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Peasants' combat (agricultural) land corruption in a less
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Peasants' combat (agricultural) land corruption in a less competitive, authoritarian political context – the case of Vietnam

(work in progress)

Nguyet Dang

1 Introduction

Vietnam is a country of contradictions: on the one hand, the single ruling party state led by the Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV) claims to build Vietnam into a strong nation with wealthy people, and a democratic, just and civilized society. This slogan has played a crucial role in mobilizing people to support the raise to power of the CPV and making the party the only legitimate “representative party” during the nation’s early years. On the other hand, “justice” and “democracy” remained empty promises, however. The Freedom House ranks Vietnam as the worst country in terms of political rights, and the second worst in terms of “freedom”. Human Rights Watch organization lists “freedom of expression and belief” and “freedom of association” as the two most prominent issues violated by the Vietnamese government.

After Doi Moi (i.e. economic renovation), the country has chosen industrialization and modernization as the key drivers for development. The processes have been associated with the state-led confiscation of almost a million hectare of agricultural land and directly affected lives and livelihoods of almost 2,5 million smallholder farmers over the past 2 decades.

The key data used for this paper come from a systematic review of Vietnamese government websites and Vietnamese’s online newspapers published since the early 2000s up until now (online articles are directly referred to as a footnote). It looks into the dynamics around the access to and conflict over agricultural land in Vietnam, looking at Government and some state actors on the one hand, and smallholder farmers on the other hand. The intention of this research is to demonstrate which strategies both sides adopts in order to get access to, retain and contest access to land of the other party. The focus is on how smallholder farmers organize themselves, which strategies they develop and to what extent they prove to be successful. Particular attention is paid to the Army and how it uses its mandate given by Government to convert land that was assigned to them for ‘national security and defense’ purposes into a profitable resource. The recent struggle between peasants in Dong Tam village and the authorities over contested agricultural land, which received considerable international media attention, is used as an example.

The paper explains how specific legal instruments like the Land Price Framework and the Land for Infrastructure mechanism allow dispossessing farmers from their agricultural land against an unfair compensation and how this gives farmer households a bleak outlook on the future. The same instrument gives state actors, and alliances of government officials and private investors the opportunity to make huge profits, and by doing so also opens the door to corrupt practices.

Land-based conflicts are often dealt with through administrative and judicial channels, but sometimes also lead to violent stand-offs between the two parties. Social media became an important weapon in the struggle in a country where there is strong state control over the media. The example of Dong Tam shows how social media played a key role in addition to other strategies used by the villagers. It helped the villagers to build a broader alliance in their fight but also urged Government to find a peaceful and sensible solution because Vietnam and the world were watching.

Part I: The development pathway fed by agricultural land confiscation

Resulting from the country’s Doi Moi, Vietnam went through major transitions particularly after the early 2000s. From the macro-economic perspective, Vietnam’s economy has fully been transformed from a central planning to market driven economy (although this statement can be debated by the

CPV's leaders and ideologists). However, Vietnam's political system still operates under the state socialist development regime, which rests on a bureaucratic-authoritarian system that was developed to oversee all facets of social life, from politics and the economy to culture and ideology (London, 2006). The gap between the "socialist orientation" and an economy that fully operates under the market's principles has resulted in the heavy interference in and strict control of the CPV and its government of the country's economy. The CPV believes a socialist-oriented market economy model is possible and the state can control the market through State-owned corporations and their branch enterprises¹. This direction, however, has resulted in serious market distortion and as a consequence led to changes and permanent transformation particularly in Vietnam's countryside's landscape and production relations in the agricultural sector later on.

In 2001, the Ninth National Congress of the CPV approved the strategy to kick start the industrialization and modernization processes as the key drivers of the country's development. The processes were expected to build the country into a modern industry-based country with a mechanized, modernized agricultural sector by 2020 and became the country's top priorities ever since. The CPV and its government argue that industrialization and modernization primarily are required building blocks to establish a basic foundation and infrastructure for the country to transform itself into a communist country. The processes are necessary to prepare Vietnam for long-term economic growth on the basis of modern production relations that rest on developed industrial and service sectors. Simultaneously, the industrialization and modernization will reduce Vietnam's dependence on agriculture and gradually promote structural changes in Vietnam's agricultural sector and improve the image of Vietnam's countryside from within. By developing new industrial parks, special economic zones and new urban areas across the country, plenty of jobs will be created and then offer stable incomes for redundant agricultural laborers, who would depart from the agricultural sector along this development pathway (The Communist Review, 2015²; The Communist Review, 2016³; Nguyễn Linh Khiếu, 2016⁴).

Although the agricultural sector has never been placed as a top priority on the abovementioned Vietnamese government's development agenda, the sector contributes from 14% to 20% to the country's Gross Domestic Product per annum (The Communist Review, 2016⁵; Nhan Dam, 2016⁶). Agricultural sector also absorbs 60% of the country's total laborers, which is equivalent to 23 million agricultural laborers (Phuong Loan and Minh Quang, 2016, Huynh Buu Son, 2015⁷). Nationwide, Vietnam has a total of 11,5 million hectares of land for agricultural production (MONRE, 2017⁸); 70,36% of the population cultivate between 0,5 and 3 hectares of land (Hoàng Ngọc Vĩnh, 2010). Vietnam is considered as the country of smallholders with the lowest agricultural land endowment per capita (i.e. 0,12 hectare agricultural land per capita) compared to the rest of the world. Approximately, there are 9,6 million farmer households who are cultivating different small and fragmented land plots (OECD, 2015). Within Vietnam's industrialization and modernization process, and the mechanization

¹ <http://www.doimoi.org/detailsnews/1485/339/tap-doan-kinh-te-nha-nuoc-nhung-lat-cat-thoi-su.html>

² <http://dangcongsan.vn/tu-lieu-van-kien/van-kien-dang/gioi-thieu-van-kien-dang/doc-293020159581846.html> (last consulted: 25/6/2017).

³ <http://www.baomoi.com/quy-trinh-cong-nghiep-hoa-hien-dai-hoa-nong-nghiep-nong-thon-o-viet-nam/c/18742277.epi> (last consulted: 27/6/2017).

⁴ <http://www.tapchiconsan.org.vn/Home/Nghiencuu-Traodoi/2016/37425/Loi-ich-kinh-te-cua-nong-dan-trong-cong-nghiep-hoa-hien.aspx> (last consulted 27/6/2017)

⁵ <http://dangcongsan.vn/tu-lieu-van-kien/tu-lieu-ve-dang/lich-su-dang/books-0105201511342446/index-510520151133234659.html> (last consulted: 27/9/2017).

⁶ <http://www.baomoi.com/cai-cach-kinh-te-dang-bo-quen-nong-nghiep/c/19605999.epi> (last consulted: 27/9/2017).

