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# H-Diplo

## H-Diplo Roundtable Review

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Introduction by Stein Tønnesson

**David G. Marr. *Vietnam: State, War, and Revolution (1945-1946)*.** Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2013. ISBN: 9780520274150 (hardcover, \$55.00/£37.95).

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### Contents

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Introduction by Stein Tønnesson, Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO) and East Asian Peace program, Department of Peace and Conflict Research, Uppsala University.....	2
Review by Pierre Brocheux, Université Paris Diderot-Paris 7 <i>Translated for H-Diplo by Diane Labrosse</i> .....	9
Compte-rendu par Pierre Brocheux, Université Paris Diderot-Paris 7 .....	13
Review by Shawn McHale, George Washington University .....	17
Review by Pham Quang Minh, Vietnam National University-Hanoi .....	27
Review by Tuong Vu, University of Oregon .....	31
Author's Response by David G. Marr .....	35

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Introduction by Stein Tønnesson, Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO) and East Asian Peace program, Department of Peace and Conflict Research, Uppsala University

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David Marr has spent most of his adult life studying twentieth-century Vietnamese history with the use of Vietnamese-language documents. His research has allowed him to dig up a wealth of documents to demonstrate the endurance, organizational capacity – and diversity – of the Vietnamese nation. He can build on more than fifty years of experience with Vietnam, first during a short period of military service, then through marriage and family, multiple conferences, numerous prolonged stays, patient archival work and vast reading of Vietnamese and French texts.

Marr has never had much of an ideological axe to grind, but his basic research orientation is derived from the interest he gained in *the adversary* when serving as a U.S. Marine Corps intelligence officer in 1962–63. He has never taken much interest in the local allies or collaborators of France and the U.S. He was struck while serving in Saigon by the ability of the National Front for the Liberation of South Vietnam (NLF) to conduct complex political and military operations amidst some of the most difficult conditions imaginable. Marr quickly gained the conviction that the U.S. war was wrong. He wanted to understand the society in which his own nation had wrongfully intervened. He realized that this would require a deep understanding of history, and thus began studying the past. After 1975, he was one of the few Americans who remained faithful to Vietnam, and continued to study the country after the U.S. war was over. At that time a career in Vietnam studies was impossible in American universities. Everyone wanted to forget, so Marr moved to Canberra, where he also remained faithful to the Australian National University until his retirement.

With its 721 pages, *Vietnam: State, War, and Revolution (1945–1946)* is the fourth big book that Marr has written, and the thickest so far. The books have been published by University of California Press at approximately ten-year intervals. The first, which was based on his 1968 dissertation, was written while the Vietnam War was at its most intense. *Vietnamese Anticolonialism 1885–1925* (1971) which he dedicated to his wife Ai, explored the failure of national resistance by the Vietnamese scholar-gentry against French colonization, and the emergence of a new generation of *résistants* before and during World War I. He made it clear in the preface that he did not cover the “various *collaborateur* elements.” His focus was resistance. And he wanted to demonstrate that the main reason why the Vietnamese were so fiercely resisting foreign intervention was not to be found primarily in the ideology or practice of the Indochinese Communist Party but in Vietnam’s nineteenth and twentieth-century history. One had to go back at least to 1885. He saw Nguyen Ai Quoc (Ho Chi Minh) as a successor to the anti-imperialism of Phan Boi Chau and the anti-feudal reformism of Phan Chu Trinh. Quoc decided to become a part of the international communist movement in order to fight imperialism.

The title of Marr’s second monograph, *Vietnamese Tradition on Trial 1920–1945* (1981), which he dedicated to his mother, father and grandmother, turned Quoc’s famous pamphlet *Le procès de la colonisation française [French Colonization on Trial]* (Paris 1925) on its head.

Quoc was part of a new generation that needed to break with many local traditions, and embrace some version of modernity. Marr wrote this book on the basis of Vietnamese-language publications from the 1920–45 period in the holdings of the *Bibliothèque nationale de France* in Paris. In this contribution to Vietnamese intellectual history, he discussed one important topic after the other: morality instruction, ethics in politics, language and literacy, gender, perceptions of the past, harmony and struggle, the power of knowledge, and learning from experience. All of these subjects were put on trial by Vietnamese thinkers, writers, and activists in the period between the two World Wars, which was also the formative period for a number of rival nationalist and communist groups. The main question underlying Marr’s study was how the national unity of purpose, as demonstrated in active popular support for President Ho Chi Minh, the Viet Minh, and the NLF, could emerge from this cacophony of voices.

Something happened during World War II. The transition from intellectual exploration, political rivalry and futile revolts to a genuine quest for state power, and a protracted, ultimately successful political and military struggle became the topic of his third monograph: *Vietnam 1945: The Quest for Power* (1995; 602 pp.), which he dedicated to his and Ai’s children Danny, Aileen, and Andy. It was a focused study of the most important year in the modern history of Vietnam, the year when, as he had phrased it in 1971, “another alien power, the Japanese, upset the colonial mechanism in Indochina sufficiently to leave the way open for Nguyen Ai Quoc (by that time, Ho Chi Minh) and the Viet-Minh to move amidst revolutionary circumstances and build a truly effective anti-colonial movement.”<sup>1</sup> 1945 was also, he said, the year when the educated elite’s long quest for salvation from the foreigner merged with the desire of the peasantry to be free from hunger, tenantry, and taxes. A national and social revolution went together in the ‘deadly struggle’ of the Indochina wars. Pierre Brocheux rightly refers in his review below to Marr’s 1945 book as a *maître livre* (master work). As noted by Brocheux, the title of its last chapter, “A State is Born,” forms the point of departure for the book under review here.

This fourth book, which Marr dedicated to his and Ai’s grandchildren Grace, Billy, Jimmy, and Ella is about “the birth of the Vietnamese nation amidst war and revolution.”<sup>2</sup> It deals with the sixteen-month period between the August Revolution – as it is still called in Communist historiography – and the outbreak of full-scale war between France and the Democratic Republic of Vietnam in December 1946. It also includes a short epilogue, reflecting on the Indochina War 1946–54 and predicting, in its last sentence, that the Socialist Republic of Vietnam will one day revert to the name Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV). Like most of Marr’s earlier work, this new massive contribution is not a chronological narrative but a thematically organized treatise dealing with government formation, the creation of an army, peace and war, attempts to get foreign support,

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<sup>1</sup> David G. Marr, *Vietnamese Anticolonialism 1885–1925* (Berkeley: University of California Press: 1971), p. 274.

<sup>2</sup> David G. Marr, *Vietnam: State, War, and Revolution (1945–1946)* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), p. 1.

economic realities and visions, opposition from non-Communist groups, the Indochinese Communist Party and the Viet Minh, and mass mobilization. The choice to treat the Party and the Viet Minh only in the penultimate chapter most likely stemmed from a wish to play down their role in the overall history of the state and nation. They were just a part of it, not the political embodiment of the nation. The last chapter, on mass mobilization, points back to Marr's overriding concern in the 1960s: to explain the organizational capacity and enduring unity of purpose that made victory possible against France and the U.S. He has always been struck by the ability shown by local cadre to operate independently, without orders but in a similar pattern, based on ideas cultivated through consensus-building training. These ideas, he has always maintained, are not as much inherited as shaped during the modern history of resistance, rebellion, and war, although the ideology makes active use of mythical heroes also from ancient history. In his new book, however, Marr is more cynical about the mechanisms of mass mobilization than he used to be: "Amidst revolution and war, peer pressure combined with fear and insecurity to lead persons to engage in acts never dreamt of previously. This psychological dynamic produced heroic self-sacrifice at one end of the spectrum, and ruthless treatment of fellow citizens at the other" (566). *Vietnam: State, War, and Revolution* provides solid documentation and numerous examples of the tremendous effort, sacrifice and brutality that went into the building of institutions to mobilize huge parts of the population for three decades of intense warfare. One may then also have a clue to understanding the national exhaustion of the 1980s.

The H-Diplo Editor Thomas Maddux has put together a highly qualified group to review Marr's book from different angles.

Pierre Brocheux belongs to the same generation as Marr, and was a lead member, together with Daniel Hémerly, of the undogmatic Marxist group of scholars at the University of Paris 7, who for many years taught and researched the history of Vietnam. Brocheux's own main work has been on the economic and social history of the Mekong Delta. It is therefore not surprising that he urges Marr's readers to begin with chapter six, on economic dreams and realities. In his mostly positive review, Brocheux criticizes Marr for having failed to include research on socio-cultural developments in Indochina during the Vichy period of 1940–45. One also understands from Brocheux's comments that he does not quite share Marr's belief in contingency. History, in Brocheux's view, is to a greater extent determined by socio-economic developments.

In his review, Tuong Vu is mainly interested in the high politics of revolution and war. He points out that Marr has done a pioneering and essential work in reconstructing the history of the January 1946 national elections, the workings of the National Assembly, and the making of the DRV's first constitution. Then Tuong Vu criticizes Marr's arguments concerning the historical role of Ho Chi Minh. Tuong Vu agrees with Marr's assertion that Ho was a Leninist but is skeptical towards the distinction made by Marr between Ho's humanity and reluctance to use violence and ICP Secretary General Truong Chinh's more dogmatic, power-oriented kind of Leninism. Tuong Vu questions Marr's contention that Ho was eventually sidelined in the Vietnamese communist hierarchy because of his lack of

interest in power. He asks if Ho perhaps just preferred to play the roles for which he was best qualified and was just a more “cautious” Leninist than Truong Chinh and others.

In his long, thorough and critical review, Shawn McHale declares himself impressed by the empirical richness of Marr’s book, and by Marr’s use of formerly unutilized source material, above all in the “De Facto Government (*Gouvernement de fait*)” file, which fills 78 boxes in the *Centre des Archives d’Outre Mer* in Aix-en-Provence. The file contains mainly Vietnamese-language documents captured by the French in the Hanoi ministry buildings after the outbreak of war in December 1946. McHale, however, criticizes Marr’s book for its absence of a clearly stated central argument, thematic structure with many crisscrossing narratives, failure to engage with other researchers’ arguments (notably Christopher Goscha’s concept of an “archipelago state”),<sup>3</sup> its top-down Hanoi-centered approach, and its scant attention to southern Vietnam. Thus, according to McHale, Marr underestimates the importance of the war that was fought in the south from September 1945 to December 1946. At that time, northern Vietnam was protected against active warfare, first by the presence of a Chinese army of occupation and then by the Franco-Vietnamese agreement of March 6, 1946, which recognized Vietnam as a free state. McHale explains Marr’s Hanoi-centered focus as deriving from his reliance on two main types of source material: the *Gouvernement de fait* file, and northern (and some central Vietnam) newspapers but none of the southern ones. Another reason is that the DRV did not in fact wield de facto control of much territory south of the 16<sup>th</sup> parallel in 1946. This could explain the author’s choice to concentrate a study of state-building on the areas where it was built. McHale’s highly interesting criticism, which contains a whole revisionist research agenda, leaves an intriguing question behind: Is there something wrong with the whole underlying premise for Marr’s lifelong research, his quest to explain the unity of purpose and organizational strength allowing the DRV to win its wars against internal and external adversaries? Through his interesting questions about many parts of Vietnam, McHale draws attention to the complexity of the Vietnamese experience. There was never a war between just two parties. Yet it does not seem obvious that complexity is the main factor setting the history of Vietnam apart from that of other nations. If we seek an explanation for the communist victory in Vietnam, or if we want to understand the characteristics of the state that took control of the whole country in 1975, then Marr’s preoccupation with “the heartland of the DRV state” could be more useful than studies of the social and political complexities of the various other parts of the country. Unless of course the 1954 and 1975 victories were due to Communist Party machinations, supported by China and the Soviet Union and not to anything deeper down in Vietnamese history. This would mean to reject the basic revelation that David Marr made as an intelligence officer during 1962–63, the revelation that served as his main rationale for delving into Vietnamese history.

Pham Quang Minh also mixes praise with criticism in his review below, notably concerning the leading role of the Indochinese Communist Party in revolution and state building. Where Marr – primarily in his previous book – argues that the “August Revolution” happened as a spontaneous reaction by local youth in most parts of the country to an

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<sup>3</sup> Christopher E. Goscha, *Vietnam: Un état né de la guerre 1945-1954* (Paris: Armand Colin, 2012).

opportunity presenting itself at the moment of the sudden and unexpected Japanese surrender in World War II, Pham Quang Minh insists on the standard view that the Party had prepared and carried out the revolution, which could not have happened without such careful preparation. While Marr argues that the Communist Party had only a limited capacity at the time (5000 members, many of whom remained in jail), and that for a long time it was unable to really control the new state, Pham Quang Minh sees the Party as always having been in the lead, with people “voluntarily, cheerfully, and actively” joining the Viet Minh.

