

## Historical patterns of the racialisation of Vietnamese in Cambodia, and their relevance today

Anna Lewis

Abbreviations:

NICFEC	Neutral & Impartial Committee for Free & Fair Elections in Cambodia
RFAKS	Radio Free Asia Khmer Service
UN	United Nations
UNHRC	United Nations Human Rights Council
UNICERD	United Nations International Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination

### Introduction

Relations between Cambodians and Vietnamese have been bitter through most of the region's history. Present day is no different with ethnic Vietnamese falling victim to racial prejudice in Cambodia. RFAKS (2014) estimated that approximately 750,000 of Cambodia's 15 million population are of Vietnamese ethnicity, yet they are constantly referred to as being stateless and in limbo. This paper is going to explore the processes of racialisation that are at play here. Racialisation has been defined as "the process by which [*race*] becomes meaningful in a particular context" (Garner 2010: 19), involving how racial identities are developed and ascribed to people. To know how ethnic Vietnamese are racialised by Cambodians, especially those who identify as Khmer, four key themes will be studied.

Firstly, in order to gain any level of understanding it is essential to understand the historical context. Since the 1600's, the presence of Khmer nationalism has been an undeniable influence on xenophobia, especially when combined with the recurrent loss of Khmer territory to the Vietnamese. The periods discussed will cover the Vietnamese expansion of the 17th Century, the French Protectorate, independence under Sihanouk, Pol Pot's regime, Vietnamese occupation in the 1980's and modern day. The discussion will explore Chandler's (2000) claim that past events contributed to anti-Vietnamese sentiment through historical accounts and story-telling. This should help to explain how racial ideologies and stereotypes are still so prevalent today.

Focus will then be given to the second theme of racialisation by looking at the Khmer Rouge regime. Already this is an example of history's significance, as pre-existing racial prejudice was influential of Pol Pot's party. External influences will also be considered here through similarities with Nazism, Maoism and Stalinism (Kiernan 2007). The occurrence of genocide then added to the scale and extremity of racialisation. This case study will aim to demonstrate how the racial ideology of one group can be mobilised through discrimination, and reproduce racial resentment so that it becomes a nationwide issue.

Political discourse will be investigated as another process of racialisation. By exploring the previous influence of Lon Nol and the more recent Sam Rainsy, the significance of politicians will become clearer. Anti-Vietnamese feeling is exploited and encouraged through politics,

often being used to unite Khmers through a sense of belonging to gain political support. This will be studied through the rhetoric and discriminative actions of political figures.

Finally, racial discrimination at both an institutional and individual level will be analysed. By this point the paper will have established that fear of Vietnamisation has taken hold in Cambodia. Demonstrations of this through displays of racism will be examined in an attempt to explain the progression of racial tension. Issues discussed will vary from murder to issues of citizenship, indicating the diversity of racial discrimination and its effects. Improvements that have either been made or need to be made will also be highlighted here by drawing upon reports by the UN.

It will become clear throughout this report that these four themes are all interlinked, with different processes of racialisation adding to the pre-existing ideologies and stereotypes. Therefore, while each must be understood individually, it would also be wise to view them in conjunction with one another. When combined, diverse processes can cause racialisation to become deep-rooted in culture and this is what will be studied.

## **A history of Khmer Nationalism and Loss of Territory**

The Khmer are the largest ethnic group in Cambodia and have a very strong sense of nationalism. As a result of this, the historical losses of Khmer territory have not been forgotten and remain a source of Vietnamese resentment. Arguably the first major loss of Khmer territory to Vietnam was that of the Mekong Delta in the 1630's. This loss remains significant as many Khmer still refer to this area by its Khmer name, Kampuchea Krom. As Chandler (2000) explains, a Cambodian king was tricked into marrying a Vietnamese princess in order to grant Vietnamese access to trade and temporary settlement. The non-profit, non-government organisation Khmers Kampuchea Krom Federation (2009) have since demonstrated that the marriage was a tactical Vietnamese strategy to aid their march to the south. A loss of territory and Khmer culture took hold and may be seen as the root of xenophobia in Cambodia as a fear of Vietnamisation began to spread. The situation was worsened as these events have been told to new generations through storytelling, depicting Vietnamese as manipulative and encroaching on Khmer territory. The family environment legitimises and justifies anti-Vietnamese sentiment through such storytelling. Another tale commonly told from this period is known as the legend of the Master's tea. Hinton (2005) explains that in the 1800's the Vietnamese allegedly buried Khmer servants up to the neck before balancing a wooden stove on their heads to boil water for their tea. The Khmer were then told not to move as this would spill their master's tea. Two centuries later, many Khmer are still told this story from a young age, often using the derogative word 'yuon' to refer to the Vietnamese, meaning barbaric (Hinton 2005). This is an example of verbal discrimination. Hence, as these stories are told, racial stereotypes are reproduced, portraying a vindictive and cruel race. Alongside this, a racial discourse developed that is still in place today. Cambodia's history is therefore extremely relevant when looking at the racialisation of ethnic Vietnamese.