⁷ <http://news.zing.vn/so-nguoi-lam-nong-nghiep-o-vn-cao-hon-11-nuoc-tpc-cong-lai-post621758.html>; and <http://www.doanhnhansaigon.vn/van-de/nong-nghiep-viet-nam-lam-sao-de-phat-trien/1089352/> (last consulted: 25/9/2017).

⁸ <http://chuyentrang.monre.gov.vn/tmnt/van-ban-qlnn/phe-duyet-va-cong-bo-ket-qua-thong-ke-dien-tich-dat-dai-nam-2015.html> (last consulted: 25/9/2017).

and modernization of the agriculture sector that prioritized large-scale agribusinesses over small-scale production in particular, smallholder peasants are facing heavy pressure for conversion of agricultural land into non-commercial uses that often offer higher land use value (e.g. industrial park and for urban expansion).

The land-based development pathway in Vietnam has resulted in a competition for land through the state-led agricultural land confiscation. In the period from 2001 - 2011, at least 951,640 hectares of land have been confiscated by the state. This amount of land is equivalent to almost 10% of the country's land for agricultural production in the year 2007 (Hoàng Ngọc Vĩnh, 2010; Davidsen et al., 2010: 13; the World Bank, 2011). In most of the land confiscation cases, agricultural lands that were taken are often flat, fertile farmlands that are located nearby the periphery urban cities or at easy to access locations. The World Bank estimates that the annual agricultural land conversion rate in Vietnam is 13.3%, which is very high compared to other Southeast Asia countries (World Bank, 2011a: 28). Meanwhile, the rapid urbanization in Vietnam also requires an approximation of 53,000 hectare of land per annum. In total, at least 70,000 hectares of agricultural land are needed per annum for the establishment of industrial parks, special economic zones, urban expansion, and construction of dams and hydroelectric power plants (Huy Thong, 2015⁹; VASS, 2014; Đặng, 2009; Vu, 2008; NCEIF, 2007; Le, 2007). In the course of 10 years, farmland confiscation displaced and expelled at least 9 million of peasants (i.e. 10% of the country's population) from their native lands (Kerkvliet, 2014: 20; The World Bank, 2011; Hoàng Ngọc Vĩnh, 2010). So far, Vietnam's industrialization and modernization processes were criticized by scholars of being implemented on the expense of the agricultural sector, by means of the state-led confiscation of land and agricultural land in particular. In those processes, millions of smallholder peasants are precisely those who bear the costs (Võ Hùng Dũng, 2008¹⁰; Tran Dac Hien, 2007; World Bank, 2013).

Part II: State-led land confiscation for “economic development”, “public interest” and “national security and defense”

The mechanism that allows Vietnamese government to get access to land

In order to understand the means that allow Vietnamese government to confiscate land, it is essential to know that the Vietnamese state is the only lawful owner of the country's land; the Land Law grants people the right to use land and it is guaranteed by a Land-Use-Right certificate (LURs) and there are also quotas on maximum land areas where an individual can hold LUR¹¹ for (Dang, 2015: 14). While de facto ownership and diverse forms of customary land tenure exist and essentially play important roles in governing people and communities' behaviors regarding access to and control over land at grassroots level, the Land law does not recognize them. The LUR is tradable and can be transferred voluntarily or compulsorily. The first case often happens at small-scale and the selling price is calculated based on the market price upon negotiation and mutual agreement of involved individuals/parties (Đặng, 2009: 7). The second case is compulsory and is performed only by the state or its authorized agencies, often the People's Committee at provincial level¹² and district level if authorized by the provincial People's Committee.

⁹ <http://mtnt.hoinongdan.org.vn/sitepages/news/1098/36380/hieu-qua-su-dung-dat-nong-nghiep-tai-viet-nam-con-thap> (last consulted: 25/9/2017).

¹⁰ <http://agro.gov.vn/vn/newsdetail.aspx?targetid=9440> (last consulted: 27/9/2017).

¹¹ In terms of annual cropland, a household in Southern Vietnam is entitled to a maximum 3 hectares (ha), while households in the North and Central part of Vietnam are only entitled to maximum 2 ha. For perennial crops, the quota is no more than 10 ha/household in the plains and no more than 30 ha in the midlands and in mountain regions (Dang, 2015: 20)

¹² Article 66, the 2013's Law on Land.

To control land prices in official deals between the state and individuals, or the state and foreign/private investors, the Vietnamese government issues a Land Price Framework (LPF), which indicates different price ranges that are applicable for different types of land (i.e. agricultural versus non-agricultural land) located in a particular geographical region and having a particular socio-economic development status¹³. The framework covers a period of 5 years and serves as the basis for calculating price of a particular type of land in all official land deals including land levies and compensation rate to LUR's holders once their lands are confiscated by the state (Chinh Phu, 2014; OECD, 2015: 28). While Vietnamese government regulates the method of how the land price should be constructed, the detailed land price norm is prepared by the provincial level People's Committee for its particular province. The provincial land price norm also covers a 5 years period. Scholars often criticize the LPF for not reflecting adequately the real market price and the future value of agricultural land once it will be converted into non-agricultural land e.g for industrial and urban development (World Bank, 2011; Labbe and Musil, 2013; Dang, 2015). Looking at the difference in land prices in Chuong My, a peri-urban rural district in Hanoi for example, "urban land" category is priced 28 times higher than "agricultural land" (i.e. 148 euro/5 euro per square meter), or "residential land" is at least 3 times higher than "agricultural land" (i.e. 16 euro/5 euro per square meter)¹⁴. This significant gap in prices between agricultural and non-agricultural lands can be observed in other provinces that underwent rapid urban expansion and industrialization (UBND Hanoi, 2014; UBND Ho Chi Minh; 2014; UBND Da Nang, 2014; UBND Hung Yen, 2014).

The Constitution and Law on Land allow the state to confiscate land, in this case is the seizures of LUR from individuals, in order to serve (i) the country's socio-economic development, (ii) public's interest, and (iii) national security and defense (The 2013's Land Law). These are main justifications that allow the state to appropriate land from its citizen, however they remained problematic and have been contested for their inexplicitness and for leaving room for maneuvering. When land is confiscated using "public interests", "socio-economic development" or "national security and defense", the authorized state agency only compensates LUR holders for the economic value of the land and of other physical substances on the land that is subjected to confiscation (Nguyen V.S., 2009). Compensation can be made in cash or by a similar type of land that has already been acquired and LUR holders are entitled to assistance e.g. resettlement (if acquiring residential land), vocational training for job changing and/or job seeking, so that they could quickly stabilize their life (Dang, 2015: 24). The prices to compensate LUR holders are calculated based on the LPF with a "K" ratio. This K ratio significantly influences the final compensation price calculated and it is decided by the People's Committee at district level. Together with the fact that land prices indicated by the LPF have already been up to 70% lower than the real market price, leaving the decision on the K ratio solely in the hands of the lower administrative level – if combining with a poor land management and monitoring – would offer an attractive space for rent seeking behaviors of powerful actors involved in land deals (Ta Lam, 2017¹⁵).