The four reviews assembled here, and David Marr’s response, demonstrate to what extent the history of the 1945–46 juncture in Vietnamese history remains controversial. Was it the birth of the modern Vietnamese nation, led by its Communist Party? Was it the creation of a communist dictatorship, geared towards utilizing peasant grievances and anti-colonial sentiments as vehicles for creating a war machine? Was it the birth of the modern Vietnamese nation in a spontaneous revolution allowing the Communist Party gradually to take control of the new national state? Or was it no birth of a nation at all but just a complex series of events with mainly local meanings, revealing multiple divisions and conflicts, which were molded into a national master narrative of national revolution and resistance?

*Vietnam: State, War, and Revolution (1945–1946)* is a work of immense value for future debates about such issues, because it brings so many previously unknown facts to the table. The book is likely to attract many Vietnamese readers. Books like these cannot yet be produced by Vietnam-based Vietnamese scholars, who are not free to undertake independent research on topics of major political importance. Once Marr’s book appears in a complete and fully reliable Vietnamese translation – as Pham Quang Minh says it must – it is likely to become a work of reference in Vietnam. My hope is that it will set a standard of historical craftsmanship for future generations of Vietnamese historians.

### **Participants:**

**David G. Marr** is an emeritus professor in the College of Asia and the Pacific, Australian National University. In addition to the four books cited in Stein Tønnesson’s introduction, Marr compiled a book-length bibliography titled *Vietnam* (Clio Press, 1992), and has written about Vietnamese attitudes towards illness and healing, ‘the Self,’ education, and local government. He was co-director of the Indochina Resource Center (Washington and Berkeley) in 1971-1975. Marr continues to work on the 1945-1954 era, as well as a book provisionally titled ‘Vietnamese political culture in the 20th century’.

**Stein Tønnesson** is research professor at the Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO), and adjunct professor at the Department of Peace and Conflict Research at Uppsala University, where he leads a six-year research programme on the East Asian Peace. He has done research on decolonisation, revolution, war and nation building in Southeast Asia, and the disputes in the South China Sea. His most recent publications include “War and peace between nations since 1945,” ch. 10 in N. G. Owen, ed., *Routledge Handbook of Southeast*

*Asian History* (London: Routledge, 2013), pp. 96-107; and "The fragile peace in East and Southeast Asia," *SIPRI Yearbook 2013*, 28-40. A (somewhat doctored) Vietnamese translation of his latest monograph, *Vietnam 1946: How the War Began* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010) was published in 2013 by the Hanoi-based publisher Nha Xuat Ban Chinh Tri Quoc Gia – Su That.

**Pierre Brocheux** is a retired professor of Contemporary History at the University of Paris-Diderot, specialist of French colonial History, of Indochina and Viet Nam History. Recent publications include: *Ho Chi Minh .A Biography* (Cambridge University Press, 2007); *The Mekong Delta. Ecology, Economy and Revolution* Wisconsin-Madison 2009 (2nd edition); *Une Histoire économique du Vietnam 1850-2007. La palanche et le camion* (Paris, 2009); *Histoire contemporaine du Vietnam. La Nation résiliente* (Paris, 2011); Editor and co-author with Gisèle Bousquet, *Viet Nam Exposé. French Scholarship on Twentieth-Century Vietnamese Society* (The University of Michigan Press, 2002); co-author with Daniel Hémerly, *Indochina. An Ambiguous Colonization. 1858-1954* (University of California Press, 2009); editor and co-author: *Les décolonisations au XXème siècle* (Paris, 2012). His next major project is *Les paysans du Vietnam dans le XXème siècle*.

**Shawn McHale** is Associate Professor of History and International Affairs, The Elliott School of International Affairs, George Washington University. He received his Ph.D. in Southeast Asian history from Cornell University in 1995. His publications include *Print and Power: Confucianism, Communism, and Buddhism in the Making of Modern Vietnam* (University of Hawaii Press, 2004); "Understanding the Fanatic Mind? The Viet Minh and Race Hatred in the First Indochina War (1945-1954)," *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* (October 2009); and "Ethnicity, Violence, and Khmer-Vietnamese Relations: the Significance of the Lower Mekong Delta, 1757-1954," *Journal of Asian Studies* (May 2013). He is currently writing a book on the Mekong delta in a time of war (1945-54) in local and global perspectives.

**Pham Quang Minh** is associate professor of history and politics at the University of Social Sciences and Humanities (USSH), Vietnam National University-Hanoi. After receiving his PhD in Southeast Asian Studies from Humboldt University in Berlin (Germany) in 2002, he first became deputy head, and then head of the International Studies Department at USSH, and in 2012 Pham Quang Minh was promoted to vice-rector for research affairs at the university. His main teaching and researching interests include world politics, Asia-Pacific international relations, and Vietnam's foreign policy. His articles have appeared in *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific*, the *Journal of Vietnamese Studies*, *Asia-Pacific Review*, and *Asia Europe Journal*; he has also recently contributed a chapter "East Asia and the Pacific: The Regional Roles of Vietnam and Korea," to Joon-Woo Park, Gi-Wook Shin, and Donald W. Keyser (eds.), *Asia's Middle Powers? The Identity and Regional Policy of South Korea and Vietnam* (Walter H. Shorenstein Asia-Pacific Research Center, Stanford University 2013), pp. 73-97.

**Tuong Vu** is Associate Professor of Political Science at the University of Oregon and has held visiting appointments at Princeton University and National University of Singapore. His book, *Paths to Development in Asia: South Korea, Vietnam, China, and Indonesia* (2010),

received a Bernard Schwartz Award Honorable Mention for the best book on Asia in 2011. He is co-editor of *Dynamics of the Cold War in Asia: Ideology, Identity, and Culture* (2009) and *Southeast Asia in Political Science: Theory, Region and Qualitative Analysis* (2008). His articles have appeared in *World Politics*, *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, *Studies in Comparative International Development*, *Theory and Society*, *South East Asia Research*, and *Journal of Vietnamese Studies*.



Review by Pierre Brocheux, Université Paris Diderot-Paris 7

Translated for H-Diplo by Diane Labrosse

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In his master work *Vietnam 1945: A Quest for Power*,<sup>1</sup> David Marr entitled the last chapter (eight) “*A state is born.*” His second work can be read as the sequel. On September 2, 1945, the foundation of the state (Kiến Quốc) was proclaimed at the same time as the independence Vietnam (Độc Lập). Between the proclamation of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam and the deadly tragedy of 19 December 1946, which destroyed the hopes for a Franco-Vietnamese *modus vivendi*, how did the state assume its responsibilities? How did it exert its power, how did it extend its authority over a country and a population in the throes of a revolution, which is to say in a state of anarchy and chaos? Did the Indochinese Communist Party play a decisive role in the revolution of August 1945 and in the exercise of state power, domestically, and on the diplomatic front? (This is a question that anticipates the post-1954 developments) These questions form the framework of the narrative analysis that Marr develops in these 721 pages of admirable density and unflagging interest.

In order to understand the difficulties with which the leaders of the young republic were confronted, without having prepared for them, it is necessary to read Chapter six, “Material Dreams and Realities,” in which the author reveals in a clear and nuanced manner the expectations of a people that had for eight centuries been subjected to foreign domination:

*“ In times of revolution, hopes are aroused of great abundance, an end to fear about where the next meal will come from, the ability to enjoy the fruits of one’s labor, and membership in a much larger effort to create a new order of production, exchange and community welfare. In Vietnam, material aspirations became linked with ideas of progress and modernity. In this future life, farmers would obtain pumps, manual laborers become truck drivers, merchants offer a cornucopia of commodities at fair prices, engineers alter the physical landscape, and scientists contribute to world knowledge.*

*However, revolution also releases fury at those countrymen who are seen to have profited from the colonial system, who live in comfort while others starve. People subject to such accusations lose property, even their lives. Or they may be allowed to show remorse, contribute resources to the revolution, learn the latest political slogans, and gain admission to a patriotic association. Much depends on local circumstance. Meanwhile, everyone must face scarcities of food and other essentials, pay taxes, and accept that the country future is replete with uncertainties. The government tries to increase output, manage some allocations, and ensure that the nascent army receives top resource priority. Long after the events of a revolution, archive dossiers sometimes allow us to tune in on village property disputes, small scale commodity transactions, and neighbourhood collection of taxes and donations” (315).*

Thus the Vietnamese nurtured their hopes for a better life in an extremely perilous

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<sup>1</sup> David G. Marr, *Vietnam 1945: The Quest for Power* (University of California Press, 1995).

economic, strategic, and political context. At the end of 1944, the general government of Indochina forecast/predicted the collapse of the economy in the following year, a prediction that was confirmed by the horrifying famine that took hundreds of thousands, perhaps one million, lives in Tonkin and North Annam (in *Vietnam 1945*, Marr was the first to attempt to seriously calculate the number of victims).<sup>2</sup> The complementarity of the alimentary resources between the north and south (and the rice granary of Nam Bô) disappeared with the almost total destruction of communications and of rail and maritime transportation.

On the international geopolitical and Asiatic level in particular, the end of the Second World war was also the beginning of the reorganization of the chessboard on which the United States and the Soviet Union confronted each other for five decades while the end of western colonial empires did not unfold peacefully. At the same time, the fate of the young republic rested on the division of the country into zones of influence that had been determined at Potsdam without consulting the peoples who were involved.

North of the 16<sup>th</sup> parallel, the nationalist Chinese forces that were responsible for disarming Japanese troops were based in the country for many months; having taken possession of the Bank of Indochina, they deprived the state of its financial resources at the exact moment when it had the most need of them in order to operate the administrative apparatus, the education system, and above all to organize an army that would preserve the newly-acquired independence against the armed return of the French, after September 1945, in the south of the country. The situation was all the more critical because the sudden abolition of the colonial fiscal system provoked a drastic reduction in state revenues.

In fact, south of the 16<sup>th</sup> parallel, the British, having received the same mission as the Chinese, favoured the return of the French who in October 1945 began the re-conquest of Nam Bô, occupied the rice granary that was vital for the *République démocratique du Viêt Nam* (RDVN).

Domestically, the political cleavage between nationalists and communists [a replication of the long-term rupture in China between the Guomindang and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in 1927] resurfaced after March 9, 1945. The eviction of the colonial government and the restoration of the monarchical government allowed the nationalist sphere of influence (Đại Việt, Quang Phục Hội, Dân Xã Hội) that was protected by the Japanese to re-emerge on the public scene and to express itself and to operate without hindrance after its 'time in the wilderness' during the decade of 1930s. The competition between political and religious groups was intermixed with the lives of ethnic minorities.

In consequence, the Indochinese Communist Party (ICP) that took power by means of the intervention of a front organization, the Độc Lập Đông Minh (Ligue pour l'indépendance), was confronted with a number of potentially centrifugal factors which imposed on it a

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<sup>2</sup> *Vietnam 1945*, 96-107.

policy of broad rallying, a seemingly paradoxical action, since a communist party is theoretically at the vanguard of the proletariat and undertakes class warfare, and its organisation is exclusive and non-inclusive. In fact, the political line defined by Hồ Chí Minh in 1941, that of national union, conformed to the Comintern directive of the 7<sup>th</sup> Party Congress of 1935 which called for an anti-fascist policy in Europe and an anti-Japanese policy in China. It assumed the phasing out/putting on the back burner of the social revolution, and thus of class warfare. The fact that the Vichy government and that of Tokyo had formed a collaborative relationship facilitated the adoption of the Comintern policy. On the other hand, the union of all of the independent forces did not fail to arouse the opposition within the ICP but also from the Vietnamese Trotskyists, who well-established in Nam Bộ. This paradox (or duplicity for the adversaries), only obsessed the American interlocutors and the French negotiators.