The loss of Kampuchea Krom would have been threatening to Cambodians. After the expansionist Vietnamese invaded, there was an "absolute 'Vietnamization' of the Khmer kingdom" (Pouvachy 1986: 441). This implies that not only was there a loss of Khmer territory, but their culture and politics would have been affected too. Under the expansionism of Vietnam, immigration rose rapidly and added to racialisation. It has been stated that: "ethnic relations have also been centrally determined by patterns of migration" (Law 2010: 107), from this it can be interpreted that the increasing dominance and superiority of the Vietnamese within Cambodia would have overwhelmed many Khmers. Consequently, the process of immigration and an establishment of a racial hierarchy added to racial resentments at the time. The next two hundred years saw the Vietnamese dominate

Cambodia, separating the country from the rest of the world (Chandler 2000). By being so isolated during this time period, Cambodia's trade and economy would have been ruined, in turn lowering the quality of life for Khmers even further. Meanwhile, the Vietnamese continued to prosper. Chandler (2000) stated that the consequent racial tensions were so extreme they brought a "legacy of resentment and anti-Vietnamese feeling" (Chandler 2000: 95). It could be inferred from this that previous oppression by the Vietnamese in the Khmers' own country, has resulted in a deep rooted fear of Vietnamisation. Such apprehension and the knowledge of history would inevitably contribute to the racialisation of the minority group in modern day Cambodia.

This fear and racial discourse has been worsened by French colonialism. After the establishment of a French protectorate in 1867, rivalry between the Khmers and Vietnamese reached a new level. As Hinton (2005) explained, the protectorate posed a threat to Khmer culture and traditions. Once again, immigration resulted in an increased Vietnamese population and the fear of Vietnamisation became more socially embedded. Racial rivalries developed to the point that Cambodians saw themselves as the complete opposite of a greedy Vietnamese race (Hinton 2005). This process of racialisation has been explained by both Hinton (2005) and Chandler (2000) as resulting from the favouritism shown by the French towards Vietnamese. Under colonialism, the French thought of the Vietnamese as more competent and accepting of Westernisation, and encouraged immigration through promises of high social positions and quality of life in Cambodia (Chandler 2000). As the Vietnamese came to dominate governing and business roles, racial inequalities hardened pre-existing resentment. Cambodians saw Vietnamese as "the evil, invading other" (Hinton 2005: 215) as racial stereotypes portrayed the Vietnamese as morally impure. Despite the French aiming to make Cambodia an "extension of Vietnam" (Chandler 2000: 144), these racial stereotypes meant that the attempted Vietnamisation was rejected and the process of ethnic fusion was extremely unlikely. Two distinct ethnic groups were established as rivals with Khmer nationalism and a fear of Vietnamisation being evident in the rebellions of 1885 (Chandler 2000). Clearly, colonialism consolidated anti-Vietnamese sentiment through the further threat against Khmer customs; mass immigration resulted in Vietnamese dominance and superiority. Racial segregation accompanied the racial stereotype of an oppressive Vietnam, and the role of history meant that these effects have been long lasting.

