

Rubber and Soul

*Moral Economy, Development and Resistance
in the Bousraa Villages, Mondulhiri, Cambodia*

MA Thesis in Social Anthropology

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December 2011

Abstract

This thesis deals with the establishment of the rubber plantation Varanasi in the Bousraa village complex, Monduliri Province, Cambodia. The land that the project is changing from forest to plantation has been used by the Bunong, an indigenous group practicing swidden agriculture, for generations. The establishment of the plantation has led to protests, sabotage actions, the generation of difference in the community and the dispossession of villagers, all in the name of “economic development”. The central argument is that by applying the moral economy concept to the Bunong, their relationship to land can be seen as complex and “total”, while the idea behind the plantation is to tap an untapped set of resources for commodity production - a purely profit-oriented outlook. This leads to the concept of “development” losing all meaning in context of the case: it becomes obvious that a rethinking of what development *is* and *should be* is necessary.

Acknowledgements:

Several people deserve thanks for their help with this study.

First of all, Associate Professor Lorenzo Cañas Bottos at the Social Anthropology department, NTNU, has provided much valuable feedback, suggestions and a wealth of literature for me to explore. Any misconception or error left in the text is, of course, entirely my own.

In Cambodia I would like to thank, first and foremost, the people in Bousraa, who generously shared their lives, thoughts and time with me, something which must have occasionally have been frustrating and demanding on their patience. I hope I have done you justice in my presentation. Furthermore, Torn and Thet, two very good friends, deserve mention here, as their friendship and interest have played a key role in my interest in their native country. Thank you!

Brigitte Nikles and Frédéric Bourdier have provided valuable insights, have taken the time to discuss issues of mutual interest, and have helped in finding informants, literature and colleagues, as well as writing several of the texts that are much quoted in this thesis. I hope you find this thesis can contribute in some small way to the body of work you are creating.

Tom Windelinckx, Jack Highwood and Samuel Bartholin deserve a special mention for listening to my (often incoherent) ramblings, for sharing meals and drinks, and for being great friends. Let's hope we meet again soon.

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1 Frameworks

“Mankind has opted for monoculture; it is in the process of creating a mass civilization, as beetroot is grown in the mass. Henceforth, man’s daily bill of fare will consist only of this one item” Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Tristes Tropiques*, 1955.



Figure 1: View from a height in Bousraa, facing west.