When discussing agricultural land compensation politics, scholars argue that the first motivation that leads the Vietnamese state in conducting farmland confiscation is to overcome the country's financial obstacles to serve its industrialization and modernization course (Labbe and Musil, 2013). From the state's budget perspective, within Vietnam's hybrid institutional and development model i.e. socialist elements with market logic of capital circulation and accumulation combining with the non-existence of a clearly defined private land ownership, the state has played its dual role of both facilitator of capital and beneficiary (Labbe and Musil, 2013; Dang, 2015). The state has used its unilateral decision making power in land acquisition, land conversion and land planning to achieve financial gains thanks

¹³ The latest 2013 land's law defines 6 types of urban place including (i) special municipalities, urban township category I, II, III, IV, V, and rural, countryside areas. This division is essential when it comes to define land price in those areas.

¹⁴ My own calculation based on data from 2015 – 2019 land price in Hanoi, issued by the Hanoi city's Decision no. 96/2014/QĐ-UBND date 29/12/2014.

¹⁵ <http://plo.vn/do-thi/dung-de-dan-thiet-thoi-khi-nha-nuoc-thu-hoi-dat-702418.html> (last consulted: 4/10/2017).

to the differences between prices of the agricultural land prior to land confiscation and after being converted into commercial land, as regulated by the double price system (Nguyen et al., 2014; Kim, 2011). After agricultural land being confiscated, the state agency will rent it to private investors for land levy and land-use charges. Sometimes, these levies and charges can amount up to 45-50% of the total cost of land confiscation and are significant sources of income for the local government budget (Ding, 2007; Ghatak and Mookherjee, 2014). The wide gap in prices between agricultural land before and after it has been converted into non-agricultural use purpose (e.g. residential or commercial land) provides a strong explanation why it always has been the primary target either in state-led land confiscation or in every large-scale land deals in Vietnam so far. Scholars could observe in many land confiscation cases, however, confiscated land that did not necessarily served public interests, national security and defense purposes or boosting socio-economic growth (Davidsen et al., 2010; Dang Hung Vo, 2009). From the LUR holder's standpoint, scholars often find that compensation packages offered to them are unjust. The reason is, as they argue, that dispossessed LUR holders may not be able to use property rights to either claim or to gain their bargaining power because full property rights in the land market has already been limited by the state's control through its hybrid market socialist land regime (Labbe and Musil, 2013: 1149; Kerkvliet, 2006; Kim, 2011). The capital rich private investors, through their alliance with local governors and policy makers, have been able to maneuver the double layer LPF, as well as Vietnam's decentralized land management program, and substantial tax incentives that Vietnamese government has offer to private sector to boost public investment for their tremendous financial gains (Dang, 2016¹⁶; Dang, 2015)

“National security and defense” land used for profit making activities of the Army-based economic entities

Scholars who studied land confiscation in Vietnam often mentioned “state actor” as a general term to refer to a state authority responsible for land management and land confiscation, or identified state authority, private investor and farmers as three main actors involved in land confiscation (Han and Vu, 2008; Nguyen et al., 2014; Labbe and Musil, 2013). The Ministry of Natural resources and Environment (MoNRE) at central level and the People's Committee at provincial level are the two main state's institutions that often catch media and scholars' attention when discussing land confiscation politics. The Ministry of Public Security (MoPS), Ministry of Defense (MoD) and the Vietnam People's Army (VPA), even though they are managing a large area of the country's land, have been missing in most of land discussions until recently. To date, the MoD in particular and its sub-branches are managing at least 0.7% of the country's land area (i.e. 244,966 hectares), under the category of “land for national security and defense” purposes (Đặng Hùng Võ, 2017¹⁷). The reason that the MoD is a forgotten actor in land confiscation politics of course is understandable: firstly because once land is assigned for that designated purposes, it is solely under the direct use and management of the MoD (Le Minh, 2017). Secondly, when it is about national security and national defense almost none of the Vietnamese people would ever question the purposes and integrity of those who use or are responsible for managing the land. In late 2010, when media reported that an economic entity under the auspices of the MoD built and rented an urban township in Southern Vietnam to Chinese enterprises for 99 years, the question of whether the army's land has been used for its designated purposes surfaced. Since then, media have reported significant numbers of cases in which land for national security and defense (in short ‘national defense land’) has been used for commercial and profit generalizing purposes including residential apartments, hotels, restaurants and golf courses (Hoang Hanh, 2015¹⁸; Quynh Chau, 2017¹⁹; Le Minh, 2017²⁰; Bach Hoan, 2017²¹). Regarding the

¹⁶ <http://www.mekongcommons.org/vietnams-urbanization-and-agricultural-land-acquisition-state-and-farmers-lose-who-wins/> (last consulted: 26/3/2016).

¹⁷ <http://tuoitre.vn/dat-quoc-phong-ranh-gioi-nao-1343881.htm> (last consulted: 1/10/2017).

¹⁸ <http://danviet.vn/tin-tuc/lay-dat-quoc-phong-cho-thue-kinh-doanh-596698.html> (last consulted: 2/10/2017).

¹⁹ <http://nld.com.vn/thoi-su/thu-hoi-dat-quoc-phong-cho-thue-o-da-nang-20170925223439546.htm> (last consulted: 2/10/2017).

²⁰ <http://www.baokhanhhoa.com.vn/chinh-tri/201202/su-dung-dat-quan-doi-vao-muc-dich-kinh-doanh-can-co-su>

usage of national defense land for profit generation purpose, it is important to highlight that most of the land under this category is often large-scale, at good or premium locations at the city center, along the coastal line, at the country's borders and in residential areas if at the countryside. Meanwhile, transaction of army's land remains a "fuzzy" or "forbidden" territory to outsiders and other ministries responsible for land management, for instance MoNRE (Le Minh, 2017).

From a legal perspective, the ability of the MoPS, MoD and its VPA to access land for "national security and defense" purposes goes back to the 1993's Law on Land. Article 72 of the latest Land Law (2013) also indicates that state agencies including the minister of the MoD can expropriate land for national security and national defense purposes. In this case, the land areas are exempted from any tax or land use fee²² (Bach Hoan, 2017). LUR holders are compensated using the state budget and forced eviction can be used in case the LUR holders refuse to conform to the land confiscation decision (GoV, 2013: Article 72). The land law also designates the direct management and use of land for national security and defense to the MoD and the Ministry of Public Security (MoPS) and their sub-branches. This category of land should only be used as per instruction and for items required for national security reinforcement such as airfields, army's headquarter offices, warehouses, and specific buildings for special security purposes. Land areas for defense and security will be extended every five years according to land use plans prepared by those two Ministries (GoV, 2013: article 72; GoV, 2014²³).