Marr invokes the numerical weakness of the party, which comprised a maximum of 2500 militants, and the internal contradiction that secrecy, the absence of communications between the northern, southern, and central party cells/committees, and the weakness in communications between the Central Committee and the rank and file, as was indicated by the failure of the Cochinchina insurrection in 1940. The disjunction between the north and south reverberated in the conflict that quickly ended but was nonetheless genuine between the “old Viet Minh” and the “new Viet Minh” including the clashes or the friction between the Jeunesses d’Avant garde (Thanh Niên Tiền Phong) and the Jeunesses du Salut national (Thanh Niên Cứu Quốc). The author is led, if not to deny, at least to contest the leading role of the ICP in the revolutions, and he goes so far as to deny that the Party planned to take power; the ICP had been carried along by events more than it had directed or mastered them. In taking the opposite view of established scholarly opinion Marr goes to the opposite extreme, which will be a source of controversy.

A party which aims for hegemony, even if not overtly, is inevitably tempted to use coercion and terror, which is [at a minimum] the principal accusation of the nationalists and Trotskyists against the Viet Minh. This version was adopted by authors on the topic, like Bernard Fall and more recently François Guillemot<sup>3</sup>. When we take this perspective and when we adopt these presumptions, the politics of unity of Hồ Chí Minh, the advances that the Viet Minh made in Việt Nam Quốc Dân Đảng and Cách Mạng Đông Minh Hội, among the Catholics, the Caođaiistes, and the Hòa Hảo, were but tactical manoeuvres.

The analysis of the period running from September 1945 to December 1946 leads one to not content oneself with general explanations like the expansionist plan of international communism. Marr himself prefers an empirical-critical approach, and he leaves aside accepted ideas about communism and confines himself to ‘the facts, only the facts, and nothing but the facts.’ He preferred to analyze an impressive documentary mass (the

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<sup>3</sup> Bernard Fall, *The Viet-Minh Regime*, New York, 1956; *Dai Viêt. Indépendance et révolution au Viêt – Nam*, Paris, Les Indes savantes, 2012

archives of the *de facto* government<sup>4</sup> which comprises the documents captured by the French army after it retook Hanoi and to which the author had privileged access) but also the Vietnamese press of the period. This documentary godsend (manna) permitted him to explore the level of the villages and the people who did not have a fear of expressing themselves. These pages, which provide a close examination of the press, as well as the complaints, petitions, inquiry reports that denounced arbitrary arrests, the imprisonment of persons, the confiscation of property, and the summary executions as well as the corruption of the new holders of power, allow us to discover authentic public opinion. At the same time, these multiple voices attest to a large patriotic movement, a spirit of sacrifice, and citizen participation. French readers cannot help but recall the history of the French revolution.

Neither a single political apparatus, the ICP in this case, nor the only state apparatus, which moreover was embryonic, where the communists took care to take the key positions, could have taken on the French army if it had not had the mass uprising of the Vietnamese people (see the chapter entitled “Mass mobilization”) or the choice of the majority to rally behind the Viet Minh. Today, Party and army veterans who regret the heavy and stultifying influence of Communist China after 1950 will tell one that “c’était le bon vieux temps” (“those were the good old days”).

I have only one regret to express: that Marr left unexamined the socio-cultural evolution of the years 1940-1945. If they did not mark a moment of innovation, they were marked by the diffusion of modernity, the re-appropriation of the national past (in linguistics, in archeology, and in literature) and at the same time reflection on the future of the nation. This cultural movement appears to be the prelude and a component of a political uprising that was accomplished in a quasi-unanimous fervor, and it equally highlights the adherence of the modernist intelligentsia to political revolution.

David Marr is obviously convinced that nothing is predetermined or fatal, writing, “I hope to convey the uncertainty and contingency, as well as the coherency and momentum, of revolutionary events in 1945-1946” (4). This is why Marr has not only written a fascinating book, but has also provided us with a fine lesson on how to write history.

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<sup>4</sup> These boxes contain the administrative correspondence of the period that followed 9 March 1945 and the beginning of the DRVN: the imperial government did not succeed in establishing its authority, the political turmoil grew from day to day, disorder and uncertainty settled in the country and in the cities. These bundles of archives permitted David Marr to write a history ‘from the bottom up’ that reminds us that the contingent and the uncertain are present in the unwinding of history

Dans son maître livre *Vietnam 1945. A Quest for Power*,<sup>1</sup> David Marr intitulait le dernier chapitre (8) « *A State is born.* » Le deuxième ouvrage qu'il nous propose aujourd'hui, peut être lu comme la suite. Le 2 septembre 1945, la fondation de l'État (Kiến Quốc) est proclamée en même temps que l'indépendance du Vietnam (Độc Lập). Entre la proclamation de la République démocratique du Vietnam et la tragédie meurtrière du 19 décembre 1946, qui anéantit l'espoir d'un *modus vivendi* franco-vietnamien, comment l'État assumait-il ses responsabilités ? comment exerçait-il son pouvoir, comment étendit-il son autorité sur un pays et une population en proie à la révolution c'est à dire à l'anarchie et au chaos ? Le Parti communiste indochinois joua-t-il un rôle déterminant dans la révolution d'août 1945 et dans l'exercice du pouvoir étatique, à l'intérieur et sur le front diplomatique ? (Question qui laisse entrevoir l'évolution post 1954). Ces interrogations tissent la trame du récit-analyse que David Marr développe dans ces 721 pages d'une admirable densité et d'un intérêt qui ne faiblit jamais.

Pour comprendre les difficultés auxquelles les dirigeants de la jeune république furent confrontés sans y avoir été préparés, il faut lire le chapitre 6, « *Material Dreams and Realities* » où l'auteur expose de façon claire et nuancée les attentes d'un peuple soumis depuis huit décennies à la domination étrangère :

*« In times of revolution, hopes are aroused of great abundance, an end to fear about where the next meal will come from, the ability to enjoy the fruits of one's labor, and membership in a much larger effort to create a new order of production, exchange and community welfare. In Vietnam, material aspirations became linked with ideas of progress and modernity. In this future life, farmers would obtain pumps, manual laborers become truck drivers, merchants offer a cornucopia of commodities at fair prices, engineers alter the physical landscape, and scientists contribute to world knowledge.*

*However, revolution also releases fury at those countrymen who are seen to have profited from the colonial system, who live in comfort while others starve. People subject to such accusations lose property, even their lives. Or they may be allowed to show remorse, contribute resources to the revolution, learn the latest political slogans, and gain admission to a patriotic association. Much depends on local circumstance. Meanwhile, everyone must face scarcities of food and other essentials, pay taxes, and accept that the country future is replete with uncertainties. The government tries to increase output, manage some allocations, and ensure that the nascent army receives top resource priority. Long after the events of a revolution, archive dossiers sometimes allow us to tune in on village property disputes, small scale commodity transactions, and neighbourhood collection of taxes and donations" (315).*

Or les Vietnamiens nourrissaient leurs espoirs d'une vie meilleure dans un contexte économique, stratégique et politique extrêmement périlleux. À la fin de l'année 1944, le gouvernement général de l'Indochine prévoyait l'effondrement de l'économie pour l'année

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<sup>1</sup> David G. Marr, *Vietnam 1945: The Quest for Power* (University of California Press, 1995).

suivante, prévision confirmée par l'effroyable famine qui emporta des centaines de milliers, peut-être 1 million, de vies dans le Tonkin et le Nord Annam (dans son livre *Vietnam 1945*, David Marr est le premier qui a tenté de calculer sérieusement le nombre des victimes, 96-107).<sup>2</sup> La complémentarité des ressources alimentaires du nord et du sud (le grenier à riz du Nam Bô) avait disparu avec la destruction quasi complète des communications et des transports ferroviaires et maritimes.

Dans le registre géopolitique international et asiatique en particulier, la fin de la Seconde guerre mondiale fut aussi le début du réaménagement de l'échiquier où les États Unis et l'Union soviétique s'affrontèrent pendant cinq décennies tandis que la fin des empires coloniaux occidentaux ne se déroulait pas pacifiquement. En attendant, le sort de la jeune république dépendit du partage des zones d'influence décidée à Postdam sans consultation des peuples intéressés.

Au nord du 16<sup>ème</sup> parallèle, les troupes nationalistes chinoises chargées de désarmer les troupes japonaises, vécurent sur le pays pendant plusieurs mois ; s'étant emparé de la Banque de l'Indochine, elles privèrent l'État de ses ressources financières au moment où il en avait le plus besoin pour faire fonctionner l'appareil administratif, le système d'éducation et surtout mettre sur pieds une armée qui puisse préserver l'indépendance fraîchement acquise contre le retour offensif des Français, dès septembre 1945, dans le sud du pays. La situation était d'autant plus critique que l'abolition brutale du système fiscal colonial provoqua une réduction drastique des revenus de l'État.

En effet, au sud du 16<sup>ème</sup> parallèle, les Britanniques ayant reçu la même mission que les Chinois, favorisèrent le retour des Français qui commencèrent la reconquête du Nam Bô dès octobre 1945, occupant le grenier à riz, vital pour la RDVN.

Sur le plan intérieur, le clivage politique entre nationalistes et communistes (une réplique de la rupture durable qui avait éclaté en Chine en 1927 entre le Guomindang et le PCC), resurgit après le 9 mars 1945. L'éviction du gouvernement colonial et la restauration du gouvernement monarchique avaient permis à la mouvance politique nationaliste (*Đại Việt, Quang Phục Hội, Dân Xã Hội*) protégée par les Japonais, de ressurgir sur la scène publique, de s'exprimer et de se mouvoir sans entraves après sa « traversée du désert » dans la décennie 1930. La compétition entre groupes politiques et religieux était entremêlée à l'existence de minorités ethniques.

Par conséquent, le Parti communiste indochinois qui prit le pouvoir par l'entremise d'une organisation frontiste, *Độc Lập Đông Minh* (Ligue pour l'indépendance), fut confrontée à de nombreux facteurs potentiellement centrifuges qui lui imposaient une politique de large rassemblement. Action paradoxale, en apparence, puisqu'un parti communiste est l'avant-garde du prolétariat et prône la lutte des classes, l'organisation est exclusive et non inclusive. En fait, le ligne politique définie par Hô Chi Minh en 1941, celle de l'union nationale, était conforme à la directive du Komintern issue du 7<sup>ème</sup> congrès de 1935 :

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<sup>2</sup> *Vietnam 1945*, 96-107.

pratiquer une politique antifasciste en Europe, anti-japonaise en Chine. Elle supposait la mise en veilleuse de la révolution sociale, donc de la lutte des classes. Le fait que le gouvernement de Vichy et celui de Tokyo avaient noué des relations de coopération, facilita l'adoption de la politique kominternienne. En revanche, l'union de toutes les forces indépendantistes ne manqua pas de soulever l'opposition au sein du PCI mais aussi des Trotskystes Vietnamiens bien implantés au Nam Bô. Ce paradoxe, duplicité pour les adversaires, ne manqua pas d'obséder les interlocuteurs américains et les négociateurs français.

Marr invoque la faiblesse numérique du parti, 2 500 militants au maximum et les contradictions internes que la clandestinité, l'absence de liaison entre les cellules du nord et celles du sud et du centre, les failles dans les communications entre le comité central et la base comme en témoigna l'échec de l'insurrection de Cochinchine en 1940. Le déphasage entre le nord et le sud se répercuta dans le conflit vite résorbé mais réel entre les « anciens Viet Minh » et les « nouveaux Vietminh » allant jusqu'à des heurts ou des frictions entre les *Jeunesses d'Avant garde (Thanh Niên Tiền Phong)* et les *Jeunesses du Salut national (Thanh Niên Cứu Quốc)*. L'auteur est conduit sinon à nier, du moins à contester le rôle dirigeant du PCI dans la révolution, il va jusqu'à nier que le parti ait programmé la prise du pouvoir ; le PCI a été entraîné par les événements plus qu'il ne les a orientés et maîtrisés. En prenant le contre-pied de l'opinion établie, celle des partisans mais aussi des adversaires, David Marr passe à l'extrême inverse, source de controverse.

Un parti qui vise l'hégémonie, même si ce n'est pas ouvertement, est forcément tenté par l'usage de la coercition et de la terreur, c'est du moins l'accusation principale que les nationalistes et les trotskystes portèrent contre le Viet Minh. Cette version fut reprise par les premiers ouvrages comme celui du politologue Bernard Fall<sup>3</sup> et plus récemment par François Guillemot. Lorsqu'on se place dans cette perspective et que l'on adopte ces présupposés, la politique d'unité d'Ho Chi Minh, les avances que le Viet Minh fit au Việt Nam Quốc Dân Đảng et au Cách Mạng Đông Minh Hội, aux catholiques, aux Caodaïstes et au Hòa Hảo, n'étaient que manœuvres tactiques.