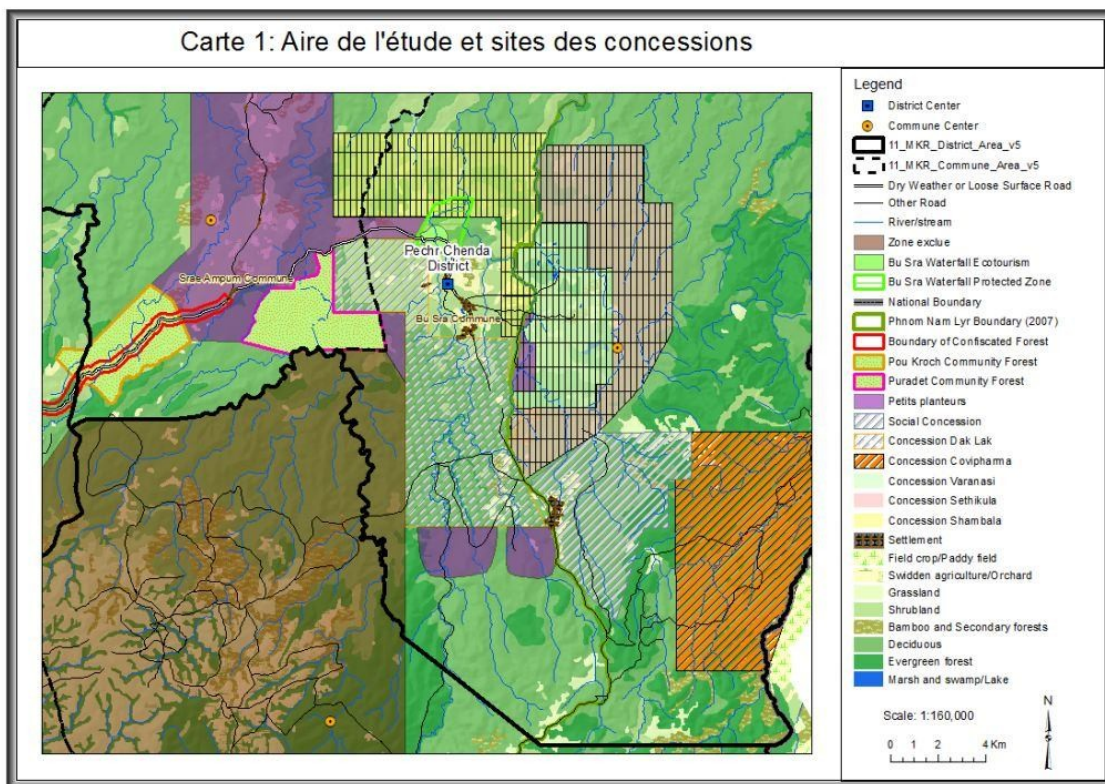


Figure 2: Cadastral map of concessions in the Bousraa area. Image taken from FIDH (2011).

“Protection of indigenous peoples’ land rights is still, however, vastly inadequate ... Land grabbing involving indigenous land continues. Large-scale developments continue to have devastating impacts on indigenous peoples; these include the development of plantations and tourist sites, mining and the construction of hydroelectric dams and roads. There has been essentially no meaningful consultation of indigenous peoples during project decision-making and no free, prior, and informed consent given ... Over the last decade, the Cambodian government has granted large numbers of economic land concessions for rubber, pine trees, corn and other plantations in indigenous areas. A 2007 UN report found that “the alienation of indigenous land through the grant of concessions is undermining the ability of indigenous communities to register their collective ownership of traditional lands, and enforce their rights to land under the Land Law”. Indigenous communities have lost forests (including sacred forests), other sacred sites, agricultural land, residential land and other land ... The government has made it clear that it considers tree plantations to be forests, so forests can be converted to plantations without changing official measures of forest cover.” (Wessendorf 2011:297-298)

“Standing in the middle of the plantation seemed almost surreal. There was absolutely nothing left. Some patches of forest were left here and there, but the bulldozers were actively working to flatten them. We were stopped by an extremely unfriendly Frenchman¹(presumably), yelling, telling us not to take photos. Five years ago I got lost here trying to find Phnom Nam Lia² - the forest was so dense we couldn’t see it, we decided we’d need a GPS and coordinates. Now it sits on the horizon, with a wide, graded dirt road leading right up to the base. Everywhere there were tree trunks, seemingly just tossed aside, worthless. Some areas had rubber saplings planted, others had not been planted yet. As we drove onwards to the river by the base of the mountain,

¹One of the SOCFIN KCD employees. He was presumably laid off sometime after my fieldwork, when most of the western staff was replaced. He was noted by several of my informants as being “fat and rude” - I’ll let this stand as their words.

²Phnom Nam Lia / Nam Lear / Namlyr etc. is a black volcanic mountain situated in what was once the forests east of Bousraa. It holds spiritual significance for the Bunong as part of their myth of creation, and is considered a holy place.

the sheer size of the project dawned on me. *This is a quarter.* A quarter of one concession. There won't be anything left *at all.*" (Field notes, February 2010)

1.1 Introduction

The first quote above paints a bleak picture of the rights of indigenous peoples in Cambodia. Under the guise of "development", massive financial projects are being implemented on indigenous lands, lands which the communities that utilize it have limited means of securing tenure rights to. This thesis deals primarily with one such case, the implementation of the rubber plantation "Varanasi" on the land of the Bunong in Mondulkiri province, Cambodia. The plantation is a joint venture between Luxembourg-registered rubber giant Socfinal and Cambodian entrepreneur firm Khau Chuly, collaborating as Socfin KCD³. The concession was granted by the Cambodian government (FIDH 2011). The quote from my field notes is meant to illustrate the scope of the operation. At the time of fieldwork, approximately one third of the total area granted (2600/6978 ha.) had been cleared and was being prepared for planting. Bousraa village, where I undertook my fieldwork, is the closest settlement to the plantation area, and is mainly populated by individuals from the Bunong indigenous group. The Bunong have traditionally practiced swidden agriculture (also called "rotational" or "slash-and-burn" agriculture) for subsistence, in addition to gathering non-timber forest products⁴ from the forests surrounding their villages, fishing and hunting. With their means for subsistence eroding fast, the Bunong are forced into wage labor at the plantation, with no security net in the form of self-production of food, and no forest in the immediate vicinity to forage for other goods in. This has led to a varied set of reactions to the situation by the original population of Bousraa. This thesis aims to identify and analyze these reactions, and to contextualize them to a larger framework of peasant analysis, development rhetoric and resistance movements.