Land access by the MoD probably would not have become an issue if it was not combined with the Vietnamese government's decision to encourage the Army to engage in economic and profit making activities; this direction is reinforced by both Vietnam's 2013 Constitution and different versions of the land law later on (Thu Hang, 2017²⁴). In 2005, the Vietnamese Prime Minister (PM) issued an Instruction 36²⁵ to expand the functions of the MoD and the VPA to include economic development without conflicting the "national defense and security" designated role (GoV, 2005, session 2²⁶). In 2009, the MoD also issued Circular 35 that indicated that the Army-based economic entities, including (but not limited to) the army's based joint venture (100% state-owned enterprise operating under the management of the MoD), could use unused national defense land for economic purposes²⁷ (BQP, 2009: article 2). Land areas that are used for economic purposes, in this case, are under the entire management of the MoD (ibid; MoD, 2009: Article 4; GoV, 2009 Nhan Dan, 2017²⁸) and Vietnam's 2013 Constitution also reinforced this (Thu Hang, 2017²⁹). The Circular indicates that using the national defense land for economic purposes and profit making activities must serve the ultimate purpose of strengthening Vietnam's national defense system and assuring national security of the country (ibid; Thu Hang, 2017; The Deputy Minister of the MoD, cited in Vietnamnet, 2017³⁰). While these key documents have given green light to the Army to utilize unused public land for profit

[-quan-ly-chat-che-2129138/](#) (last consulted: 2/10/2017).

²¹ <http://danviet.vn/tin-tuc/kinh-te-quoc-phong-va-quoc-phong-lam-kinh-te-786328.html> (last consulted: 2/10/2017).

²² According to Ding (2007) and Ghatak & Mookherjee (2014)

²³ Degree 43/201/ND-CP dated 15/5/2014 on the operational guideline of some articles in the 2013's Land Law.

²⁴ thuonggiaonline.vn/quan-doi-lam-kinh-te-duoi-goc-nhin-cac-chuyen-gia-7995.htm (last consulted: 2/10/2017).

²⁵ Instruction no. 36/CT-TTG

²⁶ The Circular no. 35/2009/TT-BQP dated 20/7/2009 on using land for national defense and security on economic activity.

²⁷ "Economic purposes" where the Circular referred to are (i) renting the land to the army-based joint venture for constructing office or running profit making activities; (ii) for self-investment in sector that fits with a particular function assigned to a particular joint venture in which the army will be principle investor

²⁸ <http://www.nhandan.com.vn/chinhtri/item/33416602-quan-ly-su-dung-dat-quoc-phong-theo-dung-phap-luat.html> (last consulted: 2/10/2017).

²⁹ thuonggiaonline.vn/quan-doi-lam-kinh-te-duoi-goc-nhin-cac-chuyen-gia-7995.htm (last consulted: 2/10/2017).

³⁰ <http://vietnamnet.vn/vn/thoi-su/chinh-tri/quan-doi-khong-lam-kinh-te-don-thuan-van-lam-kinh-te-quoc-phong-382986.html> (interview with the deputy minister of the MoD on July 10th, 2017, last consulted: 2/10/2017).

making economic activities, they can, I would argue, at the same time create and safeguard a protected space for possible maneuvering of the MoD and its Army on public resources.

The main argument of the Vietnamese government for the Army's engagement in profit-driven and economic activities is purely to build a strong army-based economy and strengthen the country's national security and defense system. Meanwhile, media recorded that among the current, so-called 88 army-based corporations and companies, the MoD only directly manages 20 of them. Key areas where these companies are active include "civil construction and real estate", "banking", "mobile technology and telecommunication", "logistics" and "rubber plantation" (Nha Dau Tu, 2017³¹; Minh Son, 2017³²; Vuong Dieu Quan, 2017³³; Mai Linh, 2017³⁴). Media also recorded that at least 4 army-based groups are in the list of "Billion USD companies" that are among the most wanted by international investors (i.e. Viettel, the Military Bank, Tan Cang Sai Gon, XXX). Interestingly, areas where the army-based companies are famous for, are not necessarily immediately connected to "national security and defense" purposes. At this stage, it is also impossible to find official statistics of how the MoD and the VPA have used the army's land for the so-called economic purposes and whether or not the profits generated by the country's land have actually returned to the state's budget to serve the nation's interest. However, one can start raising questions about the integrity in using and managing land for national security and defense of both the MoD, the VPA and the army-based companies.

The impact of agricultural land confiscation on the livelihoods of land-lost and landless smallholder peasants

As mentioned in the previous section, the CPV and its government expected the industrialization and modernization processes could – at least – bring jobs and stable income to affected peasants who have been expelled from their land to serve the country's development (The Communist Review, 2015³⁵; The Communist Review, 2016³⁶; Nguyễn Linh Khiếu, 2016³⁷). In reality, another, gloomier rural landscape has been permanently transformed:

By 2011, the country had an approximate 6 to 7 million abundant farm laborers who could not find employment in industrial sectors in their region (SGGP³⁸). Massive unemployment of former farm laborers, in particular among those who are female and above 35 years old, has been recorded during the period 2001 to 2005 in 16 provinces where the highest rate of agricultural land expropriation has occurred (Bui Ngoc Thanh, 2009³⁹). After 10 years, the livelihoods of at least 10 million (1/9th of Vietnam's population) peasants had been affected by the implementation of industrialization and modernization processes (Pham Duy Nghia, 2014). On average, it is estimated that each hectare of confiscated land has taken away employment of at least 10 farm laborers. Likewise, at least 1,5

³¹ <http://www.nhadautu.vn/se-co-lan-song-ipo-doanh-nghiep-quan-doi-lam-xay-dung-bat-dong-san-d1795.html> (last consulted: 2/10/2017).

³² <https://www.baomoi.com/doanh-nghiep-quan-doi-dang-kinh-doanh-nhung-linh-vuc-gi/c/22709469.epi> (last consulted: 2/10/2017).

³³ <http://soha.vn/quan-doi-rut-dan-khoi-kinh-te-nha-dau-tu-quan-tam-nhat-den-cong-ty-nao-20170704101037377.htm> (last consulted: 2/10/2017).

³⁴ <http://soha.vn/chan-dung-cac-doanh-nghiep-goc-quan-doi-tro-thanh-nhung-cong-ty-co-gia-tri-hang-nghin-ty-tren-san-chung-khoan-20170705091452502.htm> (last consulted: 2/10/2017).

³⁵ <http://dangcongsan.vn/tu-lieu-van-kien/van-kien-dang/gioi-thieu-van-kien-dang/doc-293020159581846.html> (last consulted: 25/6/2017).