L'analyse de la période qui court de septembre 1945 à décembre 1946 conduit à ne pas se contenter d'explications générales qui relèvent plus de la dénonciation du dessein expansionniste du communisme international. David Marr lui a préféré une démarche empiriocriticiste, il a laissé de côté les idées reçus sur le communisme pour s'en tenir aux faits, *facts, facts and only facts*. Il a préféré dépouiller une masse documentaire impressionnante (les archives du « Gouvernement de fait »<sup>4</sup> qui étaient des documents

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<sup>3</sup> *The Viet-Minh Regime*, New York, 1956 ; *Dai Việt. Indépendance et révolution au Viêt - Nam*, Paris, Les Indes savantes, 2012

<sup>4</sup> Ces cartons contiennent la correspondance administrative de la période qui suit le 9 mars 1945 et les débuts de la RDVN : le gouvernement impérial ne parvient pas à asseoir son autorité, l'effervescence politique grandit de jour en jour, le désordre et l'incertitude s'installent dans les campagnes et dans les villes. Ces liasses d'archives ont permis à David Marr d'écrire une histoire « d'en bas » qui nous rappelle que le contingent et l'aléatoire sont présents dans le déroulement de l'histoire.

capturés par l'armée française après que celle-ci eut repris Hanoï et auxquelles l'auteur a bénéficié d'un accès privilégié) mais aussi la presse vietnamienne d'époque. Cette manne documentaire lui a permis de descendre jusqu'au niveau des villages et du peuple qui n'a pas peur de s'exprimer. Ces pages qui passent au crible la presse mais aussi les plaintes, pétitions, rapports d'enquêtes qui dénoncent les arrestations arbitraires, la séquestration des biens et des personnes, les exécutions sommaires autant que la corruption des nouveaux détenteurs de l'autorité, nous font découvrir une véritable opinion publique. En même temps ces voix multiples témoignent d'un grand souffle patriotique, d'un esprit de sacrifice et d'une participation citoyenne. Un lecteur français ne peut que se remémorer l'histoire de la révolution française.

Ni un seul appareil politique, le PCI dans ce cas, ni le seul appareil d'État d'ailleurs embryonnaire où les communistes avaient pris soin de détenir les postes-clés, n'auraient pu tenir tête à l'armée française s'il n'y avait pas eu la levée en masse du peuple vietnamien (voir le chapitre : *Mass Mobilization*) ni le choix par une majorité de rallier le Viet Minh. Aujourd'hui, des vétérans du parti et de l'armée qui regrettent l'influence pesante et rigidifiante de la Chine communiste à partir de 1950, vous disent « c'était le bon vieux temps » (en français).

Je n'ai qu'un seul regret à exprimer : David Marr a laissé de côté l'évolution socio-culturelle des années 1940-1945. Or si elle n'a pas été un moment d'innovation, elle a été celui de la diffusion de la modernité, de la réappropriation du passé national (en linguistique, en archéologie et en littérature) et en même temps de la réflexion sur l'avenir de la nation. Ce mouvement dans la culture apparaît comme le prélude et la composante d'un soulèvement politique accompli dans une ferveur quasi unanime, il éclaire également l'adhésion de l'intelligentsia moderniste à la révolution politique.

David Marr est visiblement convaincu que rien n'est pré-déterminé, ni fatal, « *I hope to convey the uncertainty and contingency, as well as the coherency and momentum, of revolutionary events in 1945-1946* » (4). C'est pourquoi David n'a pas seulement écrit un livre passionnant mais il nous donne également une belle leçon d'écriture de l'Histoire.



Review by Shawn McHale, George Washington University

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In the spring of 1991, at the French colonial archives in Aix-en-Provence, the archivist Lucette Vachier recommended that I look at the *Gouvernement de fait*<sup>1</sup> collection, as it might be of use to my research on colonial Vietnam. The collection did not have any official finding aid, but she lent me one, done in pen if I remember correctly, by David Marr. When I requested my first box of documents from this collection, I was rather astonished to find a muddy boot print on the pages of one dossier, presumably left by a French soldier. It appeared that, with the exception of Marr, no one had examined some of these files in over four decades.

The files, seized by the French military in 1946, were a revelation: they detailed the inner workings of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam's (DRV) government, but also had a hodge-podge of other material. I was particularly entranced reading through petitions from various individuals to the new government. As interesting as these documents were, however, they turned out to be mostly irrelevant to my research at the time. After skimming through many files in this collection for two weeks, I moved on.

I bring up this story because the *Gouvernement de fait* collection is one of the key archival sources at the heart of *Vietnam: State, War, and Revolution*, David Marr's new and weighty book based on research that goes back over twenty years. Also at the heart of this book are Vietnamese-language newspapers from the north and center of Vietnam. I cannot overestimate the importance of these two sources: Marr has, indeed, provided us with a window into the workings of a nascent DRV government, based on sources that have previously never been used. He has also shown us what was debated in newspapers from the time. Marr has supplemented these sources with a range of other works, primarily Vietnamese and French secondary sources, on this period. The centrality of these two sources of evidence shapes the book's interpretations in important ways.

Marr's book is a signal contribution to our understanding of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. It is based on a prodigious amount of research. Despite its title, the work is not really about Vietnam the *country* from September 1945 through December 1946. The book focuses heavily on the parts of Vietnam above the 16<sup>th</sup> parallel under Democratic Republic of Vietnam control, and the DRV's domestic and international challenges. Marr covers this very short period of time in 578 pages of text (supplemented by 120 pages of notes and bibliography). He begins his book with short sections on revolution, state formation, war, mass mobilization, the Indochinese Communist Party (ICP), and Ho Chi Minh, the first president of the DRV. But it is hard to tease out an overarching argument to the book from these short introductory pages.

Near the beginning of his book, David Marr states that "for many young scholars of Vietnam

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<sup>1</sup> The "Gouvernement de fait" was the *de facto* government of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, established on September 2, 1945, which was not recognized as legitimate by the French government.

in the West there seems to be an assumption that amidst all the Communist Party propaganda nothing of continuing significance can be found out about the DRV, Việt Minh, or the resistance” (xvi). This is a strangely dismissive comment. It is easy enough to cite examples of scholars for whom this is not true (e.g. François Guillemot, Christopher Goscha, Alec Holcombe, Tuong Vu, Ken Maclean, Christian Lentz, not to mention the work of a few middle-aged scholars like myself.). The comment begs the question as to what is the continuing significance of 1946. Marr is partially successful in answering this question. One also wonders where Marr situates his book in a larger scholarship and whether he takes issue with particular approaches to the DRV. The reader will find many other scholars cited for information, but we get few specific and explicit engagements with their *arguments*. I shall return to this point in due course.

So what does *Vietnam: State, War, and Revolution* argue? Taking the totality of the book into account, it is obvious that Marr moves away from an ICP-driven narrative of events, and shows that a broad array of Vietnamese individuals and groups shaped the events of 1945 and 1946. He recaptures events that have often been forgotten or partially told, such as the brief democratic stirrings of late 1945 and early 1946. The book as a whole is a dense, state-centered narrative that begins with a discussion of the National Assembly and its debates over the constitution, and ends with the mass mobilization for war. We see a DRV state that, despite enormous challenges, seems to function reasonably effectively, but that is also ‘winging it’ – figuring out, on the fly, how to govern, how to create an army, how to be diplomats, and the like.

Marr’s approach to this complicated story is to write thematic chapters, then to divide these chapters into multiple subthematic sections. It is not always easy to see the thread linking these sections. Take, for example, the issue of the relationships among the ICP, the state, and the Việt Minh. This is diffused across multiple chapters. It is not until page 442 that Marr introduces the chapter on the ICP and the Việt Minh. This would have been an ideal chapter to place near the beginning of the book, not the end.

Arguments aside, this book is notable for its empirical richness. Those of us who enjoy a rich, fact filled narrative will find much to enjoy. Nuggets abound. One of the most intriguing parts of this book, for example, are the chapters on the National Assembly and its debates over the constitution, as well as the attempts to lay out the responsibilities and powers of different parts of the state. Equally intriguing is Marr’s vivid discussions of the conferences in Dalat (April 17-May 11 1946) and Fontainebleau (July 6-September 12, 1946), or the chapter on repression of opponents. We learn all sorts of other bits of information, such as how Ho Chi Minh decided to extend the colonial-era state monopolies on the production of alcohol, salt, and opium (357-65). At times, however, the love of odd facts may go too far, as when Marr, writing about the 1<sup>st</sup> battalion in the Hanoi region, writes that “Company personnel sheets contain fifteen categories of information on each battalion member” – and then proceeds to list every single category (148).

In a book with nearly 600 pages of text, it is impossible for a reviewer to do justice to all the fascinating material unearthed and discussed by Marr. It is worth underlining Marr’s achievement in unearthing this material and presenting much information, in clear prose,

that will be new to readers. To evaluate the book I will concentrate on four topics. First is the issue of sources. Second, flowing from the first, is the heavy northern-centeredness of the book, and the significance of this fact. Third, I will look at the top-down nature of the book. Fourth, I will examine the question of opposition and civil war.

## THE QUESTION OF SOURCES

As I have stated, two sets of materials, the *Gouvernement de fait* files and the newspapers from the north, heavily shape Marr's narrative. The *Gouvernement de fait* collection contains communications sent up to the central government in Hanoi, and communications sent back. The use of newspapers broadens the perspective of the book. At the same time, it is important to note that Marr heavily relies on newspapers from the north: his list of serials consulted indicates thirty-five from the North (twenty-six from Hanoi), five from the Center (none south of Quảng Ngãi), and none from the South. The newspapers – and Marr relies on a few of them, like *Cứu Quốc* (National Salvation), a great deal – tend to replicate this Hanoi-centered and central ICP/Việt Minh view of reality.

Marr supplements these two sets of primary sources with a wide range of other primary and secondary ones. Nonetheless, without these two major sources, the book would not have been written. This reliance on these two sources should clue us into two key points. First, this book does not cover all of Vietnam equally thoroughly. The northern heartland (i.e. the Red River delta) is covered in great detail. The center is addressed, but in no great depth. The south is covered in a limited fashion. Second, the reliance on these two sources allows a level of detail unmatched by any other book on the inner workings of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam in the early years of the revolution. Taking these two points together, it should be obvious this book focuses on the heartland of the DRV state, and should be read in such a light.

Interestingly enough, Marr does not use the ubiquitous Party provincial histories. These sources are problematic, in that they can obfuscate as much as enlighten, and never give communist opponents a fair hearing. Read carefully, however, they can be invaluable sources on the challenges faced by the Communist Party in rural areas. Marr also uses Vietnamese memoirs somewhat sparingly. I don't think of this as a particular weakness of the book, as Vietnamese memoirs published by the communist party are highly selective in their interpretations. I would simply note that for southern Vietnam in this period, contending narratives of what happened in 1945 and 1946 are useful, as different personalities (e.g. Trần Văn Giàu, Nguyễn Thanh Sơn, Huỳnh Văn Mội) have penned works or contributed to biographies that challenge in places the Party's received story about what happened in those years.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> See Trần Văn Giàu, *Hồi ký Trần Văn Giàu* [Memoirs of Tran Van Giäu], (<http://www.diendan.org/tai-lieu/hoi-ky-t-v-giau/>), Nguyen Thanh Sơn, *Trọn đời theo Bác Hồ : hồi ức của một người con đồng bằng sông Cửu Long* [A life in the footsteps of Uncle Ho: A memoir of a son of the Mekong delta] (Ho Chi Minh City: Tuổi Trẻ, 2005), Vương Liêm, *Huỳnh Văn Mội: người con trung dũng của Đức Hòa – Chợ Lớn* [Huynh Van Mot: A loyal and brave sone of Duc Hoa and Cho Lon] (Hanoi: NXB Quân Đội Nhân Dân, 2006)

Sources drive one's research, but it is also true that scholars pick and choose what sources to foreground and what topics to cover. Marr notes, for example, that a range of sources, including petitions, "can be mined for a lively social history of Vietnam during this period" (577). This book, however, focuses on political history and leaves such topics to others. Thus it does not examine in any depth the social dynamics of rural areas or popular understandings of rural challenges.