A third period of Vietnamisation can be seen during the Vietnamese occupation of 1979 to 1989. The recentness of this incident indicates the ongoing influence of historical issues. After the Vietnamese overthrew the tyranny of the Khmer Rouge, their presence was not appreciated for long as they set up a new government in Phnom Penh (Pouvatchy 1986). By doing so, the Vietnamese reinforced the stereotype that saw them accused of meddling in Cambodia's affairs. Pouvatchy (1986) adds strength to this argument by demonstrating that the Vietnamese held significant presence in administration, the armed forces, culture, education and business. Racial discourse continued to present the Vietnamese as a vindictive minority and hatred grew amongst Cambodians as they were viewed as pervasive. Over the nation's past, a strong pattern had emerged linking Vietnamese involvement with a loss of Khmer territory and increased immigration. These periods had typically brought hardship on the Khmer population and the 1980s was no different as the Vietnamese oppressed, arrested and killed thousands of Cambodians (Khmers Kampuchea Krom Federation 2009). Fear and resentment based on race was almost inevitable, and has remained influential through the re-telling of history.

While such a complex history and the numerous processes of racialisation cannot be discussed in too much detail here, it is clear that the broader role of history must be considered in order to understand the territorial-political motives behind racial discrimination. As Law (2010) illustrated, nationalism and defence against invasion are important motivations for racialisation and discrimination. These are clearly present in Cambodia as loyalty to Khmer culture and territory, combined with constant losses to Vietnam, has resulted in a prevalent fear of Vietnamisation and racial resentment.

## Extreme Ideology of the Khmer Rouge

Past experiences often shape a nation's ideological beliefs, and this appears to be relevant when studying Cambodia. Racial ideology is an essential process of racialisation as it impacts doctrine and cultural values. For instance, it is "a system of ideas which interprets and defines the meanings of racial differences" (Nash 1962: 285). Such interpretations categorise ethnicities as superior or inferior, and determines what racial characteristics are deemed desirable. As with any process of racialisation, the scale of racial ideology varies but Cambodia witnessed a high level during the Khmer Rouge regime.

Under Pol Pot, the Vietnamese minority in Cambodia acquired an inferior status, being oppressed through hierarchy and genocide. Before studying the genocide of 1975 to 1979, it is important to consider exactly what the ideology of the Khmer Rouge entailed and how it became so influential. Pol Pot "gave vent to his hatred of the Vietnamese and encouraged everyone else...to do the same" (Chandler 1999: 133); through Pol Pot's political position he was able to extend his own racial resentment on a large scale. This meant that social status was partially determined by ethnicity, with Vietnamese being marginalised by an increasingly fixed racial hierarchy. Such claims have been supported by Hinton (2005) who explained that their quality of life was drastically lowered, eventually to the point of death during the four year genocide. Propaganda was then used to broaden the range of Pol Pot's racial ideology. A Khmer Rouge radio broadcast titled 'Who are 'We'?' (1978) clearly distinguished between a Khmer 'we' and a Vietnamese enemy. Such methods provided the Khmer Rouge and many other Cambodians with a sense of belonging that worked as a catalyst for genocide. Chandler (1999) described how membership of the Khmer Rouge considerably rose, arguably showing the wide support for their ideology. This ideology demonised ethnic Vietnamese, and was so easily accepted due to Cambodia's shared history. Pol Pot mobilised ideology through discrimination, largely through the use of detention centres. One of the largest detention centres was S-21, and their findings were used by Pol Pot to confirm his fears of Vietnamese spies occupying Cambodia, leading to racial attacks and massacres (Chandler 1999). Racial ideology was clearly already leading to racial discrimination on an extreme scale. The combination of a discriminative racial ideology and a strong sense of nationalism meant that the Khmer Rouge wanted a "racially-defined Khmer nation" (Miller 2012: 34). In other words, there was no place for ethnic minorities in their future. As a result, approximately 150,000 ethnic Vietnamese were murdered in the genocide (Miller 2012). An extreme racial ideology segregated the two ethnic groups, continuing to portray the Vietnamese as immoral.

Racial ideology was further mobilised through genocide. Genocides are typically racially motivated, aiming for purity. The Cambodian genocide is often thought of as politically motivated but, as Chandler (1999) demonstrates, some of Pol Pot's first targets were those born abroad or educated in North Vietnam. Undoubtedly this case followed the global pattern of genocide by working towards a racial cleansing, aiming for a master race. This point is reinforced by Pouvatchy's claim that "shortly after taking power...[the Khmer Rouge] did not hide their hostility" (Pouvatchy 1986: 447) as mass deportations and massacres occurred. Further racial discrimination came through the dehumanisation of minorities by elite groups. The Vietnamese were forced to alter their body language as a display of their inferiority, for instance through averting their eyes and lowering their heads (Hinton 2005). In order to permanently remove this perceived racial impurity, an annihilation was deemed necessary. Here the extreme influence of ideology on racialisation is undeniable.