³⁶ <http://www.baomoi.com/qua-trinh-cong-nghiep-hoa-hien-dai-hoa-nong-nghiep-nong-thon-o-viet-nam/c/18742277.epi> (last consulted: 27/6/2017).

³⁷ <http://www.tapchicongsan.org.vn/Home/Nghiencuu-Traodoi/2016/37425/Loi-ich-kinh-te-cua-nong-dan-trong-cong-nghiep-hoa-hien.aspx> (last consulted 27/6/2017)

³⁸ <http://www.cefurds.com/index.php/vi/travel/getaways/354-do-thi-hoa15> (last consulted: 27/6/2017).

³⁹ <http://www.tapchicongsan.org.vn/Home/nong-nghiep-nong-thon/2009/1040/Viec-lam-cho-ho-nong-dan-thieu-dat-san-xuat-van.aspx> (last consulted: 27/6/2017).

household members become unemployed after losing their agricultural production land (VASS, 2014; Pham Duy Nghia, 2014; World Bank, 2011; Vu, 2008; Le, 2007; NCEIF, 2007). This number is even higher (i.e. 20 laborers) in 16 provinces with the highest rate of land confiscation due to its high population density (Mai Thanh, 2009⁴⁰).

Among farm laborers who have been expelled from agriculture by land confiscation only 2,8 % managed to find an occupation in the formal industrial sector (Hoang, 2007: 4-5; Nguyen, 2009). Agricultural land confiscation has tremendously reduced employment opportunities of rural youth between 16-18 years old and 19-25 years old (respectively, 80.03% and 16.25% of youths became unemployed). Female farm laborers between 26-35 years old have the lowest possibility to find a job either in formal (e.g. working in industrial zone) or informal sector (Nguyễn et al., 2013:62). Youth with a low education level are confronted with the highest unemployment rate. More importantly, these youth often originate from agriculture dominant, poorer families, who lost a large percentage of their total agricultural land areas during the land confiscation process. With low education levels and little technical skills, these young people cannot find a job in industrial zones that are established in their communes/districts nor are able to access opportunities for overseas works as promised by either government or private investors (Nguyễn et al. 2013). Landless and land-lost peasants also had to shift to periodical jobs on the informal job market, such as street vendor, motor-taxi driver and daily construction laborer (Hoàng, 2007: 4-5). Meanwhile, land investors and the industrial sector are only able to use between 3% and 5% of the laborers whose land has been expropriated as they are “incapable” of providing the skillset required by the industrial sector (Nguyen 2009: 32).

Economists may argue that cash compensation provided by land-using private investors to land-lost peasants could increase their household family’s income on the short-term, but research could observe both economic and social stratification between different socio-economic groups among the rural population (Nguyen et al., 2013). More specifically, research studying the spending pattern of households after agricultural land confiscation reveals that financial resource-rich households could use compensation money to reinvest in activities that can generate future household’s income e.g. education, new skills set, new types of household businesses or to engage in high-earning activities and get benefit from the increase in land value after agricultural land was being converted (Tran et al., 2014; Nguyen et al., 2011). In the poorer population segment, capital poor households spend more of the compensation on home renovation and on daily household expenditure, these forms of investment will not generate any additional income for them, unfortunately (Nguyễn et al., 2013: 64-65). Among land-lost peasants, households who lost from 30 to 70% of their farmlands have suffered significantly and might have felt into poverty if no further assistance was available (Nguyễn et al., 2013). While research on delay effects of agricultural land confiscation should be considered, the detrimental effects that agricultural land confiscation has created on female and youth, particularly in poorer segments of the rural population and households whose main income came from farming, are severe, both on the short-term and in the long run.

Part III: Peasants’ resistance against agricultural land confiscation

Land-based disputes and peasant’s resistance

Massive agricultural land conversion and land confiscation across the country has fueled profound land disputes, land-based tension and strong resistance by affected farmers throughout the country. According to official records of the General Department of Land Administration, during the period from 2004 to 2012 the agency had handled a total of 612,115 cases in which land-based written complaints, petitions, accusations, and denunciation accounted for more than 70% (GDLA, 2014). State’s inspectorate agency also recorded almost 1,029,000 times that citizen came to complaint about

⁴⁰ <http://www.tapchiconsan.org.vn/Home/Nghiencuu-Traodoi/2009/1003/Ve-chuyen-doi-co-cau-lao-dong-nong-thon-sau-thu-hoi.aspx> (last consulted: 27/6/2017).

land related issues during the period from 2000 to 2005 (Mai Duc Ngoc, 2015: 43). Scholars record a higher number (i.e. more than a million) of cases of peasants' denunciation and complaints, in which land-based ones accounted for at least 70% and mostly directly related to the low compensation paid to land-use right holders in land confiscation (Kerkvliet, 2014: 20; Mai Duc Ngoc, 2015: 44; Wells-Dang et al., 2016: 131) and unjust resettlement policy and support to land-lost peasants during and after their land have been enclosed (Phạm Duy Nghĩa, 2014: 2-3; Tran, nodate; Thanh Tra 2010). The office of Vietnam's Government Inspectorate registers more than ten thousand land-related citizen's written complaints yearly, accounting for 80% of the total complaint cases (Trần, nodate). Peasants' request on land reclamation from the military or public security agencies and/or from the state-owned economic entities such as state-owned agricultural, forestry or aquacultural companies are also among the most common causes of land-related complaints and denunciation, as well as land reclamation and disputes between original indigenous land owners and new arriving inhabitants (Tran, nodate; Thanh Tra 2010). In the period 2009-2011 alone, the government's general inspectorate office recorded that at least 700,000 denunciations nationwide were related to land confiscation, low compensation to peasants, land clearance, and injustice in resettlement policies (Mai Duc Ngoc, 2015; Pham Duy Nghia, 2014). More than 92% of peasants who have their farmland confiscated were entirely not satisfied about how their land had been confiscated and compensated⁴¹. Although the total number of cases in the same period was significantly different between state's and scholars' statistics, both sources recorded a very high percentage of land-based complaints and denunciation, which reflected well the rapid increase in land confiscation that happened in the same period of time in Vietnam (GDLA, 2014; Mai Duc Ngoc, 2015; Kerkvliet, 2014; Pham Duy Nghia 2014).