A second major issue that this review examines is the heavy northern focus of Marr's book. This emphasis is reasonable, in the sense that the DRV state was anchored in the north. In the north, the Chinese occupying army under General Lu Han protected the DRV from attack by the French and allowed the Nationalist Party to flourish. What was true for the north, however, did not always apply to other regions of the country. In the south, the French had free rein to crack down on dissent. There, the ICP-led Việt Minh was one of several major contestants for power, and the ICP itself was split. This region had more complicated ethnic, religious, and political divisions than the north, ones that led to political dynamics that were far different from the north. Marr's book, centered on the northern heartland of the DRV, with some attention to the center, inconsistently adds in the history of the south. .

I will focus my comments on the south in particular, since I have been carrying out research on this region. The situation in the south in 1946 was sharply different from that in the north. The book addresses some of these differences, but it neither conveys the utter fractiousness of rural politics in the South adequately nor considers their implications. My recent research, for example, not in print when Marr's book was in press, underlines the significance of Khmer-Vietnamese violence in the Mekong delta and Cambodia in this period.<sup>3</sup> Other scholarship has shed new light on the emerging struggle among the French, Việt Minh, Cao Đài, Hòa Hảo, Bình Xuyên, Catholics, and others.<sup>4</sup>

The south was where war first broke out.<sup>5</sup> Early in the book, Marr notes the significance of

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<sup>3</sup> See Shawn McHale, "Ethnicity, Violence, and Khmer-Vietnamese Relations: the Significance of the Lower Mekong Delta, 1757-1954," *Journal of Asian Studies*, May 2013: 367-390.

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, Christopher Goscha, *Vietnam: Un état né de la guerre* (Paris: Armand Colin, 2011); Christopher Goscha, "A 'Popular' Side of the Vietnamese Army: General Nguyen Binh in the South," in Christopher Goscha and Benoît de Tréglodé, eds., *Naissance d'un État-Parti: Le Việt Nam depuis 1945* (Paris: Les Indes Savantes, 2004): 325-354; François Guillemot, "Autopsy of a Massacre: On a Political Purge in the Early Days of the Indochina War (Nam Bo 1947)," *European Journal of East Asian Studies* 9.2 (2010): 225-265.

<sup>5</sup> But cf. Stein Tønneson, who has argued that the French essentially coerced the Vietnamese to launch their December 19, 1946 attacks, and that this should be seen as the "start" of the war. Stein Tønneson, *Vietnam 1946: How the War Began* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2009). Tønneson's view echoes both that of Philippe Devillers (please cite his work here) [and the Vietnamese Communist Party, for whom December 19, 1946 marks the "official" beginning of the Resistance War (*Kháng chiến*). this last point is a non sequitur and could be deleted]

the south when he speaks of the “reality of the war in the south and the threat of war in the north” (8). He does not, however, go into any detail about the war for the Mekong delta, where many battles took place in late 1945 and 1946. French losses (killed, dead, or disappeared) from October 1945 through the end of November 1946, totaled 2896.<sup>6</sup> If we add the Japanese who fought under British, then French, command, the number of dead on the Allied/ French side rises to over 3000. (To put this number in context: American deaths in the Iraq war from 2003 to 2011 have been about 4,500.) The great majority of these casualties came in Nam Bộ/ Cochinchina and the southern part of Trung Bộ/Annam. Leaving aside the shelling of Haiphong, it would be plausible to assume that the Việt Minh and other Vietnamese forces lost over 10,000 dead in this period from French on Vietnamese violence alone. Unless I missed something, nowhere in Marr’s tome do we find such statistics or estimates, which would have helped the reader contextualize the significance of this phase of the war.

Finally, the far south is where the Việt Minh encountered a string of momentous failures – but learned from them. The first failure was of Party and Việt Minh unity. By 1946, the DRV state had firmly implanted itself in the north. In the south, however, the DRV/ Việt Minh amalgam was far more fragile than in the north – it fell apart in early 1946 under French military attacks, a failure abetted by the fact that the communists were split into ‘Liberation’ and ‘Vanguard’ factions. (The temporary destruction of the DRV/ Việt Minh in the south in 1946 and its descent into chaos is not addressed by Marr, but the Party split is.) A second political failure was in co-opting potential rivals. In the south, an excess of coercion in 1945 and 1946 turned potential allies like the Cao Đài and Hòa Hảo against the Việt Minh. This was one of the biggest Việt Minh failures of the war, but the dynamic of this violence – which predates the public split among contestants in 1947 -- is unaddressed in the book. Finally – and this is partially addressed -- the Việt Minh began to learn how to fight a guerrilla war in the South and the southern part of Central Vietnam, but learned the hard way. These were precious lessons when full-scale fighting finally broke out in the north.

In short, war in the south, accompanied by initial Việt Minh failures, provided critical lessons for the state in the north. It is no surprise, then, that by December 1946, when war in the north finally broke out, that the DRV had assimilated many of these lessons and was able to avoid a debacle. More prolonged attention to the significance of these negative lessons and their implications would have sharpened Marr’s argument.

A third major topic to address is how Marr’s book provides a top-down, state- and Party-centered story of the events of 1946, albeit one that challenges the existing scholarship. Marr’s book is written against the canonical view expressed in official histories coming out of Vietnam today: the communist party led the August Revolution of 1945, consolidated the

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<sup>6</sup> I calculate French losses from tables for killed, died, and disappeared in Commandant Gilbert Bodinier, *Le retour de la France en Indochine (1945-1946): textes et documents* (Château de Vincennes, SHAT, 1987) pp. 81-82. I include here the statistic for « disappeared » which seems to mean persons who were assumed to be dead but whose deaths had not been confirmed.

revolution in 1945 and 1946, and launched the Resistance War on December 19<sup>th</sup>, 1946, a war that would only end with the victory at Điện Biên Phủ in 1954. These histories always mention ‘traitors’ and reactionaries’ opposing the leadership of the communist party, but are noticeably unbalanced when examining the contesting views expressed by Vietnamese in 1945 and 1946. In many Vietnamese-language histories, in fact, the entirety of the period from September 1945 through December 19, 1946 is hurried over. It is the achievement of Marr’s book that he brings back some of the developments in Vietnam of that year, and shows why they cannot be passed over.

In his introduction, Marr writes that “this is the first study in English and French about formation of the DRV state, the lively newspaper culture, and the 1945-46 activities of Việt Minh groups and other organizations” (15). It is true that no one else has looked at the newspaper culture of these years or paid much attention to Việt Minh groups at the very beginning of the Resistance, so Marr’s work is a crucial step in that direction. I found it puzzling, however, that the book does not engage the *arguments* of the most significant work on the DRV state, Christopher Goscha’s *Vietnam: Un état né de la guerre, 1945-54*.<sup>7</sup> It does, however, cite *information* from multiple Goscha publications. This is a missed opportunity. Goscha’s book and essays are constructed using an extensive archival base of DRV primary documents. His core argument is simple but powerful: war-making and state-making go hand in hand. He explains how the center was linked to localities through an administrative hierarchy, but also how horizontal linkages among parts of the state were established, and how well they worked in practice.

One of the most useful concepts to come out of Goscha’s book (suggested by an anonymous reviewer) was that of the “archipelago state” (*état archipel*).<sup>8</sup> Goscha notes that the state was unevenly present across the countryside. Large parts of Vietnam south of the 16<sup>th</sup> parallel were outside the control of this state in 1945 and 1946, but this was even true of large parts of Vietnam above this line. (If one reads the eye-opening diary of an early DRV Finance Minister, Lê Văn Hiến, it becomes clear that control of the central state apparatus over some provinces could sometimes be weak to non-existent in the early years of the war.)<sup>9</sup> Goscha also disaggregates the state, looking at how particular functions, such as intelligence and policing, got off the ground.

Goscha’s arguments about the character of the DRV state make eminent sense to me. It is not clear what the author’s position is on these matters. I would argue that variation of state capacity across space is a key issue in understanding Vietnam in 1946, but *Vietnam: State, War, and Revolution* barely touches on it.

Marr notes “the fundamental ambiguity in the new political system” (451) in which the

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<sup>7</sup> Christopher Goscha, *Vietnam: Un état né de la guerre* (Paris: Armand Colin, 2013).

<sup>8</sup> Goscha, *Vietnam*, 63.

<sup>9</sup> Lê Văn Hiến, *Nhật ký của một bộ trưởng* [Diary of a Minister] (Đà Nẵng, 1995, two volumes).

boundaries among the ICP, Việt Minh, and the state were not clear. At the core of Marr's book is an argument that the DRV had state capacity, and that this state was not simply an appendage of the ICP. This is a plausible argument to make. First, as Marr notes, the ICP only had around 5,000 members in 1945. Some of them had just been liberated from jail in August 1945. It was thus impossible for the ICP to 'capture' the state and bend it to its will at all levels of the hierarchy. There simply were not enough communists to go around. The Communists would have to bide their time, rapidly build up their membership, and then – and only then – purge large numbers of non-communists from state ranks. This issue of Party building (which is not addressed in depth by the book) proved to be central in the long run.

As for the state itself, it is often not clear, from the narrative, how local representatives of the state reacted *in general* to the blizzard of decrees and recommendations coming out of Hanoi. What, exactly, was the nature of DRV authority? Did local provincial and subprovincial administrators essentially tell Hanoi bureaucrats to get lost much of the time? Or, on the contrary, was there a tight link between center and province? What sorts of mechanisms were in place to ensure that the provinces did not devolve into autonomous units? What were the fiscal responsibilities of provincial units? Of the revenue collected, what percentage did local state units send up to the central state? Were semi-autonomous militias the dominant coercive force in the countryside? How much variation was there among provinces, their challenges, and their capacities? I had a hard time, for example, forming a clear picture of whether Nam Định province had significantly different challenges than Hải Dương or Phú Thọ. Could one distinguish core areas of control in the Red River delta, areas with tenuous control, and those that were essentially autonomous from the central state? Besides taxes (covered in the book) what was the popular reaction to the exactions of the state? These are not picky questions. They are central to an evaluation of how well the DRV state 'worked.'

Chapter 9 on mass mobilization, is a good example of the book's top-down approach. It focuses heavily on the state and party use of media (newspapers and radio), and also discusses a scattering of events in Huế and Hanoi. The chapter does not address the nuts and bolts of organizing. We do not get a clear sense of how much the average Vietnamese in rural areas followed these campaigns, the numbers mobilized by province, the provincial organisms involved, or the variation in provincial campaigns. The chapter seems to assume that the populace followed campaigns because the population's interests and those of the state coincided.

This is not to suggest that the book does not deploy evidence about localities -- quite the contrary. It is chock full of anecdotes about events in a wide range of places. But with a few exceptions – material on Hanoi, Haiphong, Hue, and perhaps Saigon – the book rarely lingers over any one place. The reader thus gets a schematic sense of change over time in the areas where most inhabitants lived: rural Vietnam.

The character of the state and Party in this year is related to a fourth major issue: the repression of opponents and the development of a civil war. In *The Logic of Violence in Civil War*, Stathis Kalyvas notes that the scale of a study (e.g. a village study versus national

level one) affects the analysis of civil war: “almost every macrohistorical account of civil war points to the importance of preexisting popular allegiances for the war’s outcome, yet almost every microhistorical account points to a host of endogenous mechanisms, whereby allegiances and identities tend to result from the war or are radically transformed by it.”<sup>10</sup> This observation applied to Vietnam in 1946 as well. The question at stake is simple: does *Vietnam: State, War, and Revolution* focus on national-level ideological contestation while ignoring the complexity of local conflicts? An interesting way to examine this question is to look at what Marr calls “Dealing with Domestic Opposition,” in chapter 7 of the book.

One of the issues all scholars of this period have to confront is the extent to which resistance to the French was unified or splintered. Chapter 7 examines the extensive practices of repression, from arrests to setting up detention camps to assassination. This is a wide-ranging chapter, one that is rather loose in its construction. Structural issues aside, the chapter undermines the canonical view (in official Vietnamese accounts, that is) that the masses of Vietnamese supported the revolution and only ‘reactionaries’ and ‘traitors’ did not. Reality, Marr shows, was much more complicated. In its detail, the chapter does a great service to Vietnamese studies. For example, I do not remember any previous work on the detention camp system in this period.