In this thesis I utilize the concept of *moral economy* to analyze the situation in Bousraa, as shared notions of right and wrong have surfaced in the community, and the population

³Socfin is a subsidiary of Luxembourg-registered Socfinal, a company with links to rubber plantations in Africa. KCD is short for Khau Chuly Development, a Cambodian entrepreneurial firm.

⁴Abb.: NTFP. This includes, but is not limited to: resin from trees (used as trade goods), honey, medicinal plants and herbs, animals etc. (Nikles 2006).

on one occasion rose against the rubber companies in a massive protest, burning tractors and threatening employees. The application of the moral economy concept facilitates the analysis of the reactions to the establishment of the plantation, as it grounds the Bunong's worldview in a set of values that are radically different from those of a multinational corporation. The concept of moral economy is furthered by introducing land as a *social good* upon which the Bunong base their conception of justice, linking this to their animist beliefs - losing access to land means losing access to sacred places and to the blessing of the spirits that inhabit nature. This renders them unable to appease the spirits that ensure their well-being, leaving them bankrupt not just in the economical (financial) sense, but also in a moral sense.

Further, the thesis argues that in the light of the moral economy, a rethinking of what is being presented as *development* is necessary. The rhetoric involved in these large-scale operations is examined, showing them as templates of an already predefined "development" that is an export from the north, and that does not necessarily take local conditions into account, as, indeed, this justification is not needed. The thesis argues that if any meaningful "development" is to take place, it is absolutely essential that the communities affected by such projects are included in the planning and decision-making of these projects, or there can not be development, only the removal of basic rights and privileges, and, perhaps most importantly, there can be no choice or control over one's own future. This argument is tied closely to that of the Cambodian government's handling of the issues concerning indigenous land.

Finally, the thesis looks into *resistance* as a product of the moral economy clashing with development projects. The Bunong of Bousraa employ various strategies of resistance to what they see as unfair treatment. The effectiveness can be debated, but the existence of such patterns confirm the concept of moral economy as relevant to the situation in Bousraa, and gives insight into motivation and ideals for a meaningful development. Resistance, then, becomes a product of basic violations of what is perceived as (and indeed, legally *is*) *right*, not the result of the "backwardness" of indigenous communities, as it is often presented in the developmental discourse.

1.2 Moral Economy, Development and Resistance

The term “moral economy” stems from the work of E. P. Thompson (1963, 1971). Thompson deals with the “bread riots” of eighteenth century Britain - a situation where peasants and workers faced dramatically increased food prices over a short period of time, all the while being forced to pay the same taxes and rents, and thus having their basis for subsistence endangered (Thompson 1963). Thompson sees the reaction to this (the “bread riots”) not as some spur-of-the-moment, anger-driven violent outburst, but rather as an indicator of a deeper sense of justice and injustice within the “English working class”:

“It rested upon more articulate popular sanctions and was validated by more sophisticated traditions than the word “riot” suggests. The most common example is the bread or food riot, repeated cases of which can be found in almost every town and county until the 1840s. This was rarely a mere uproar which culminated in the breaking open of barns or the looting of shops. It was legitimized by the assumptions of an older moral economy, which taught the immorality of any unfair method of forcing up the price of provisions by profiteering upon the necessities of the people.” (Thompson 1963:62-63)

Moral economy, then, is in direct opposition to the liberal idea of the “free market”, as the free market is the idea which enables this “profiteering upon the necessities of the people”. The moral economy, being a measure for justice and injustice, legitimizes protest through a common notion in the society, group or class about right and wrong, because: “...behind every such form of popular direct action some legitimizing notion of right is to be found” (Thompson 1963:68).

Thompson furthers the idea of the moral economy to encompass that the bread rioters were legitimizing their actions upon “...the belief that they were defending traditional rights or customs; and, in general, that they were supported by the wider consensus of the community” (Thompson 1971:188). With this expansion of the concept in mind, the moral economy can be seen as the internal “scale” upon which interactions with the market or, in Thompson’s terminology, the “political economy” are weighed. If the scales tip too far (i. e. traditional rights and/or customs are being challenged), the internal sense of injustice will trigger counteraction to the problem at hand, in this case taking the form

of riots. This entails that the two economies have different “regimes of value” (Humphrey & Hugh-Jones 1992): the value put on tradition on the one hand and value as price in a market situation on the other. This means that the concept of moral economy can be used not only to interpret the actions of individuals involved in this form of rioting based on the conflict between the market and an internal sense of justice or challenge to tradition, but can also be used, on the flip-side, to explain the nature and timing of such riots or protests.

