form of Việt kiều social, cultural and even political self-representation — although this last suggestion must remain unthinkable to Hanoi at the present juncture.

Notes

1. In a 1993 publication on language policy, the biggest issue is that of minority languages, and there is no reference to globalization or foreign languages in Vietnam (Viện ngôn ngữ học 1993). A 2002 publication on the same topic addresses the issues of transcribing foreign words in Vietnamese and maintaining the “purity” of the language (Viện ngôn ngữ học 2002).
2. First broadcast internationally in 1945, radio station The Voice of Vietnam (VOV) was Vietnam’s first “transnational” medium, but predated de-territorialized nation-building as imaginary and policy, and carried a narrowly defined propaganda function. VOV remains infinitely more important as a domestic rather than international medium, because of still imperfect TV access in rural and especially remote Vietnam (Nguyen 1998). VOV6 currently broadcasts internationally on short and medium wave in twelve languages (including Vietnamese), and is also available as a webcast.
3. Socialist Republic of Vietnam (SRV) diaspora scholar Tran Trong Dang Dan regards the Australian and North American communities as “extremely anti-communist”, while he sees the Western European communities as being more politically diverse (Tran 1997, p. 147). Of over 2,000 publications having anticommunist content surveyed by Tran, 60 per cent originated in the United States, Canada and Australia, while only 35 per cent originated in over ten Western European nations (Tran 1997, p. 147).
4. In some overseas Vietnamese contexts, the term Việt kiều [“distant” Vietnamese] remains a sensitive one. In the recent past it carried negative

connotations of “national betrayal” in Vietnam, although this is arguably no longer the case. Compared to the official term Người Việt Nam ở Nước ngoài [Overseas Vietnamese], Việt kiều simply sounds somewhat informal. Nevertheless, some in the diaspora see the term as an undesirably homeland-centric way of defining overseas Vietnamese identity, and prefer alternative phrases. It has been my observation that Vietnamese Australians typically do not refer to themselves as Việt kiều while in Australia, but may well do so while in Vietnam. See Hoa (2000) for a discussion of the history of the term.

5. This last issue is of special importance to that significant number of Việt kiều who are interested in having houses in their homeland for both sentimental and economic reasons. Currently, the right to purchase houses is limited to those who return for long-term investment or who have made significant cultural, educational or other professional contributions to the nation. At the time of writing, the National Assembly is debating a liberal new provision that would allow Việt kiều to buy houses in Vietnam after remaining in the country for three consecutive months.
6. This quotation is taken from the official English version of Resolution 36. Here, and below, I have corrected it where its wording is ambiguous, having referred to the Vietnamese original.
7. See <<http://www.tokten-vn.org.vn/>>.
8. In contradistinction to Vietnamese citizens working as temporary migrant labourers in Asia and the Pacific, who remain more susceptible to State control.
9. These categories are styled after Levitt and de la Dehesa (2003).
10. This distinction is comparable to that in Chinese between *renmin* (denoting a political community) and *minzu* (denoting an ethnic nation).
11. In 2004 a Summer Camp for overseas Vietnamese youth was successfully organized by the Central Committee of the Ho Chi Minh Communist Youth Union, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Committee for Overseas Vietnamese.
12. On the politics of overseas Vietnamese media, see Cunningham and Nguyen (2000), Carruthers (2001) and Valverde (2003).
13. Such “policies of introversion” (Levitt and de la Dehesa 2003, pp. 588–89), concerned with defending the security and rights of overseas communities, are more realistically directed at vulnerable Vietnamese diasporas in countries such as Cambodia, Laos and Thailand, and new migrant labour diasporas in East and Southeast Asia and the Pacific. They may safely be interpreted as rhetorical gestures when applied to the refugee diaspora in the West.
14. Broadcast media continue to be directly managed by the State in Vietnam. All other media forms belong to mass, social and professional organizations (Nguyen 1998, p. 66).
15. VTV4 began to broadcast over North America via the Telstar-5 satellite in

2000. It can also be seen in Vietnam on commercial Community Area Television packages.

16. Examples include: Vào bếp với những người nổi tiếng [Celebrity Kitchen], Nữ sinh và tương lai [lit. “Female Student and the Future”], Đường lên đỉnh Olympia [The Road to Olympia] and Chiếc nón kỳ diệu [The Magic Hat]; and cultural programmes such as Việt Nam - Đất nước - Con người [Vietnam – Land – People], Văn học nghệ thuật [Literature and Art], and Phim truyện và ca nhạc [Film and Music].
17. SBS also broadcasts two hours of Vietnamese radio programming per day. These programmes are locally produced and share the anti-communist homeland politics of other diasporic media.
18. This interview was conducted with a senior SBS manager who was centrally involved in the events described. I have withheld his name here, at his own request, owing to the sensitivity of the issue.
19. Forrester reports that VTV4 was “trying to secure re-broadcast of programmes through SBS in Australia” in 1998, and at the same time trying to secure cable access in the United States for free re-broadcast of its programmes in regions with concentrations of Vietnamese-Americans (Forrester 1998, p. 80).
20. Nguyễn Chiến Thắng, Vice-president of the Committee on Overseas Vietnamese, notes that “Looking at the total picture ... the SBS affair was only a small spot, and is not representative of the aspirations of the whole community. But what’s important is that we don’t give up, and that we continue to think about more appropriate ways of reaching out to satisfy the desires of our compatriots” (Cầm Hà 2004).
21. *Trái Tim Việt Nam Online*, an overseas Vietnamese students’ website, hosted a discussion headed “SBS should broadcast VTV4 because:” (<<http://www.ttvnol.com/Oz/341499.ttvn>>).
22. See <www.pacific-media.net>.

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