Marr does not situate this repression in the context of civil war. Some individuals – and I would provisionally put myself, François Guillemot, and Chris Goscha in this category – see the 1945 to 1947 period as both a civil war *and* a war against the French. In his key essay on the “fracture vietnamienne” of 1945-46, for example, Guillemot analyzes the process by which the ICP and Việt Minh got rid of their nationalist enemies and created the fundamental rift that shaped post-1946 politics.<sup>11</sup>

Guillemot even takes a stab at quantifying the deaths from this civil war. He estimates that 5,000 to 50,000 Vietnamese were victims of the “revolutionary fury” from 1945 to 1947: in other words, Vietnamese-on-Vietnamese violence.<sup>12</sup> (Guillemot’s lower limit – 5,000 – seems implausibly low to me.) Marr is acutely aware of these killings, which he discusses in his chapter on repression of dissent. But he does not engage Guillemot’s argument conceptually. While he provides scattered estimates, at particular points in time, of detainees, he gives no rough estimates for the overall numbers of killed or detained in camps, or even estimates for the core provinces of the Red River delta that are at the heart of this study. This task may well have been impossible, but from my own research, I’d be surprised if the actual number killed in Vietnamese on Vietnamese violence (and

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<sup>10</sup> Stathis Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence in Civil War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 3.

<sup>11</sup> François Guillemot, “Au coeur de la fracture vietnamienne: L’élimination de l’opposition nationaliste et anticolonialiste dans le Nord du Viet Nam (1945-1946),” in Christopher Goscha et Benoît de Tréglodé, eds., *Naissance d’un État-Parti/ Birth of a Party State: Vietnam Since 1945* (Paris: Les Indes Savantes, 2004): 175-216.

<sup>12</sup> Guillemot, “Au coeur de la fracture vietnamienne,” 209.



Vietnamese-Khmer violence) throughout Vietnam from May 1945 to December 1946 was less than 15,000. Such numbers suggest that Vietnam was suffering from a developing civil war as well as a conflict with the French, and this dual character of the conflict found its roots in the events of 1945 and 1946.

Whether we call such developments a civil war or not, I would argue that when Marr discusses “dealing with domestic opposition,” he probably conflates issues. Take detention. Can all of it be thought of as a reaction to domestic dissent? How many detainees were arrested for looting? Were some of them common criminals or members of the underworld? Were some of the groups that called themselves “Việt Minh” really just gangs of thieves?

I would make a similar argument (about conflation of issues) when looking at killing. I see three distinct processes. The first is targeted political killing. The ICP creation of ‘Honor Squads’ in May 1945 to kill specific ‘traitors,’ discussed by Marr in an earlier book<sup>13</sup>, is an example of this process, one that continued to shape Vietnamese political life in 1946 and beyond. The second process is indiscriminate killing that was clearly carried out by political parties/ movements, itself justified by the rhetoric against ‘traitors’ and ‘reactionaries’ that Marr discusses. The major early example comes from central Vietnam, where a rogue Việt Minh unit in Quảng Ngãi massacred almost 3,000 Cao Đài followers in August 1945. Such violence was no aberration, and was indeed promoted by Party Secretary Trường Chinh in 1946:

The third weak point of the August Revolution was that the revolutionary government, once established, did not resolutely get rid of the reactionary Vietnamese traitors, did not firmly deal with the French colonialists and their henchmen. The exceptions were a few places, such as Quảng Ngãi, where insurgents implemented policies of ‘wiping out the reactionaries’ but got out of hand; elsewhere, our policies were spineless.<sup>14</sup>

The idea that the Quảng Ngãi massacres were fine in theory but just “got out of hand” is astonishing, but such was the official ICP view in 1946. However we evaluate Trường Chinh’s statement, the examples given above would seem to confirm Marr’s macro-level view that the Việt Minh was targeting a domestic ideological opposition with its killing.

It is incontestable, however, that this is not the only kind of violence found in Vietnam in 1946. A third process was at work: violence welling from the bottom-up, far beyond the control of any central authority. It probably was motivated, in many cases, by very local and particularistic concerns. It was carried out by gangs and by the hundreds of armed groups existing in Vietnam from August 1945 onwards, many of which may have claimed to be “Việt Minh” but which were usually under limited or no centralized authority. In the

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<sup>13</sup> David Marr, *Vietnam 1945: The Quest for Power* (Berkeley: California, 1995), 232-237.

<sup>14</sup> Trường Chinh, *Cách mạng tháng tám* [The August Revolution] 5<sup>th</sup> printing of the first edition, 1946 (Hanoi: NXB Sự Thật, 1955), 37-8.

south, for example, Khmer massacred Vietnamese – and local Việt Minh groups, expressly violating DRV/ ICP orders, massacred Khmer in turn. Can we blame the ICP or Việt Minh, let alone other political parties, for this last form of killing? Not really. It is common in situations of great tumult (e.g. Partition in India, 1947), where ethnic or political targeting can spiral out of the control of its original instigators. It is very common, in such situations, for local grievances to drive killings: hatred of a landlord, fights over land, antagonism to a capricious village chief. Not surprisingly, killers in such cases sometimes legitimate these killings by reference to national level political cleavages.

It is not just the kind of violence, but the representation of it, that concerns me. In a far different context, Alain Corbin chastised his fellow French historians for their approach to violence: “historians have tended to construct, out of the last century, a narrative that empties the event of its violence and bitterness. . . . Slaughter is pasteurized, the blood of revolution carefully washed away.”<sup>15</sup> I would argue the same failing afflicts much – but not all – of the work on Vietnam in war. In the south in late 1945 and into 1946, we find repeated accounts of summary executions, mutilations, beheadings, and drowning by stringing prisoners together and dumping them in rivers. The revolution had its dark underside. I wonder whether Marr considers this type of situation to have been present as well in the north and the center, and if so, why it does not appear in the book. Was this present as well in the north and center? If so, why exclude it?

Near the end of his book, Marr writes that “it is difficult to draw firm conclusions about what farmers, artisans, or shopkeepers were thinking in 1945-46, given that almost all our available sources were created by a minority of urban, educated Vietnamese” (565). This is an important reminder of the limits of the sources at our command. Much of what passes as the history of the inhabitants of Vietnam is, in fact, the record of its small literate minority.

I come away from this book with much admiration for the research that has gone into it. There clearly is no other book out there, using Vietnamese sources, that gives us as riveting a view of northern Vietnam in 1946, and gives us a context for evaluating the war that followed. It is obvious that the period from September 1945 to December 1946 had a pivotal impact on the wars that would wrack Vietnam (and Indochina as a whole) for over 40 years. Readers should enjoy this book for its empirical richness, and its many insights into Vietnam in 1946, while realizing that the arguments over Vietnam in that year have not been fully resolved.

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<sup>15</sup> Alain Corbin, *Le village des cannibales*, 137.

David Marr's newest work, *Vietnam: State, War, Revolution (1945-1946)*, must be considered his fourth masterwork on Vietnamese history. It follows his *Vietnamese Anti-colonialism, 1885-1925*, *Vietnamese Tradition on Trial, 1920-1945* (1981) and *Vietnam 1945- The Quest for Power* (1995) thanks to its extensive and rich resources.<sup>1</sup> If Keith Taylor's *The Birth of Vietnam* deals with the birth of the Vietnamese in their ancient history, Marr discusses how the modern birth of the Vietnamese people happened.<sup>2</sup> With the proclamation of Independence and formation of Democratic Republic of Vietnam in 1945/1946, the Vietnamese people were reborn. The most important thing was that the revitalization of a nation had been done by the Vietnamese themselves in the so-called situation "*ngan can treo soi toc*" (a thousand kilos hang by one fibre of hair), as they were occupied, dominated, 'assimilated' and divided by the 'mission' of Frenchmen to help 'civilize' them. They were not even named Vietnamese, but Annamite, which was a slight.

The book examines only one year, but a most important one, and the most difficult of Vietnamese contemporary history, as Vietnamese carried out the August revolution, formed, for the first in their history, a government based on democratic principle of ruling, the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV), and went immediately afterwards into the war against the return of the French. Revolution, state, and war were three tremendous and interrelated questions that the Vietnamese had to deal with within very the short time from September 1945 to December 1946.

Marr's main argument is that the so-called revolution was in fact "a spontaneous welling up" (3) of social revolutionary sentiments and behavior in Vietnam that some individuals had joined their "revolution by chance, not by choice or design"(4), despite the fact that the Vietminh saw national liberation as the first step on the road to socialist revolution. This argument is contradicted by the actions of Truong Chinh, one of the main leaders of this revolution and the ideologue of Vietnamese government later. On September 12, 1945, i.e. ten days after the proclamation of Independence, Truong Chinh published in the newspaper "*Liberation Flag*" (*Co Giai phong*) an article entitled "Revolution or Coup d'état" which stated: "We have accomplished the August Revolution." Later in 1946, all his related articles were published in a book *The August Revolution* to confirm that what happened in Vietnam in August 1945 was in fact a real revolution.<sup>3</sup> "The spontaneous welling up theory" of Marr challenges the role of the Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV) as initiator, organizer, and leader of Vietnam. From 1995 to 2007, the CPV decided to publish the *Complete Collection of Party Documents (Van kien Dang Toan tap)*, consisting of 54 volumes that

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<sup>1</sup> David G. Marr, *Vietnamese Anti-colonialism, 1885-1925* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971); *Vietnamese Tradition on Trial, 1920-1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981); and *Vietnam 1945- The Quest for Power* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995)

<sup>2</sup> Keith Taylor, *The Birth of Vietnam* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991).

<sup>3</sup> Truong Chinh, *Cách mạng Tháng Tám (The August Revolution)*, Hanoi, NXB ST, 1946.

cover the historical events from 1924 through 1995.<sup>4</sup> In this Collection there are many documents that appeared for the first time. One can find a number of documents in volumes 6 and 7 that relate to the preparation and guidelines for revolution, as well as the leadership of the Indochina Communist Party. For example in one *Working Instruction (Chỉ thị về công tác)* in December 1941, the Central Committee asked local party cadres in urban areas “to implement the tactics of Trojan horse” by penetrating into the enemy’s organizations to spread propaganda, and persuade, and attract the masses for revolution.<sup>5</sup> The documents of the CPV also described how the CPV mobilized a million Vietnamese within more than two weeks from 13 to 28 August 1945 in their effort to gain power. The narratives and memoirs of witnesses tell about how people voluntarily, cheerfully, and actively joined the Vietminh and the August revolution led by the Vietminh without consideration of their background, education, religion, age, gender, welfare, or political attitude. For all of them the revolution meant becoming masters of their land, and the creators of something new.<sup>6</sup> They were in fact not a “revolutionary crowd [used] as a vital political weapon” (4) as Marr argues.

The formation of the state was a more complicated and comprehensive issue for Vietnam because it required not only commitments from its own citizens, but also recognition by other states. The bitter reality was that no power in the world recognized the DRV, instead recognizing French sovereignty over Indochina. There were different points of view represented by Ho Chi Minh to hope for a mutually advantageous Franco-Vietnamese treaty, but to prepare for the worst—a war without allies, Vo Nguyen Giap, Commander General of National Army, appealed to the U.S. and China for support (more openly than Ho), and Nguyen Luong Bang, Director of the Vietminh General Headquarters, insisted on fighting the French. David Marr does not answer the question as to why Vietnam decided to choose the form of a democratic republic for its first government. This decision is explained by the fact that Ho Chi Minh was influenced by the French and other revolutions during his thirty years of experiences abroad. If Ho was influenced by these revolutions, then why was the power of the state centralized, and not divided between executive, legislative and judicial branches. The structure of the state was hierarchical whereby the regional and province revolutionary committee were responsible for the executive body, and became the linchpin of the new administration. It is also interesting to raise the question of why the so-called committee hierarchies which emerged in later 1945 could function thanks to their depth and resilience, but also could go in different directions, cancel each other out, or even fight each other, but even so remains in today’s Vietnam. This can be explained by the nature of the Vietminh, a solidarity front of all social strata without “classism,” a

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<sup>4</sup> Pham Quang Minh, The meaning of the Complete Collection of Party Documents, Journal of Vietnamese Studies, University of California Press, Vol.5, Issue 2, pp.208-218.

<sup>5</sup> Dang Cong san Viet Nam (The Communist Party of Vietnam), Van kien Dang Toan Tap (The Complete Collection of Party Documents), Volume 7, National Political Publishing House, Hanoi 2000, p.220-221.