The theory of moral economy is picked up and greatly expanded upon by James C. Scott in *The Moral Economy of the Peasant* (1976). Scott transfers Thompson’s assumptions about the English working class to Southeast Asian peasants, and introduces additional concepts for analyzing and understanding peasant behavior. Just as Thompson (or, perhaps more accurately, *because of* Thompson), he looks to peasant rebellions for his empirical data. He explains his central concept:

“We can learn a great deal from rebels who were defeated nearly a half-century ago. If we understand the indignation and rage which prompted them to risk everything, we can grasp what I have chosen to call their moral economy: their notion of economic justice and their working definition of exploitation - their view of which claims on their product were tolerable and which intolerable. Insofar as their moral economy is representative of peasants elsewhere, and I believe I can show that it is, we may move toward a fuller appreciation of the normative roots of peasant politics.” (Scott 1976:3-4)

Once again we see the concept of *justice* as the central point around which the framework is spun. Scott relates his analysis to groups of people who in the larger scheme of things have tried to evade state formation and taxation (2009), which relates directly to “their view of which claims on their product were tolerable and which intolerable” (Scott 1976:3). The general idea that Scott puts forward is that peasants operate within a “safety first” framework for subsistence, which has its own set of decision-making processes aimed at securing a minimum, or a subsistence basis, for all members of the community (Scott 1976:5). This is what he puts forward as the peasant’s “subsistence ethic” - which is the general term for what his ideas mean for the analysis of peasant economics, morality and politics.

Thompson's (1963;1971) framework for analysis is built upon these three central themes: economics, morality and politics. This is picked up by Scott, and transferred to the realm of Southeast Asian peasants. On the issue of economics, the "safety first"-principle comes into play. Scott asserts that because of the nature of subsistence farming, any farmer will be averse to taking risks, as what he would be risking would be the subsistence basis of himself, his family, in some cases even of his group (Scott 1976:17-19). The potential gain involved in changing, for instance, the type of rice sown or the equipment used to sow and nurture it, will in most cases not outplay the risk involved for the subsistence basis of the family should one of these schemes fail dramatically (Scott 1976:19). It should be noted, though, that subsistence farmers cannot be seen as absolutely averse to taking risks: if the risk is low enough not to challenge subsistence safety, and the potential gain is seen as high enough, peasants will attempt innovation (Scott 1976:24). Generally speaking, the closer a farmer is to subsistence minimum in terms of agricultural output, the more averse he is to taking risks. He also notes that the argument only holds as long as the farmer is operating close enough to the subsistence security "limit": if there are enough resources to ensure subsistence even if some things fail (i. e. a farmer has three plots of land, but is only dependent on one to ensure subsistence), the argument would not hold (Scott 1976:25). In these cases, as well as cases where the traditional subsistence safety is threatened, innovation increases in bouts of either attempting surplus/profit or as a "last attempt" to secure a threatened subsistence (Scott 1976:26). Furthermore, there is the aspect of risk management. As a subsistence farmer is always the prey of the forces of nature, the subsistence minimum will not always be met, something which the farmer tries to avoid by having diverse plots of land with diverse crops (i. e. to prevent all his resources from being washed away in a flood or destroyed by drought). If this strategy fails, however, there are several mechanisms present in the society to act as so-called "insurances" against starvation (Scott 1976:27). These become an integral part of how peasant economics work, as the economy then revolves around relations of reciprocity rather than those of trade.

Moving on to morality, we can better understand how morality becomes an integral part of the subsistence ethic by looking at the "subsistence claim" (Scott 1976:32). This claim overlaps with that of Thompson's "English crowd", and Scott formulates it: "...

any claim on peasants by elites or the state could have no justice when it infringed on subsistence needs” (Scott 1976:33). This means, then, that a peasant community will occasionally “throw caution to the wind” and perform acts that would otherwise be conceived as morally wrong, should the subsistence basis be threatened by external factors. This reflects the idea of justice put forward above: the community has its claims on the population (in the form of those peasants that are more well-off being, on occasion, required to help those less fortunate), but all members of the community also has a justified claim to subsistence. If these mechanics are disrupted in a manner that is seen as unfair or unjust, the community will react.