The ideological belief that extermination was needed took hold by 1977. Massacres were becoming more common, with some even on Vietnamese territory (Hinton 2005). This came alongside a racial discourse that often referred to the Vietnamese as wanting to 'swallow up' Cambodia. Clearly, the pre-existing fear of Vietnamisation caused by past events had shaped racial ideology of the Khmer Rouge, resulting in mass murder. Pouvatchy (1986) adds weight to this argument as he cites politician Khieu Samphan who said in 1978 "the number one enemy...Vietnam, ready to swallow up Cambodia" (Pouvatchy 1986: 447). This emphasises the fear of Vietnamisation while reinforcing the stereotype of a greedy race. The success of spreading this ideology has been linked by many researchers like Hinton (2005) to the sense of belonging that it provided. By claiming that Vietnam posed a threat to the whole of Cambodia and wanted to 'swallow them up,' all Khmers seemed to have a mutual enemy. This would have strengthened nationalism and united many behind the Khmer Rouge, to some extent enabling the genocide. However, the level of unity here must not be over exaggerated; the Khmer Rouge terrorised the whole of Cambodia so claims of an accepted ideology should be treated with care. Chandler (1999) supports the idea of racial attacks being more likely due to shared values, as the party became increasingly violent after establishing their position in power. There has been some discrepancy with the number of Vietnamese deaths, ranging from Beachler's (2009) estimate of 20,000 to Kiernan's (2007) 30,000. But the fact that the ethnic minority were racialised through an extreme ideology cannot be ignored. Such racialisation presented them as an impure threat to Khmer existence, and thousands consequently lost their lives through the mobilisation of a racial intolerance that is still prevalent today.

The racial ideologies of the Khmer Rouge and the consequent persecution through genocide are somewhat reminiscent of previous regimes across the globe. The Khmer Rouge were significantly shaped by both Marxism in the Soviet Union, and Maoism in China. While Hinton (2005) explains that these influences were mainly political, this should not overshadow the fact that Maoism would have encouraged Pol Pot's aspiration for a homogenous society. As can be seen here, external, political influences are key to understanding Khmer Rouge ideology and how it was put into practice. Chandler (1999) explained that they were a communist party following Stalin's example. This is reflected through the similarity between Stalin's purge trials, and the extraction of confessions within Khmer Rouge prisons like S-21. Kiernan (2007) also stressed the importance of political influences, suggesting that they made genocide more likely. Another source of similarity can be seen in Hitler's Nazi Germany. As Hinton (2005) points out, both Jews and Vietnamese were minority groups used as scapegoats after socio-economic hardship, with genocide being offered as a solution. Already, external influences appear to be very significant in the forming of racial ideology under the Khmer Rouge. This is strengthened as Kiernan (2007) identifies further similarities between Hitler and Pol Pot through the desire to revert their nations to an agricultural society that revolved around farming. It is possible that Pol Pot admired Hitler's ethos and decided Cambodia needed to follow a similar path, aiming for a master race without the perceived impurity of the Vietnamese. External, global influences are irrefutable here, as they have been localised to suit the Khmer Rouge regime (Hinton 2005).

The racial ideology of the Khmer Rouge is an important example of how extreme this process of racialisation has been in Cambodia. Motivated by racial purity and defence against Vietnamisation, the Vietnamese were yet again portrayed as an impure and evil threat. Encouraged by external influences, racial ideology contributed to genocide in an attempt to create a master race and remove the risk of Vietnamese expansionism. The sense of unity lay the ground work for putting racial hatred into action. Despite this horror, many Cambodians still focus on alternative motivations behind the genocide, overlooking the racial discrimination. This indicates that this racial ideology may still be somewhat intact, and the risk of a repeat is ever-present.