<sup>6</sup> Hoi Khoa hoc Lich su Viet Nam (Vietnam Historical Science Association), 19/8. Cach mang la sang tao (19 August. Revolution means Creation), Hanoi 1995.

phenomenon witnessed during the land reform of 1953-1956 whereby the CPV tried to carry out a reform based on the classification of the rural population according to their political attitudes rather than their actual ownership. Due to this “classism” a quite large number of wrongly classified landlords were killed.<sup>7</sup> Marr is correct to explain that due to the circumstances of war, there were no elections for the National Assembly until January 1946, and the same happened to the provincial and commune People’s Councils. In such a situation, what was done by the Vietnamese central government by the end of 1945 was “impressive policy momentum” (5). Due to its long tradition of monarchy and maintaining historical records, the Vietnamese state from its beginning insisted on national sovereignty, territorial integrity, and a common identity. But, as Marr points out, the DRV did not issue any decrees relating to the land and maritime boundaries of the new state. He also mentions that the legal concept of sovereignty was unknown to most Vietnamese, who had no doubt that Nam Bo (Cochinchina) was an integral part of Vietnam, while the French refused to accept this.

According to Marr, the goal of the Communist party was to control the entire Vietnamese nation, both people and state. He argues that it was too ambitious, and followed the Soviet precedent in terms of occupying all power positions, even after its dissolution in November 1945. However, it is important to recognize that the communists, as opposed to others, could communicate and plan secretly with each other without being accused of disloyalty or treason, but Marr does not ask why they could cooperate in such way. It is also doubtful that the Viet Minh government followed the Soviet precedent in 1945. The fact was that in his Declaration of Independence Ho Chi Minh did not mention any words about the Russian October Revolution, but cited the Independence Declaration of Independence of the American revolution in 1776 and the French Revolution in 1791. The distrust of Joseph Stalin toward Ho Chi Minh can be traced back to the time from the end of 1920s to 1930s, when Nguyen Ai Quoc, later President Ho Chi Minh, was isolated in Moscow without being assigned to do any thing. Besides, the Soviet Union was concentrated on the main stage of Europe rather than faraway Asia where Chinese influence after 1949 was increasing.

An interesting argument of Marr’s is that the war against re-colonization by the French in fact changed the nature of the Vietnamese revolution and the DRV state. Due to the priority of the struggle against the aggressors and their allies, the DRV had to limit the enforcement of a series of plans to transform society, develop the economy, and create a new culture. The most challenging difficulty was that it had to fight alone in circle of enemies. With the formation of the State of Vietnam led by Bao Dai and supported by the French, and with the escalation of the Cold War, the war between the DRV and France became more complicated through its new added dimensions of civil and international conflict. The war required a war economy. In order to serve the needs of regular army units the government had to carry out a number of measures, from the continuation of most of the former colonial taxes,

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<sup>7</sup> The number of landlords who died during the land reform 1953-1956 ranged from 2,500 (Gareth Porter, *The Myth of the Bloodbath: North Vietnam’s Land Reform Reconsidered*, *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars*, September 1973) to 675,000 persons (Hoang Van Chi, *From Colonialism to Communism: A Case History of North Vietnam*, Praeger 1964.)

through voluntary contributions and the launching of two national fundraising efforts, as well as the introduction of a defense contribution. In order to encourage people, the government carried out a wide range of mass mobilization efforts that were advanced by a myriad of oral encounters because up to 90 percent of population was illiterate. Marr concludes that most Vietnamese believed in national independence and wanted to contribute in some way to making that independence a reality. However, there was also the option of moving to a French-controlled town.

Marr questions the role of the Indochinese Communist Party by suggesting that when the opportune moment came in mid-August 1945, the party lacked the capacity to engineer widespread takeovers. With only 5,000 members, the ICP had no hope of controlling the DRV state. After the dissolution of the ICP in November 1945, according to Marr, there was an unaccountability of the party to the government, and many party members in central and southern Vietnam were left confused and demoralized for months. In order to solve this problem, in late May 1946 the Viet Minh decided to form the Vietnam National Alliance (*Hoi Lien hiep quoc dan Viet Nam- Lien Viet*). Even after this, according to Marr, ICP authority within the state apparatus was still quite limited. This fact contradicts the argument of Marr about the “spontaneous voluntarism” (11) of the August Revolution. As mentioned earlier, without the thorough preparation by the Viet Minh and ICP, there would have been no revolution at all.

In short, *Vietnam: State, War, Revolution* is without a doubt a new important record in researching Vietnamese history. With its bottom-up approach, the book opens a new dimension in our understanding the fundamental problems involved in the wars, revolution, and state-building of Vietnam. This book must be translated and widely publicized in Vietnam for Vietnamese historians and the Vietnamese people.

Review by Tuong Vu, University of Oregon

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David Marr's 700-page book is no doubt a major accomplishment. This book continues his previous volume on the year 1945 when the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) was established at the end of the Pacific War.<sup>1</sup> In this one, Marr conducts in-depth research on the politics of state making, defense, foreign relations, economy, power consolidation, and mass mobilization from late 1945 to late 1946. His sources primarily come from the documents of the DRV captured by the French in late 1946 and the Vietnamese-language materials available at the Vietnam National Library in Hanoi. Marr is interested in accumulating as much historical detail as possible rather than providing explanations for particular events. While devoting ample space in his book to key political figures such as DRV President Ho Chi Minh or Indochinese Communist Party's General Secretary Truong Chinh, Marr also undertakes considerable efforts to capture the feelings and activities of a wide range of social actors, including intellectuals, local officials, and ordinary people. The result is an extremely rich and complex narrative of this short period that will be valuable to historians.

It is impossible to review every aspect of this massive book; rather I will highlight below only what I believe are its most important contributions. This book provides the first detailed account of the creation and transformation of government institutions and bureaucratic organizations in the DRV. These institutions and organizations included the central and local governments, the National Assembly, and mass mobilizing organizations. Some were brand new but for others there was significant continuity from the colonial period. The discussion in the book of the National Assembly election, the 1946 constitution, and the deportation camps in northern Vietnam is as detailed as available evidence allows. We now have a standard account of these events that future scholars can build on or critique. As Marr writes, and I fully agree with him on this, the book will be useful for young Vietnamese to know better than what their history textbooks tell them about the events of 1945-46 (xvi). They can now learn about the Vietnamese state founded in late 1945 that would evolve into the communist dictatorship still in power today.

Under that state there were political assassinations and deportation camps, but there were also freedoms of press and association, at least before the summer of 1946. Here is another significant contribution of the book: Marr devotes significant efforts to analyze the lively debates in the Vietnamese press at the time. The press ranged the ideological gamut from communist (*Su That* and *Cuu Quoc*), to pro-government (*Doc Lap*), to independent (*Du Luan*) to anticommunist (*Viet Nam* and *Chinh Nghia*). As Marr shows, the debates on the constitution and on other issues at the National Assembly similarly reflected a diversity of opinions despite the communists' attempts to guide and limit the discussions. Overall, the book provides a sense of contingency throughout the period under consideration. Anything seemed possible, as the foreign powers, the elites, and ordinary people reacted to the unfolding conditions following their beliefs and interests. Compared to his own earlier

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<sup>1</sup> David G. Marr, *Vietnam 1945: The Quest for Power* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).

works, Marr is more explicit about contingencies in this book, which is a welcome step. If *Vietnam 1945* gives a casual reader the impression that the Indochinese Communist Party (ICP) was in charge throughout, this book states flatly that “available evidence does not support such assertions” (12). Clearly Marr had access to and used a far greater amount of non-communist sources in the current book than in the previous work.<sup>2</sup>

Perhaps that is why the role of non- and anti-communists in the events appears significant in the narrative. They are shown to have been actively involved, whether in support of or opposition to, state making, defense, diplomacy, and the economy. One such figure is Nguyen Van To, a non-communist intellectual who appeared capable and dedicated in his capacity as the chair of the Standing Bureau of the National Assembly (65-8). To attempted to exercise legislative oversight over the executive, especially local governments, and was later removed from his position for those attempts. Marr argues that for the anticommunist opposition, the Nationalist Party still had the chance to challenge the ICP for leadership of the country in March 1946. Had leaders of that Party taken risks to challenge the negotiations between Ho Chi Minh and French representative Jean Sainteny in early March, 1946, they might have been able to cause fractures and perhaps revolts within the National Guard (421). Of course, if the Nationalist Party leaders did this, they would have to have defied the Chinese generals who were supporting the Franco-Vietnamese negotiations.

The book not only gives non-communists the agency they deserve but is on the whole critical of the Indochinese Communist Party. Leaders of this Party except Ho Chi Minh are shown to have harbored a radical worldview and to have tended towards violence and dictatorship. Their worldview called for class struggle and confrontation with the imperialist camp (264). While all political groups engaged in abducting and assassinating their enemies, the communist security squads proved “most implacable” at the job (383). ICP leader Truong Chinh worked hard behind the scenes to impose direct ICP control over the Viet Minh, the state apparatus, and the government. ICP leaders used the war with France to justify the party’s grabs of power (xv). In the epilogue, Marr laments “a dark side to 1945-46” in that the “Communist Party capacity in 1945-46 to operate covertly, kill opponents, and pursue dictatorial agenda is still transmitted as glorious national history... Today, citizens continue to be detained indefinitely and sometimes tortured by the police (577).” The revolution has long become “a racket,” with former revolutionaries “pass[ing] on perks and power to their children” (578).

One issue that deserves further discussion is how Ho Chi Minh differed from his comrades in the ICP. Marr argues that Ho did not embrace the two-camp worldview of many ICP leaders, at least until 1949 (264-5). This observation leaves unanswered the question as to whether Ho lacked conviction in the global struggle between capitalism and communism or whether he was simply cautious. On matters of organization, Marr similarly argues: “while Ho was no less a Leninist than Truong Chinh, his immediate objectives were to widen popular support for the fledgling government and to project himself as a national leader

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<sup>2</sup> For more on this point, see Tuong Vu, *Paths to Development in Asia: South Korea, Vietnam, China, and Indonesia* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010): 108, fn 13.



above party, class, or personal interest.... Truong Chinh, however, made no secret of his intention to move Vietnam more quickly towards proletarian dictatorship” (444). This characterization seems to imply that Ho was a more cautious Leninist than Truong Chinh, and that he would have supported proletarian dictatorship if the ICP were in a secure position.

It is also unclear from the book what Ho’s relationship with other key ICP leaders was during this period. Marr argues that Ho did not want to monopolize power by eliminating rivals as Joseph Stalin had done, and this eventually resulted in him being sidelined by other ICP leaders (561-2). Based on my research of the 1930s,<sup>3</sup> Ho was more interested in playing the Comintern representative’s role of fostering, rather than taking personal leadership of, the Vietnamese communist movement. Ho’s behavior after 1945 apparently fit this pattern. Thus Marr’s assertion seems to be correct, but he does not have much information about the power arrangements between Ho and other top Party leaders like Truong Chinh, Hoang Quoc Viet and Pham Van Dong during 1945-46. Did those leaders accept Ho’s overall leadership, or did the entire leadership divide responsibilities among themselves? Did they make all or only some kinds of decisions collectively, or did they act individually?

Ho brought to the Party leadership specific skills others did not have, including his skills in communicating with Chinese and Americans, his ability to gain respect from the mandarins and the colonial intellectuals, and his personal charisma that attracted mass support. The argument that Ho was sidelined because he was not interested in power may be circular and is highly speculative. A more plausible argument is that he simply preferred roles that played to his strengths. In fact one can even argue that he was never really sidelined. His role changed in the 1950s and 1960s in part because by then the Americans had become enemies and the mandarins and colonial intellectuals had been completely marginalized, if not purged.

Still, Ho remained very active throughout the 1950s and 1960s in mass mobilizing. He penned sharp articles to denounce ‘evil landlords,’ such as Mrs. Nguyen Thi Nam who was the first landlord to be executed,<sup>4</sup> toured cooperatives to urge peasants to imitate Chinese farming techniques at the height of the Great Leap Forward,<sup>5</sup> and read his poems on radio on every New Year’s Eve to exhort every North Vietnamese to fight the Americans and to

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<sup>3</sup> *Triumphs and Tragedies: Ideology and Revolution in Vietnam*, unpublished book manuscript.