From state's and legal standpoint, peasants are not owners of the land; however, de facto ownership has been established strongly among land-lost and landless peasants as they had been cultivating the same land plots for several generations (Ravallion and van de Walle, 2008a: 61; Nguyen, 2009). For many land-lost and landless peasants, giving up their farmland or land use rights means having no way to support their family and harming their children's futures (Kerkvliet, 2006). Affected peasants in agricultural land confiscation often argue that the compensation paid by the state does not reflect the land's actual market value. As landowners, peasants believe they should be able to decide for which price they want to sell their land, or even to refuse selling it (ibid: 299). Analysis of official media (i.e. media operating with the GoV's permission) also revealed five main common sources of complaints and denunciation of land-lost and landless peasants: (i) Delays in compensation and peasants are compensated at an extremely low price. Compensation prices are far below the real market price and the amount they were compensated for could not allow them to buy smaller land areas to live or to cultivate. In addition, price discrimination also exists, thus, creates stratification among different peasant groups living in the same community or community nearby the place where land is confiscated. (ii) Injustice in distribution of land price's profit between peasants who lost their land and receive low compensation at one side, and private investors who could generate unusual high profit on the same plot of land by selling it for residential and commercial purposes on the other side. (iii) Undesirable resettlement plan and places. (iv) Inability to find new livelihoods or employment after losing farmland. and (v) Lack of integrity, transparency and accountability of responsible authorities in land and land confiscation planning; lack of landowner's participation in land planning and land confiscation planning processes (Nhan Dan, 2017⁴²; Tuoi Tre online, 2013⁴³; Pham Duy Nghia, 2014). Massive peasants' demonstrations, petitions and large-group denunciations have been increasing during the same period (ibid; GDLA, 2014; Kerkvliet, 2014). The reasons why peasants complain are reinforced by arguments brought forward by scholars. Firstly, the [extremely] wide gap in terms of prices between agricultural and nonagricultural/residential and commercial land in the double layer LPF has given the state or compensation committee or private investor the opportunity to pay LUR holders very low amounts while they can sell it to end users with closer to or even higher than market

⁴¹ <http://plo.vn/do-thi/khieu-nai-dat-daigiao-co-quan-tai-phan-hanh-chinh-128089.html>

⁴² <https://www.baomoi.com/thao-go-vuong-mac-trong-cong-tac-den-bu-giai-phong-mat-bang/c/21975054.epi> (last consulted: 4/10/2017).

⁴³ <http://tuoitre.vn/so-khoa-hoc-cong-nghe-tp-can-tho.html> (last consulted: 4/10/2017).

prices. In several research studies, the LPF, together with the government's mechanism for encouraging private sector's investment in public infrastructure such as the Land for Infrastructure mechanism and the decentralized land governance program, have created opportunities for private gains and corruption through the private investors – local government official's alliance at grassroots level (Dang, 2015; Bui, 2009; Davidsen et al., 2010; Nguyen et al., 2014). Secondly, local governments also are under pressure to mobilize sufficient financial resources in order to sustain their own operation as per requirement of the decentralization process. Hence, confiscating agricultural land and pay peasants low compensations then transfer the land to private investors for levies and land use fee indeed provides an easy solution (Pham Duy Nghia, 2014). Last but not least, the wooliness in state's arguments i.e. "public interests", "national security and defense", and "socio-economic development" supported by the missing of a proper, well-defined private land property regime, combined with inefficient monitoring of land governance are key reasons that led to unjust land confiscation processes (Bui, 2009; Labbé and Musil, 2013; Kerkvliet, 2006; Vũ, 2008; World Bank, 2011b; Han and Vu, 2008; Davidsen et al., 2010). Scholars believe land-based resistance can cause a real challenge to the legitimacy of Vietnamese government (Gillespie, 2011). On the longer run, it can be a counterweight to the country's own development without being solved (Pham, 2014).

Forms of peasants' resistance

Land-lost and landless peasants expressed their resistance to land confiscation in various ways, but "written denunciation", "manifestation", and "violence" are observable either at individual level or through collective actions; the level of severity is directly proportional to the increase in both scope and scale of agricultural land confiscation that happened over time in Vietnam.

At individual level, the most common form of resistance is through written complaints and denunciation to the state's land administration and/or to Court (Nhan Dan, 2017⁴⁴; Tuoi Tre online, 2013⁴⁵; Pham Duy Nghia, 2014). The Government's General Department of Land Administration (GDLA) recorded 612,115 cases of land-based written complaints from individuals during the period 2004-2012 (GDLA, 2014). During the first wave of land confiscation in the first half of the 2000s, individual resistance happened in a more peaceful way. However, individuals tend to react in more extreme and direct forms, sometimes involving violence from the middle of the 2000s up to present. These two distinctive observations correspond well to the increase in both scope and scale of agricultural land confiscation happening throughout Vietnam during the second half of the 2000s.

The second form of land-lost peasants' resistance involves prolonged manifestation and/or appeals of individuals, but more often up to dozen, several dozen or hundreds of land-lost, landless peasants when their denunciations were not taken seriously or they are not satisfied with the solution offered by the responsible state's land administration agencies or Court (Mai Duc Ngoc, 2015: 45; Pham Duy Nghia, 2014; Tan Luc and Huu Kha, 2016). Particularly since 2008, media recorded an increasing number of large-scale manifestations involving hundreds of thousands of land-lost peasants that happened in provinces with the highest percentage of agricultural land confiscation for the establishments of industrial parks, special economic zones, large-scale agribusinesses, urban expansions. Large-scale resistance against, for instance the construction of public infrastructure, road or hydropower plants are interestingly less observable.

The third form of resistance is more extreme, sometimes involving violence and physical confrontation with state's agencies either during manifestations or during land clearance/land eviction events. This form of contention often happen at individual or small group level, but sometimes involved the participation of hundreds or thousands of land confiscation victims (BBC, 2012⁴⁶;

⁴⁴ <https://www.baomoi.com/thao-go-vuong-mac-trong-cong-tac-den-bu-giai-phong-mat-bang/c/21975054.epi> (last consulted: 4/10/2017).

⁴⁵ <http://tuoi-tre.vn/so-khoa-hoc-cong-nghe-tp-can-tho.html> (last consulted: 4/10/2017).

⁴⁶ http://www.bbc.com/vietnamese/business/2012/04/120425_ecopark_business_interests.shtml, and <http://www.>

Nguyen Lang, 2012). Regarding this third form of resistance, media recorded a significant number of cases where land-lost or landless peasants burned themselves, threatened to burn themselves, shot those who conducted land eviction⁴⁷ or committed suicide to show their disappointment and dissatisfaction with the land confiscation process (Vnexpress, 2012⁴⁸; Nguyen Hung, 2012⁴⁹; Xuan Long, 2015⁵⁰; Tan Luc and Huu Kha, 2016⁵¹; Hong Long, 2015⁵²; Phap Luat online, 2016⁵³).