Scott terms the ways of exchange in subsistence communities as relations of reciprocity or equal exchange (1976:172). In the subsistence claim lies the idea that as all members of the community are entitled to subsistence, those in the community that are more well-off than others are expected to help those less fortunate, in exchange for services such as labor. This mechanic is possible in a community where the producers and the consumers are the same group - the output of agriculture is produced to satisfy local nutritional needs, not to generate surplus and profit. In this we can see a contrast to the market economies, where producer and consumer are two different links in the production-consumption chain, that have a relationship mediated by money. Appandurai (1986) says the following on the distinction between reciprocity and the circulation of commodities:

“Gifts, and the spirit of reciprocity, sociability and spontaneity in which they are typically exchanged, usually are starkly opposed to the profit-oriented, self-centered and calculated spirit that fires the circulation of commodities. Further, where gifts link things to persons and embed the flow of things in the flow of social relations, commodities are held to represent the drive - largely free of moral or cultural constraints - of goods for one another, a drive mediated by money, not by sociality” (Appandurai 1986:81)

While the subsistence communities are most certainly “driven” by sociality and equal exchange that depends upon this sociality, the market is largely disconnected from these relations. The contrast thus becomes clear: the fundamental economics of the market are in conflict with the morally based economics of reciprocity and equal exchange, and are in direct opposition to the ideals of securing subsistence rather than maximizing profits.

When it comes to peasant politics, Scott relies heavily on theories of patron-client-relationships to explain how inequalities in the community are seen as either of equal (or roughly equal) exchange, or as instruments of exploitation (Scott 1976:170-171). Wolf defines these client-patron relations as “imbalanced friendships” (1966:16):

“When instrumental friendship reaches a maximum point of imbalance so that one partner is clearly superior to the other in his capacity to grant goods and services, we approach the critical point where friendships give way to the patron-client tie.”

While peasants that are in the same situation will be able to help each other out on a favor-for-favor basis, the peasants that are comparatively well-off are expected to contribute to those that are not, and in return for this favor they get loyalty, and, per the reciprocity principle, favors in return, even if these are favors of a different nature (such as labor, “goodwill” etc.) (Scott 1976:170, Wolf 1966:17). This again invokes the sense of justice in the community: is the exchange fair? And again: if the exchange is not fair, will the community stand for it (in the event that a client-patron relationship is formed)? This means that the politics of subsistence are formed on the basis of reciprocity and fair exchange, all tied into the morality of the subsistence claim and the economy of the “safety first”-principle.

So, the subsistence ethic combined with the application of low-risk, low-yield agriculture then becomes a model for explaining peasant motivation and agency. Scott’s argument is that agent-centered theories of risk-taking and innovation are too narrow, and that there is more complexity to peasant economy than agent-theories suggest. The shared social norms, the notion of justice in social relationships, and the shared outrage when injustice occurs indicates that there is a framework based upon the moral economy concepts that can be generalized (Scott 1976, Moise 1982).

Scott’s model was criticized, in particular by Samuel Popkin (1979), mainly for being too romantic in regards to the past, and for not seeing the benefits of modernization on peasant societies (Popkin 1979:ix). This notion was refuted by Edwin E. Moise (1982), claiming that Popkin completely misrepresents the views of moral economists, and that

his reading of Scott is inaccurate at best and erroneous at worst (Moise 1982:72). The criticisms and defenses of the moral economy as an analytical tool are many - too many to take into account here. I will bring two more articles to the table here, both of them arguing that the moral economy is a viable theory, but also that it has shortcomings and needs some improvements to be able to handle the diversity of the situations it attempts to explain and analyze.

Furthering the ideas of both Scott and Popkin, Pierre Brocheux' article (1983) is based on empirical material utilized by both Scott and Popkin in their respective works, namely Vietnamese peasants and the revolts of the 1930s (Brocheux 1983). On the topic of the relationship to the "past" (as romanticized ideal) and the "future" (another romanticized ideal of market economy), Brocheux argues, put simply, that the division is not that clear:

"We can observe simultaneous, uneven thrusts toward both the defense and rejection of the structures and values of the past. Because of this rejection, revolutionary Marxism penetrated Vietnam. This reminds us that the social movements discussed by Scott and Popkin are complex, ambiguous and contradictory, which should not be ignored when they are used for theoretical purposes. Moreover, if we do not take into account the narrow link between the social and the political spheres, we run the risk of missing the originality of the peasant movements." (Brocheux 1983:798)