<sup>4</sup> C.B. (Ho Chi Minh), “Dan ba de co may tay” [How many women can be compared to her?], *Nhan Dan*, February 21, 1954.

<sup>5</sup> For example, see “Chu tich Ho Chi Minh ve tham dong bao can bo tinh Hung Yen” [President Ho Chi Minh visited people and cadres in Hung Yen province], *Nhan Dan*, July 5, 1958; Tran Luc (Ho Chi Minh), “May kinh nghiem cua Trung Quoc ma chung ta nen hoc” [Some Chinese experiences we should learn from], *Nhan Dan*, July 1 and August 28, 1958.

work harder for socialism.<sup>6</sup> He was busy in diplomacy, traveling to meet with Chinese, Soviet, and other communist leaders around the world and giving occasional interviews with Western journalists to manipulate world opinion on the DRV's 'war for peace.' In terms of propaganda, I have discovered that he wrote hundreds of short pieces under many pennames to educate the masses about the Soviet paradise and the American capitalist hell.<sup>7</sup> No one in the leadership bothered or attempted to do this, and Ho displayed excellent skills as a columnist. Marr admits that Ho was as Leninist as Truong Chinh was, but the book gives the impression that because of his way of thinking or his personality Ho did not fit in with the ICP. I wonder if Marr would agree that Ho was a Party man as much as Truong Chinh or Pham Van Dong was ('Party man' defined as sharing deep beliefs in the Party and the cause, and being loyal, dedicated, and obedient to Party discipline).

In conclusion, Marr's book makes important contributions to the scholarship on modern Vietnam. It is filled with insight and written with painstaking attention to details.<sup>8</sup> The author must be commended for his deep knowledge and for having worked tirelessly on Vietnamese modern political history over the last forty years.

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<sup>6</sup> These poems are available at <http://bacho.camau.gov.vn/tacphamcuanguoi/120-thochuctet.html> (accessed November 26, 2013).

<sup>7</sup> "'To be patriotic is to build socialism': communist ideology in Vietnam's civil war," in Tuong Vu and Wasana Wongsurawat, eds. *Dynamics of the Cold War in Asia: Ideology, Identity, and Culture* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2009): 38-41.

<sup>8</sup> A few diacritical and factual errors: Nghiêm Xuân Yêm, not Yếm, and Hồ Đắc Diễm, not Diềm. Nguyen Chi Thanh was ranked last (seventh) in the Politburo at the Second Party Congress in 1951, not third (Marr, *Vietnam*, 575). Le Duan was ranked third after Ho and Truong Chinh. See *Van Kien Dang Toan Tap* (Collection of Party Documents), v. 12 (Hanoi: Chinh Tri Quoc Gia, 2001), 521.

Author's Response by David G. Marr

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Having grown up at the height of the Cold War, I was stunned to encounter anti-communist Vietnamese teachers at the Army Language School (1961-62) and Army of the Republic of Vietnam officers at Soc Trang and Da Nang (1962-63) who greatly admired Ho Chi Minh and credited the Viet Minh with driving out the French. As a graduate student at Berkeley I found that no primary sources were available anywhere to research a Ph.D. thesis on the First Indochina War. Hence my 'retreat' to 1885 and patient march forward in time, which Stein Tonnesson outlines generously in his introduction.

I confess that the search for evidence has always excited me more than the write-up. In 1965 and 1967 I spent many enjoyable hours at the used-book stalls along Pasteur Street in Saigon; my findings became the core of *Vietnamese Anticolonialism* (1971). Christiane Rageau at the *Bibliothèque nationale de France* allowed me into the stacks to peruse 10,000 Vietnamese titles from the late colonial era, which made *Vietnamese Tradition on Trial* (1981) possible. During 1980's trips to Vietnam I found scores of discarded party histories as well as useful periodical runs in used book shops, which led to *Vietnam 1945* (1995). During those years I also encountered the 78 *Gouvernement de fait* boxes at the Aix archives, mentioned by Sean McHale above. That treasure-trove at Aix, together with 1945-1946 newspapers held at the Vietnam National Library in Hanoi, kept me entranced for years and eventually morphed into the book reviewed here.

Tuong Vu comments that I am more interested in accumulating historical detail than providing explanations. There's some truth to that. Long ago as a Marine lieutenant I bristled at being told that when teaching grunts I must 'Tell'em what you're going to tell'em, tell'em, then tell'em what you told'em.' Of course sources do need to be interpreted. Sometimes I try to present readers with a convincing train of evidence without then hitting them over the head with a summing up. At the broadest level in this book I want to demonstrate how state formation, war, and revolution intersect and feed upon each other, a phenomenon understood for the French and Russian revolutions long ago, but not yet Vietnam. Pham Quang Minh acknowledges the point, saying that revolution, state, and war were indeed "three tremendous and interrelated questions." But I also wanted to show some significant continuities from the French colonial period, which Tuong Vu notes. Perhaps the most fascinating continuity is the ongoing tension between central and local authorities. I posit the province (tỉnh) as the DRV administrative linchpin in 1946, as it had been under the French and earlier. And I'd argue that this remains the case in 2014.

Pierre Brocheux compliments my Chapter 6, "Material Dreams and Realities". I approached this chapter with trepidation, mindful that I had only one year of undergraduate economics in 1956 to guide me. Food, markets, property, taxes, donations, monopolies, currency, cloth and coal come up so often in both archive dossiers and period newspapers that I was content to demonstrate their

importance, not theorize. Brocheux himself is much better equipped to take this important topic further. Brocheux overstates my writing a history 'from the bottom up', but I did try wherever sources allowed. I think Sean McHale is incorrect to call my book "state-centered."

Each reviewer addresses my contention that the role of the Indochinese Communist Party (ICP) in determining 1945-1946 events has been greatly overblown by historians. Brocheux suggests that I may have gone too far in contesting "established scholarly opinion." Tuong Vu summarizes my position well, and seems to agree with it. McHale says my claim that the DRV state was not simply an appendage of the ICP is "a plausible argument to make." Pham Quang Minh disagrees completely, asserting that "without thorough preparation by the Viet Minh and ICP, there would have been no revolution at all." My earlier *Vietnam 1945* book was also the object of a lively seminar in Hanoi in 1995, where the party spokesman denounced my claim of 'revolutionary spontaneity', but three other individuals active in 1945 each described how their own local youth group took matters into its own hands with little or no knowledge of central Viet Minh pronouncements.

My handling of Ho Chi Minh's 1945-1946 role is criticized by Tuong Vu, but not dwelled on by other reviewers. I think Ho by 1945 was a 'creative Leninist,' with the end justifying the means, consciousness trumping spontaneity (cf. Leon Trotsky), and the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) executive superior to the legislative and judicial branches, Ho wanted three hierarchies – state, army and party – with party members salted through the other two but not taking control of them. Proletarian dictatorship for Ho would need to wait decades.

I believe Ho Chi Minh was deadly serious in trying for a diplomatic settlement with France, which would have required some sort of shared sovereignty. In Paris during the summer of 1946 Ho was not just gaining time to prepare for all-out war – the standard historical line. No reviewer mentions my Chapter 5, "Seeking Foreign Friends". Trying to balance off France, Ho went courting the United States and Nationalist China, followed by South and Southeast Asia, the Soviet Union, and the United Nations. Such efforts produced little of value in the short term, but they meant a lot domestically, and there were international rewards later.

When it came to Ho Chi Minh asserting authority over established Indochinese Communist Party (ICP) leaders like Truong Chinh, having been away from Vietnam for thirty years until 1941 was a liability. The arrival of Chinese People's Liberation Army units at the Indochina frontier in late 1949 and rapid introduction of Chinese 'advisors' resulted in a dramatic extension of ICP powers throughout the government and the army, whatever Ho's wishes. Today Ho remains the most difficult topic to research in Vietnam. Only when party and army archives are opened to independent scholars – Vietnamese and foreign – can historians hope for breakthroughs on either the ICP or Ho Chi Minh. I'm not holding my breath.

McHale takes me to task for scant attention to southern Vietnam. In my sorties on French archives at Aix and Vincennes I found that 1945-1946 materials on Cochinchina were quite spotty compared to subsequent years. Also, Saigon newspapers were heavily censored by the French, only getting lively from about 1948. I do discuss the Southern Region Committee, the early combat with Japanese, British and French forces, and the bloodletting between Viet Minh and Hoa Hao adherents. We lack primary Vietnamese sources to be able to evaluate whether an alliance between DRV/Viet Minh, Hoa Hao, Cao Dai and Binh Xuyen elements could have been sustained or not. What I find remarkable is how many southern Vietnamese retained a positive image of Ho Chi Minh and the DRV.

Was there a civil war in Vietnam in 1945-1946 alongside the nascent anticolonial war? My Chapter 7, "Dealing with Domestic Opposition", focuses on DRV, Viet Minh and ICP behaviour towards groups deemed to be traitorous, reactionary or counterrevolutionary. I also collected notes on the activities of the Dai Viet, Trotskyists, Vietnam Revolutionary League, Vietnam Nationalist Party, and Catholic Church, but found it impossible to address their beliefs and behaviour in this book. I agree with Francois Guillemot, whom McHale discusses, that there were substantial fractures in the Vietnamese polity, but those who opposed the DRV/Viet Minh lacked a leader, a focal point, or a strategy to wage civil war.<sup>1</sup> That changed in 1949-1950 with establishment of the Associated State of Vietnam and recognition by some foreign powers.

McHale considers "strangely dismissive" my Preface comment that young scholars in the West seem to be avoiding the DRV, the Viet Minh, and resistance history. I was reacting in particular to a major manifesto in 2006 that sought "approaches which counter dominant historiographical paradigms reflective of twentieth-century ideologies: those that privilege notions of a central state; those that impose nationalist and traditionalist notions on Vietnamese history and culture; those that subsume Vietnamese revolutionary visions under communist teleologies; and those that seek to interpret Vietnamese history through Cold War presumptions".<sup>2</sup> I could see who they were targeting, but thought I would be better for them to debate rather than 'counter' the culprits. Fortunately some excellent young scholars have ignored such manifestoes, as McHale points out.

I was delighted to see Tuong Vu's remark on the sense of contingency in my book, adding that in 1945-1946 "Anything seemed possible, as the foreign powers, the elites, and ordinary people reacted to unfolding conditions following their beliefs

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<sup>1</sup> François Guillemot, "Au coeur de la fracture vietnamienne: L'élimination de l'opposition nationaliste et anticolonialiste dans le Nord du Viet Nam (1945-1946)," in Christopher Goscha et Bénédict de Trégodé, eds., *Naissance d'un État-Parti/ Birth of a Party State: Vietnam Since 1945* (Paris: Les Indes Savantes, 2004): 175-216.

<sup>2</sup> "Alternative Voices in Modern Vietnamese History and Historiography". Three workshops took place at the University of Washington from 2007 onward.

and interests.” I also tried to convey some of the day-to-day ambiguity and confusion. Human beings, whether historical actors or today’s readers, are generally uncomfortable with uncertainty. My sources also allowed me to develop multiple threads of cause and effect, some of which persisted, others petered out, and still others reappeared decades later.

Historians like to ponder counterfactuals, although we seldom commit them to print. What if the atomic bombs at Hiroshima and Nagasaki had not intervened and the Pacific war continued for another six months, as Allied planners expected? The Japanese military and ‘Empire of Vietnam’ headed by Bao Dai would have worked together, making Vietnam similar to Indonesia at the end of hostilities. What if politics in the French métropole had not been so chaotic, enabling Paris to pursue a consistent policy in Indochina, whether repressive or conciliatory? Either way, matters would have reached a head by early 1946, not stumbling along until the end of the year. What if Ho Chi Minh had decided to remain in Hanoi in late May 1946 rather than going to Paris? He might have reconvened the National Assembly and reined in the communist hotheads. But his projection of Vietnam to the world, which impressed so many Vietnamese and a fair number of foreigners, would have been lost.

In an H-Diplo forum, it is surprising that only Brocheux raises an historical comparison – with the French revolution. I had in mind comparisons with China, Korea, and Indonesia in 1945-1946 when researching and writing this book, but no space was left to tease these out. I do point up the Korea comparison in my Epilogue. I have a draft article that compares the American and Vietnamese wars of independence, which may provoke some debate.

There is still plenty for younger historians to do providing they are willing to dig deep. As McHale concludes, arguments over Vietnam during these seminal months “have not been fully resolved.”

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