At the collective level, during the period 2006-2011, denunciation by large groups has reached more than 4000 cases nationwide (Mai Duc Ngoc, 2015: 43). Scholars suggest that large-scale form of contention often happened when peasants were not satisfied with the result of or the way responsible state agency handled their accusations (Pham Duy Nghia, 2014; Mai Duc Ngoc, 2015). Recently, this has become a popular method of expressing peasants' discontent with state's decisions and private sector's behavior in relation to land confiscation. Large-group manifestations involve several dozens to several hundreds of people (Hoang Long, 2014⁵⁴). To catch public and the state authority's attention, manifestations often take place at busy traffic points, in front of the government and state's offices or at the land clearance site (Nguyễn Dương, 2016⁵⁵). Participants of manifestations often are peasants who came from the same community where land confiscation had taken place (Kerkvliet, 2014: 21; Hoang Long, 2014). Often, marches are organized around or at the same time of key political events, for instance before and during the national congress party meeting, or the periodical meetings of the National Assembly. Interestingly, this forms of massive land-based resistance neither appeared in official statistics of Vietnamese government nor its official media. While cases are found in foreign online newspaper such as BBC Tiếng Việt (BBC Vietnamese online) and RFA, in the Vietnam's public media, cases of resistance are only reported as fragmented public disturbance acts by small groups of citizens under direct influence by or intervention of external forces, as a result, this form of peasants' struggles may encounter criminal charges by law. Vietnamese-led, systematic research on how peasants organize and promote their struggles, the nature of their membership and interests among different members, as well as factors that determine both their resistance strategy and the likeliness of success, is limited if not impossible to conduct due to the strong censorship and control over the media and public debate of Vietnam's central government and the CPV. Thanks to grey areas on the Internet that Vietnamese government cannot fully control, information about peasants' contestation can be found through unofficial sources or is reported live by Vietnamese volunteer bloggers and human rights defenders. Land-lost peasants also set up their own public groups on social media and update their struggle frequently on, for example, a Facebook page or YouTube video. Media clips from unofficial sources such as youth volunteers, pro-democratic bloggers and journalists about different struggles against land expropriation in Vietnam can be found. The validity/credibility of those unofficial sources is not always easy to prove, however.

bbc.com/vietnamese/vietnam/2012/04/120425_van_giang_viet_press (last consulted: 11/10/2017)

⁴⁷ <https://cafeland.vn/quy-hoach/thu-hoi-dat-hoi-chuong-can-hao-bao-tu-vu-no-sung-o-thai-binh-39645.html> (last consulted: 4/10/2017).

⁴⁸ <https://vnexpress.net/tin-tuc/thoi-su/chinh-quyen-sai-toan-dien-trong-vu-tien-lang-2222318.html> (last consulted: 10/10/2017).

⁴⁹ <https://vnexpress.net/tin-tuc/thoi-su/hon-160-ho-dan-van-giang-bi-cuong-che-thu-hoi-dat-2229379.html> (last consulted: 10/10/2017).

⁵⁰ <http://tuoitre.vn/tam-xang-doa-tu-thieu-phan-doi-cuong-che-977245.htm> (last consulted: 9/10/2017).

⁵¹ <http://tuoitre.vn/phan-doi-cuong-che-8-nguoi-co-thu-do-xang-doa-thieu-1114222.htm> (last consulted: 9/10/2017).

⁵² <http://dantri.com.vn/xa-hoi/mot-phu-nu-tu-thieu-de-phan-doi-cuong-che-dat-20150812173903282.htm> (last consulted: 9/10/2017).

⁵³ <https://www.baomoi.com/toan-can-hao-vu-cong-ty-cuong-che-dat-3-nguoi-bi-ban-chet/c/20687562.epi> (last consulted: 9/10/2017).

⁵⁴ <http://thanhnien.vn/doi-song/hang-tram-nguoi-ha-nam-di-bo-len-ha-noi-phan-doi-cuong-che-dat-396862.html> (last consulted: 10/10/2017).

⁵⁵ <https://news.zing.vn/nguoi-dan-xuong-duong-doi-bai-bien-giao-thong-te-liet-post631207.html> (last consulted: 4/10/2017).

Government responses to peasant's resistance:

Vietnamese government solves land-based disputes and responds to the denunciation of individuals or groups of land-lost peasants in diverse, both peaceful and violent ways. In the peaceful manner, Vietnamese government commonly uses two mechanisms: (1) its administrative instruments i.e. petition at state agencies responsible for land management and governance, and (2) judicial instruments i.e. appeal at the Court (Nguyen Thang Loi, 2014). In reality, citizens tend to first get their complaints handled at the state's land administrative agencies such as the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment and its lower levels. Statistics of the period 2004-2012 show that this agency has handled 17,711 cases (equivalent to 58.59% of the total cases) related to land. Among those cases, 70% are accusations of breach of policies on land confiscation, compensation, and resettlement assistance after land clearance; 20% are related to land transfer, land rental and land conversion. Accusations relating to issuance or withdrawal of Land-use Right Certificates only accounted for less than 10%. Interestingly, at least 50% of the cases handled by the MoNRE were rightful accusations (ibid), this means at least 50% of the administrative orders issued in the same period had wrongly been done to the landless and land-lost peasants. This figure is lower than, but somewhat corresponds well to the fact mentioned in the previous sections that up to 90% citizens were not satisfied with state's mechanisms to solve disputes related to land confiscation processes (Mai Duc Ngoc, 2015). In terms of solving land petitions by means of judicial appeal at the Court: statistics of the same period show a lower number of lawsuits compared to the first method. From 2004 to 2012, Courts at different level have received 3,994 land-based cases, handled 2,857 cases in which only 1,130 cases proceeded to next steps (accounting for 39.6% of the cases that had been handled). Among these, the number of cases that were unconditionally accepted is very low i.e. 189 cases, accounting for less than 10% (Nguyen Thang Loi, 2014). Comparing the two-abovementioned mechanisms, using the state's administrative instrument seemed to be a more common and preferable choice of land-lost and landless peasants than the judicial mechanism. The effectiveness of both mechanisms is low and not up to the expectation of those who used them, however.

To deal with large-group demonstrations or individuals' extreme forms of resistance, Vietnamese government tends to use its coercive power that is enabled particularly by the Criminal Law. Often in land confiscation processes, public policemen and army soldiers are sent in to evict peasants who refused to give up their land from their farmlands (BBC, 2011⁵⁶; Nguyen Hung, 2012⁵⁷; VNExpress, 2012⁵⁸; RFA, 2012⁵⁹). Disobedient peasants may confront criminal charges in cases they would react violently to the land evictions. In case of large-group demonstrations, group leaders are often arrested using Vietnam's Criminal Law. Commonly, the group leaders of the large-group demonstration or individuals can be charged with, for instance, "acts of public disturbance" (article 245), "illegal marching in public places" (article 7 in the Government's resolution 38/2005/ND-CP); "intend to cause injury to officials on duty" (article 134). When the large-group demonstrations go out of government's control, they are perceived as threats to the regime's legitimacy and the leaders can be seriously charged, for instance for "running riots against the government" (article 112); "propaganda against the socialist republic of Vietnam" (article 88); "taking advantage of the democratic freedom to violate the country's benefits" (article 258); "overthrew the regime" (article 79). These criminal charges may lead the subject to temporary custody of 3 months, or 10 years or more imprisonment (National Assembly, 2017; BBC, 2016).