Brocheux's arguing point with both Scott and Popkin is that they "... lost sight of the interrelationship between villages and the rest of the society and its institutions" (Brocheux 1983:799). It is, then, not as simple as "peasants joining the communist party because the patron-client relations were being seen as unfair" (Popkin), or "peasants revolting because their values were being intruded upon" (Scott). Brocheux illustrates the relationship between the moral and the political economy by seeing the social contract between peasant and state in communist ideology as a "new" moral economy (one where reciprocal relations are taken into consideration), and the state and the collectives as the "architects of the political economy" - and he points out that the reconciliation of the two is difficult, if not impossible, as peasants are allowed their traditional ways, yet the state seeks to increase productivity (Brocheux 1983:801). The concluding thought is that the separation between political and moral economies is only a theoretical one - the fuller

picture includes them both (Brocheux 1983:802). This means, then, that any empirical data that is used in context with the idea of the moral economy should focus not only on the social mechanics within the group in question, but also on their relations to the political economy of the state.

The last article that will be used for the moral economy framework in this context, is Thomas Clay Arnold (2001). Arnold argues for a theory of moral economy based on social goods, as this will allow broader generalizations of the concept, thus allowing for more open fields for applying the theory (Arnold 2001:94). He makes the claims that the distinction between market and non-market societies is too central to the debate, that the claim that “economic incorporation of a non-market people is the basis for the moral indignation that leads to rebellion and resistance” is too narrow, and that reshaping the theory to revolve around social goods broadens the scope of the moral economy, as it opens up to other forms of moral indignation than simply that of the intrusion of the market in a non-market context (Arnold 2001:85). His empirical case is that of water politics in the American West, and he shows that policies affecting water, being a moral concept for western states and cities, can ignite the same feelings of communal injustice as showed in Scott’s work. Access to specific social goods thus play a part when trying to find the source of the moral indignation in a community. The relevance of this point will be shown in the empirical data of this thesis, albeit regarding different social goods than water.

Regarding the moral economy in these times of globalization, Scott’s theory faces criticism from Marc Edelman, who argues that as the life of the smallholder is under siege from “... this world of IMF structural adjustment loans; commodity dumping; intellectual property rights; new markets for credit, technology and services; and giant agrobusiness conglomerates” (Scott 2005:397), the peasant’s reaction to the imposed change must escalate in accordance to the external escalation of pressure upon them. Scott agrees, to some extent, but cannot see how peasants can manage this sort of large-scale operation (though Edelman gives him an example) as a more general feature, as the resources available to them are so limited. He argues that the solution lies on the national, not the international level, and that the potential for the preservation of these societies (and their

related products and traditions) lies in an alliance on the national level between farmers, institutionalized democracy, workers and the remains of the bourgeoisie (Scott 2005:397-398). The final point to be mentioned here comes up when discussing modernization and relations to the state. Scott describes the World Bank as working for "... a massive effort at individual freehold land titling on the neoliberal model" (Scott 2005:401), that coupled with the WTO and IMF attempts a form of international governance in thread with North Atlantic capitalism (Scott 2005:401). In the end, he concludes, most, if not all, schemes to "develop" the south are exports from the north - templates to development not necessarily (and indeed not often) in accordance with small localities in far-flung regions of the world. We need, then, to take these models into account - for we cannot transcend them (Scott 2005:401).

Summarizing, the moral economy is the idea that there in some societies are shared notions of justice and injustice that, if pressured, may override the legislation of the state. These notions are based on the subsistence ethic, which is based upon every member of the community's right to a subsistence minimum - a right which the community has a duty to ensure. Introducing a system such as the free market into a community that relies on a subsistence ethic will pit the two economies against each other - the free market is a system of higher risk (and higher yield, ideally), and driven to maximize profits, not security, something which is not compatible with the idea of securing subsistence rather than making a profit. To apply these concepts to a given community, it is important to contextualize them properly, so as to see how and why this attempted integration of economies happen. This is best done by seeing the moral economy as one piece in the greater scheme of things. Especially state formation and state political economy must be considered, as the state is often the driving force causing market and moral economies to come into conflict. Furthering the contextualization, *social goods* can be defined and utilized for seeing where the economies become incompatible. Societies value their varied assets differently; there is room for negotiation on some fronts, on others not. By defining social goods it is possible to see exactly how and why there is moral indignation leading to resistance or revolt. Finally, the nature of North Atlantic capitalism must be considered, as it works on the basis of a "model transfer" - the idea that by employing schemes that, from a northern perspective, are fruitful for the economic development of southern

societies, “development” is achieved. This model transfer is not always suited to local conditions, and one can question the idea of a generalized term such as “development” as even fruitful on an ideological level.