## Political Discourse

As can be seen from studying the Khmer Rouge, political discourse plays a key role as a process of racialisation in Cambodia. Politicians have often encouraged anti-Vietnamese sentiment over the past few decades, amplifying racial tension. One example was Sihanouk who was in power from 1953 to 1970, mainly as head of state. During his time in power, Sihanouk remained very wary of Vietnam, arguably due to his own nationalism and the racial stereotypes of a greedy Vietnam. This was reflected in his actions and speeches as he often condemned the communist expansion that Vietnam was involved in (Pouvatchy 1986). Fear of Vietnamese expansion was a recurring theme in Cambodia and can be found in political situations like this that demonise ethnic Vietnamese further.

The racialisation of political discourse continued after Lon Nol's coup in 1970. The coup is a clear example of anti-Vietnamese sentiment being politicised for individual gain. For instance, Lon Nol used Sihanouk's marriage to a partially-Vietnamese woman to undermine his position (Pouvatchy 1986). Hinton (2005) adds weight to this argument by explaining that Lon Nol gained support by using resident Vietnamese as a scapegoat for the hardship suffered by Cambodians. In order for this political discourse to prove effective, propaganda was essential; speeches, rallies and publications increased the scale of racialisation. People became indoctrinated with the belief that ethnic Vietnamese were a risk to the survival of Khmers through their racial impurity. Proof of the acceptance of such racial views can be seen in Lon Nol's massacre. Thousands of Vietnamese were killed and their bodies dumped in the Mekong River to flow back to Vietnam (Hinton 2005). Racial motivations are clear here. Such resentment could also be seen in everyday life, as racial divisions were worsened through a denial of citizenship and basic human rights. Political discourse and actions were undoubtedly reinforcing racial resentment and segregation, with the Vietnamese experiencing a lower social status and quality of life as a result.

These previous discourses remain relevant as the present day rhetoric often follows similar patterns. Slocomb (2006) demonstrates that racial ideology has consistently dominated political discourse over the past few centuries, especially since independence in 1953. Politicians have used racial ideology to manipulate the constitution, mobilising anti-Vietnamese sentiment to unite Khmers through a sense of belonging. One significant example of this can be seen through the portrayal of the current Prime Minister, Hun Sen, by his enemies. LaRocco (2014) emphasises that Prime Minister Hun Sen has been treated with suspicion and labelled a Vietnamese puppet, because he was trusted and empowered by Hanoi, the capital of Vietnam. His political enemies, including Sam Rainsy and the Cambodia National Rescue Party, are xenophobic and their political discourse is reflective of this. For instance, they look to undermine Hun Sen's position through claiming that he works for the interests of Vietnam rather than Cambodia (LaRocco 2014). The significance of political discourse is reflected through public opinions and displays of resentment for Hun Sen's political origins. Examples of this can be found through a political blog where Hun Sen is accused of being a "traitor and puppet of Hanoi" who has "responded under hypnosis" (Khmer Lotus Revolution 2014). While this is a political blog and contains bias, it reflects the opinions of Hun Sen's opposition in the general population. Vietnam have continually been racialised as meddling through political discourse, and this has not changed.

Political discourse has consistently used racism to gain support. It has been stated that "the essence of being Khmer...is defined in their direct opposition to Vietnamese" (Kleger & Ehrentraut 2004), and this racialised nationalism has been taken advantage of by Rainsy, again reproducing racism. Other politicians have also taken advantage, as LaRocco (2014) demonstrates the use of derogative terms like 'yuon' have been used to heighten emotion and gain support. Hinton (2005) explains that the term 'yuon' has been used since at least the 17th Century to describe the Vietnamese, meaning barbaric or savage. Furthermore, the government presents 'Cambodia' and 'Khmer' as the same thing, which creates the sense

that Vietnam is the 'other' (NICFEC 2003). Racial sentiment has been used and reproduced by politicians, further segregating these two ethnic groups.

Evidence of political discourse encouraging racism has been reported by Special Rapporteur Surya Subedi since 2009. As detailed by the UNHRC (2014), anti-Vietnamese rhetoric caused racial attacks on the day of elections in 2013. Racially motivated cases of "ethnic Vietnamese being physically prevented from casting their votes" (UNHRC 2014: 14) directly links racism and politics as Vietnamese are told they do not belong or have the right to vote. Similar events had previously occurred in the 2003 elections when Vietnamese were intimidated at polling stations, stopping them from voting (NICFEC 2003). In addition, election campaigns were accused of being "racist and provocative" (NICFEC 2003), inciting racial tension and resentment. Racialisation through political discourse has created an 'us' and 'them' culture to the point where the right to vote has been undermined through intimidation. This escalated after the rigged elections of 2013 when protests ended with violence and the looting of Vietnamese businesses (UNHRC 2014). As a result of these problems the Special Rapporteur has called for important changes. He stated that leaders need to be "promoting racial harmony and mutual understanding" (UNHRC 2014: 14). In order to achieve racism reduction, political strategies are essential but this is simply not happening in Cambodia.