⁵⁶ http://www.bbc.com/vietnamese/vietnam/2011/07/110718_protesters_inv (last consulted: 10/10/2017).

⁵⁷ <https://vnexpress.net/tin-tuc/thoi-su/hon-160-ho-dan-van-giang-bi-cuong-che-thu-hoi-dat-2229379.html> (last consulted: 10/10/2017).

⁵⁸ <https://vnexpress.net/tin-tuc/thoi-su/chinh-quyen-sai-toan-dien-trong-vu-tien-lang-2222318.html> (last consulted: 10/10/2017).

⁵⁹ http://www.rfa.org/vietnamese/in_depth/protest-q-ninh-over-land-seizures-ka-12212012123941.html (last consulted: 10/10/2017).

To prevent large-group resistance and to control opposition, the Vietnamese government also use its medial control and censorship to isolate public's attention from burning policies and problematic socio-economic issues including land confiscation. This explains why it is almost impossible to find news about large-group demonstrations in official media and newspapers. At the grassroots level, networks of about 4 million members of Vietnam's communist party embedded in different types of state and non-state organizations, and millions of locally based public security police are used by the CPV and Vietnamese government for early warning and repression of public opposition and individuals' resistance. Different forms of political discrimination can also be applied in case members of the CPV or government's officials would participate in land-based resistance (Dang, 2015).

Part IV: A recent example of successful collective farmers' resistance: the case of Dong Tam

Successful peasant resistance against land clearance in Dong Tam

In 1980 the Vietnamese Prime Minister decided to allocate 47,36 hectares of agricultural land in Dong Tam, a commune in the Hanoi capital region, to the Ministry of National Defense which assigned the land consequently to the Air Force for the construction of Mieu Mon airport military base. The airport has not been constructed ever since.

In 2007, Vietnamese government decided to terminate the airport construction plan due to a lack of feasibility. The land, however, was still owned by the army and could be used for national defense and security purposes. Meanwhile, the Training Regiment units of the Air Force that were responsible for managing the land area had signed contract to lease the lands to 14 local households for regular agricultural cultivation activities.

In October 2016, Hanoi city's authority decided to stop cultivation activities of the 14 households on the 47,36 hectares military land that was managed by the Air Force and to give it to Viettel, a telecommunication company owned by the Ministry of Defense, enforcing a decision taken in 2014. In November 2016, the My Duc district authority sent 600 policemen, soldiers and mobile policemen to evict 14 households in order to seize 59 hectares of agricultural land in order to hand it over to Viettel for the construction of a telecom manufactory. Importantly however, these 59 hectares were not the same as the 47,36 hectares of army land following the 1980 Prime Minister's decision. The land that was seized belonged to 14 households in another part of Dong Tam commune and was purely agricultural, civil and dispute free land. Viettel's construction project on the other hand was purely for economic activity and lucrative purposes. At the same time, 6,8 hectares of the military land that was intended to be used for the construction was divided by government officials into 56 plots and sold to private owners.

Due to Vietnamese Government's control over the media, the case remained under the radar until 15 April 2017 when the district police arrested four dissenting villagers of which one was Mr. Le Dinh Kinh, an 82 years old dignitary who is considered as Dong Tam peasants' symbolic leader. Responding to this arrest, villagers captured 38 soldiers and policemen who were sent to the village for land confiscation on 16 April. Together with pressure from civil society, the international human right community, this action has resulted in the release of the four arrested villagers, a dialogue with and a promise by Hanoi city's chairman to not pursue criminal charge against the involved Dong Tam villagers, and a suspension of the land clearance activity for further investigation.

The specific nature of peasant resistance in the Dong Tam case

To understand the specific nature of the resistance against the authorities by the villagers in Dong Tam, I will use the questions proposed by Guiding Scoones et al. (2017) in order to analyze collective action.

(i) How individuals come to understand a particular situation and engage in collective action?

There was a clear joint analysis and strategy development before taking action. As a start, Mr. Kinh and his fellow villagers were very well informed about key policies and legal documents, and this strengthened their position while fighting against powerful actors. While the resistance was directly against the Army and state led land confiscation, they have successfully turned it into a struggle against local government's acts of corruption which resonated with call of the central communist party for "transparenization" of the system. By affirming their struggle as a form of loyalty to the state and communist party, Mr. Kinh managed to make them an ally and to make the struggle of the villagers a rightful struggle from the central authorities' point of view.

(ii) How can an emancipatory politics emerge that is not just bottom-up, but also horizontal, connecting across class, gender, racial, generational and ideological divides and transcending geographic boundaries?

The Dong Tam case shows how powerful social media can be, also in a context where they suffer some restrictions. Vietnamese and international outsiders were informed about the land confiscation event on 15 April and the villagers' capture of 38 officials on the day after via Facebook, YouTube video clips and blogs. The news was voluntarily made available and was spread by democratic volunteers, freelance and amateur journalists, well-educated youths who were concerned about social injustice, democratic activists and land rights activists who had been victims of land eviction elsewhere in Vietnam. Only on 20 April 2017, 5 days after the incident happened, the struggle of Dong Tam villagers was reported on the country's official media channels as an act of a small rebellious group against the stability of the state and communist party, supported by external forces

(iii) What redistributed material base is required to generate the freedoms to engage with existing authority structures? And what democratic institutions can facilitate and enable such connections to emerge and become robust?

Fox (2007) gives part of the answer by describing a situation that also applies to the case of Dong Tam. He argues that the distribution of rural power in developing countries 'both shapes and is shaped by national politics' (Fox 1990: 1; see also Franco 2001 for the Philippines and Ntsebeza 2006 for South Africa). Emancipation, which I consider as a 'freedom to engage' may emerge through what Fox (2007) calls 'accountability politics', whereby, even in authoritarian settings, accountabilities are enhanced through the deepening of civil society engagements, acting to transform state structures and embedding accountabilities. This is actually what happened in Dong Tam when local and international civil society partnered with the local farming community, facilitated by social media.

Success factors of Dong Tam villagers' resistance

The temporary suspension of land eviction was the result of both villagers' own strategy and the multi-layered pressure from human rights organizations, international media, and international diplomatic representations. It is questionable that without one of both elements the struggle could have been successful. By relating to the Communist Party's own call for transparency in terms of local governance, the villagers offered state authorities a way out of an incident that had gained wide national and international attention, and could have had potential reputational and political repercussions.

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