Having clarified what moral economy is, it becomes pertinent to see where, in the context of this thesis, the moral economy clashes with the market economy and state formation projects. In the context of Bousraa, this clash happened as a direct result of the establishment of a rubber plantation, something which is termed a “development project” by the actors involved (the Cambodian government and the rubber companies).

Development as a project is best explained by first reviewing globalization. Thomas Hylland Eriksen sums up globalization as the “... processes of increased density, speed and reach of transnational connections associated with the global spread of capitalism and new information and communication technologies” (2010:21). Roland Robertson describes it as referring to “... both the compression of the world and the intensification of consciousness of the world as a whole” (1992:8). In short, by the advances in transportation and communication technology, the world is “shrinking” (Harvey 1990), allowing actors to utilize differences in price and supply on a global scale to their profit. This means that “world actors” are present in many localities, where they again create representations of the world as a whole in the local community, a process described as *glocalization* (ibid). The world has become one place, with all its corners being interconnected via trade, migration and communication (Hylland Eriksen 2010, Robertson 1992). This, of course, has an effect on small-scale farmers (such as the ones described in this thesis), in that they have to relate to much more complex mechanics of exchange than before. Kearney (1996) calls this process *agroindustrialization* (1996:127), which he describes as “... an increased role of transnational corporations in the financing, production, distribution, marketing, and consumption of agricultural products” (ibid). In the case presented in this thesis, the peasants are incorporated into this agroindustrialization by way of a *development* project sanctioned by their national government and implemented by a multinational corporation in collaboration with a national corporation - what has brought globalization and capitalism on a large scale to the farmers of Bousraa is presented as a scheme in part designed to “help”, “develop” or even “save” them, presumably from themselves and their way of

life, which is not compatible with the mechanics of globalization.

A note can be made in this context about rubber as a commodity to illustrate the globalization phenomenon. The first European encountering rubber (“*caucho* - the coagulated resin of the hévéa⁵” (La Condamine 1736 in CNRTL 2011) was the french explorer Charles Marie de la Condamine, undertaking an exploratory journey in South America. It is assumed that it originates from the indigenous language Quechua of Peru, and means “the tree that weeps” (Friederici in CNRTL 2011). This encounter was the linguistic basis for the European versions of the word (CNRTL 2011) - in French, for instance, rubber is called *caoutchouc*. If we follow this word forward in time to the French colonies in Indochina, and, more specifically, in Cambodia, we see the word again in a similar manifestation in Khmer language - “kausoo” - derived from the French (Bernard 1902⁶). Further, the Bunong of Bousraa also spoke of rubber (naturally), and termed it the same way as in Khmer - “kausoo”. Rubber, then, can be seen as the perfect commodity to illustrate the colonial expansion, and the expansion of monoculture. The word has traveled the same way the product has - from the indigenous language in South America centuries ago, to the margins of Cambodia, all via the French colonial exploit. From being trees in a forest, rubber has become a worldwide monoculture of commodity production - a commodity used in industry, and produced for a capitalist market, a product of expansion of the colonial rule, of the expansion of the capitalist modes of production, and the expansion of the market. These mechanics have led to two indigenous groups, separated by half the globe in terms of space and centuries in terms of time, having the same vernacular for the same tree.

Having put Bousraa into the context of a globalized world, it’s time to move on to development in particular. Scott’s (1998;2005) view that most development projects are exports from the north based on North-Atlantic capitalism sets the scene for most of the argument here. The term “development” has come to mean the relationship between rich and poor countries (with an emphasis on the commitment of the rich to help the poor become rich) after the fall of colonialism (Hart/Padayachee 2010:52). This has, in practice, meant that rich countries implement projects in poor countries to improve living condi-

⁵Author’s translation (from the French).

⁶See also: <http://www.angkor-planet.com/dico/dicoUKKH.html>

tions; that large amounts of money are transferred to developing nations; and that trade policies are implemented to ensure that developing nations get access to world markets. It is, however, sufficient to cast a glance at any published statistic that measures “wealth” (as in what development is trying to generate - see for instance UNDP (2011)) to see that this has not worked in any significant way: the poor remain poor and the rich get richer. The traditional idea behind development was that we must all, as one, strive towards a universal goal, in this case a minimum of material wealth (Hart/Padayachee 2010:59) - this being owed largely to the world becoming more and more globalized, generating a need for universals. The problems, of course, begin when the motives for “development” are unmasked as plots to incorporate more regions, merchandise and people into a global economy controlled largely by the rich nations of the north (Scott 2005, Scott 1998). The postdevelopment school has recognized this fact, and are now arguing for an “end of development” based on the ethnocentrism of these exported models, and on the problem with generating universal definitions of “poverty”, for instance (Hart/Padayachee 2010:61).