Political discourse is obviously a significant process of racialisation in modern Cambodia. Pre-existing racialisation of ethnic Vietnamese has been influenced by historical nationalism and losses of territory. This has then been utilised within political rhetoric and actions, motivated by the need for electoral votes. By articulating racial resentment in this way, political discourse has reproduced racial tensions and divides, rather than reducing them.

### **Present Day Racial Discrimination**

A final process of racialisation in Cambodia comes through racial discrimination of ethnic Vietnamese. This comes at both an institutional and individual level.

Institutional racism involves racial inequality within the social system, and this is a relevant issue when studying Cambodia. NICFEC (2003) portray that the media is an example of this as they do nothing to discourage racism, with some local human rights groups even failing to properly acknowledge the rights of ethnic minorities. On a higher level, issues of citizenship are troublesome. Miller (2012) depicts that the UN Peace Conference of Paris in 1989 and the UN Transitional Authority in Cambodia aimed to improve human rights and equality. However, the 1993 constitution of Cambodia demonstrated that rights were for Khmer citizens only, causing confusion as this seems to deny basic human rights for anyone not of Khmer ethnicity. Such concerns have been shared by Amnesty International (1995) who reported dismay and worry that the term 'Khmer' does not include those of Vietnamese origin, therefore denying them basic human rights. This is a major issue in Cambodia because Vietnamese are further alienated with a confusion of their identity, as well as being extremely oppressed under such legislation.

Issues of citizenships are added to through a lack of identification papers. Miller (2012) explains this point further as a lack of official identity or citizenship papers can result in forced deportation. The laws of 1994 state that Vietnamese residents need to have passports and visas, but many of those already in Cambodia would not have had these and so technically became illegal immigrants. To make matters worse, Khmer citizenship is often denied to those born in Cambodia if their parents were Vietnamese (Miller 2012). This is a blatant disregard for the human rights of thousands of ethnic Vietnamese; the law seems to be targeting them rather than helping. The scale of this issue has been made clear by RFAKS (2014) who claim that nearly 90% of ethnic Vietnamese in Kampong Chhang do not

have identification papers or birth certificates, forcing many of them to live in poor conditions in floating houses with an extremely low quality of life. Without identification papers, political, economical, social and legal difficulties are inevitable. For instance, ethnic Vietnamese have less access to social services or the legal system, they cannot own property or borrow from banks, as well as not being able to vote or legally work (Miller 2012). This majorly hinders any potential for social mobility; they are effectively "trapped in poverty" (RFAKS 2014). The government needs to address these problems to prevent further exploitation and discrimination caused by a lack of citizenship and identification papers. Such structural racism has resulted in the inequality of opportunity, with the Vietnamese being marginalised and alienated in Cambodia.

Institutional racism is built upon pre-existing racial ideology, stereotypes and discourse. Yet, instead of legal and political strategies aiming to reduce racism, an unfair system worsens the situation. An 'us' and 'them' culture is produced, presenting the Vietnamese as an undesirable source of hardship. It could be argued that the racial stereotype of a greedy Vietnam has motivated such a discriminative system as Cambodians work to defend themselves from Vietnamisation. As Law (2010) explains, structural racism creates a domino effect as no citizenship denies the Vietnamese access to things like employment, education, and welfare, which then results in a lack of income and resources, leading to a poor quality of life. The process of structural racism clearly needs to be addressed as it completely excludes and oppresses ethnic Vietnamese in society.

On a more individual level, racial attacks and murder are fairly common in Cambodia. Incidences of Vietnamese businesses being singled out and set on fire after the rigged elections of 2013 raises the question of why only Vietnamese establishments were targeted. RFAKS reinforces this by describing the "violent assaults on ethnic Vietnamese and their properties" (RFAKS 2014). Violent attacks racialise the Vietnamese minority by distancing the two ethnic groups further and increasing a sense of rivalry and mutual resentment. Kimson and Boyce (1998) reveal that racial discrimination has been a problem for the last few decades by recounting the separate murders of 4 Vietnamese in Phnom Penh within just twenty-four hours. The policeman were then verbally and physically assaulted after attempting to cover the dead bodies with cloth (Kimsong & Boyce 1998). This is evidence racially motivated acts are still prevalent, and reproduce racial divides through such extreme acts of violence. Despite supposed improvements over recent years, racial attacks and murder are still a problem in Cambodia. A simple internet search revealed that in 2014 a twenty-eight year old Vietnamese male had crashed his motorcycle before being attacked and killed by witnesses after they realised his ethnicity, with one shouting "Yvon fight with Khmer" (Mengleng 2014). The case was ruled to have been racially motivated, suggesting that some recognition for racial issues is emerging within the justice system. UNICERD (2010) explain that some improvements have also been made in an attempt to incorporate human rights and constitutional law. However these have not been implemented very effectively as the Penal Code still does not define what racial discrimination is. There is also a lack of insight into the situation of ethnic minorities, with legislation aimed at protecting against racial discrimination being somewhat ignored (UNICERD 2010). This means that individual acts of racial discrimination and racial tensions will continue to worsen. Racial discrimination acts like a cycle, reproducing resentful rivalries. As long as ethnic Vietnamese fall victim to discrimination, they will continue to be racialised as inferior, problematic and immoral.

## **Conclusion**

The Vietnamese minority have been racialised as greedy, vindictive and immoral. As a result of this, they have fallen victim to significant oppression and discrimination in Cambodia. A combination of different processes are currently working together, constantly reproducing a

long lasting racial discourse. This is a prevalent issue that must be taken seriously and tackled through improved policy, legislation and education.

As reported by the Special Rapporteur, racial discourse continues to be a problem in Cambodia, largely due to common beliefs about the nation's history (UNHRC 2014). A loyalty to Khmer nationalism and fear of Vietnamisation has been caused by persistent invasions by Vietnam over the past few centuries. Events such as the Vietnamese expansion of the 1600's, the French protectorate and Vietnamese occupation of 1979 to 1989 have been very influential. During these periods, the Khmers were marginalised by the Vietnamese, with their culture and territory being oppressed. Racial stereotypes then developed, portraying the Vietnamese as manipulative and cruel. Such racialisation remains relevant today through the re-telling of this history, especially in the family environment. Evidence of history's influence can be seen through the Khmer Rouge regime where up to 30,000 ethnic Vietnamese were killed in a genocide (Kiernan 2007). Motivated by the desire for a master race, Pol Pot was influenced by external regimes in Eastern Europe and China. This period illustrates the amplification of tensions as racial ideology was mobilised and created a sense of unity behind the Khmer identity.

After discussing the background to current racialisation, this paper has identified current processes and themes. Political discourse has been identified as extremely important as it uses pre-existing ideologies and prejudice in order to gain votes. This process reproduces racial tensions on a national scale, causing divides as the Vietnamese are blamed for hardships and derogative terms are used in political rhetoric (LaRocco 2014). Politicians claim to be protective of Khmer culture and land, and this attitude can also be seen through structural discrimination. Ethnic Vietnamese are denied citizenship and a lack of identification papers alienates them from society. Their quality of life and human rights are undermined (Miller 2012). Despite being told to address these issues, reports indicate that legislation is not being enforced and racial oppression remains prevalent. Individual acts of racism is also not being dealt with effectively. Direct acts of violent discrimination still occur and the United Nations has appealed for better legislation and enforcement (UNICERD 2010).

There is clearly a lot of work to be done in regards to racism reduction. To improve the social situation and overcome the current racial hierarchy, racism needs to be tackled through politics, legislation and education. As current racial discourse and ideologies can be linked back to historical issues of nationalism and territory, a fear of Vietnamisation has become deeply rooted in Cambodian society. It is essential that anti-Vietnamese sentiment is dealt with in order to avoid a repeat of the genocide under Pol Pot. Protecting the human rights and citizenship of Vietnamese immigrants through legislation would be a good starting point, but lessening racial resentment and divide will take a long time. In order for any chance of effective changes, the State needs to fully recognise the racial discrimination in Cambodia and dedicate themselves to tackling racism.

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