I will consider some anthropological ideas regarding the concept “development” here, more specifically the work of Escobar (1992 & 1995), Ferguson (1990 & 1994) and Gardner/Lewis (1996).

The work of Gardner/Lewis (1996) attempts to give a history of the relationship between anthropology and development, as well as a history of the term in itself, and ideas for a more meaningful involvement in a problematic field. In their introduction, they write:

““Development“, the argument goes, represents the world as in a state of linear progression and change in which the North is “advanced”, and the South locked into static traditionalism which only modern technology and capitalist relations of production can transform.” (1996:1)

The idea of development and “development aid” from North to South are seen as continuations of colonial mechanics (1996:8, Escobar 1995). Ferguson (1990), on the other hand, sees development agents not as the direct carriers of neo-colonialism, but as someone with good intentions and horrible results (1990:17). He argues that the reason for the disastrous results of so many development projects lies within the misconceptions of those that

attempt to *do* development (1990:17). Escobar comments on this, especially in relation to anthropologists, which he claims have “overlook[ed] the ways in which development operates as an arena of cultural contestation and identity construction” (1995:15) - and that this has led to anthropologists being blinded by the opportunity to meet third world “others” in the context of development, just as in the context of colonialism (Gardner/Lewis 1996:24). Gardner and Lewis, however, attempts to see beyond the involvement of anthropologists in development as a problem, and rather sets out to define a set of goals and ideals - all the while problematicized - for a more constructive and responsible involvement. Their closing argument is that while any involvement in development practice is problematic, the methodology and knowledge of anthropology and anthropologists needs to accompany these processes - as the processes are here, and will not go away (Gardner/Lewis 1996:165-167).

Escobar (1992 & 1995) is more critical to the entire concept and construction of the concept “development”. He writes:

“Development is understood here as a particular set of discursive power relations that construct a representation of the Third World, whose critical analysis lays bare the processes by which Latin America and the rest of the Third World have been produced as “underdeveloped.”” (1992:47)

Further, Escobar sees the discourses surrounding development and the framework it is set in as three-part: the discourse of the fulfillment of democracy, as an export from western ideas of egalitarianism; the discourse of difference, which is seen as challenging the European ethnocentrism; and the anti-development discourses, which originate in the crisis of development (1992:48). Each of these discourses offers some potential - there is the potential for material and institutional gains (democracy), the potential for furthering existing struggles (difference), and, finally, the potential for “exploring alternative ways of organizing societies and economies, of satisfying needs, of healing and living” (anti-development) (1992:48). Escobar’s ideas for going beyond development are formulated like this:

“In the long run, it is a matter of generating new ways of seeing, of renewing social and cultural self-descriptions by displacing the categories with which

Third World groups have been constructed by dominant forces, and by producing views of reality which make visible the numerous loci of power of those forces; a matter of “regenerating people’s spaces” or creating new ones, with those who have actually survived the age of modernity and development by resisting it or by insinuating themselves creatively in the circuits of capital and modernization.” (1992:48-49)

The case reviewed in this thesis is one where the classic definition and rhetoric regarding development is present - the idea of modernization as the means to reach prosperity (Gardner/Lewis 1996) - and as such should be analyzed in that context. The argument of the thesis overall could be seen as a contribution to the school of postdevelopment: that in light of local conditions and reactions, a rethinking of what development *is* and *should be* is necessary. This thesis attempts to do so by analysis via moral economies as counter to capitalist economies.

What we see, then, is that globalization brings development to the margins of society, in this case to the (until recently) remote northeastern corner of Cambodia. Reflecting again on the discussion relating to the moral economy, we see a picture forming: development is forcing itself on subsistence farmers, and forcing them into a mode of production that is in direct opposition to their subsistence ethic. This has led to a set of reactions within the community, namely moral indignation towards how, why and for whom it is implemented, resistance to the project, and attempts at stopping it that on at least one occasion turned violent. From the global perspective of development and its politics, onwards to the local - the subsistence farmers and their resistance to a rubber plantation they did not ask for and do not want.

The empirical basis for *The Moral Economy of the Peasant* was that of the peasant revolts in Vietnam - which were full-fledged violent uprisings brought on by the threat of the subsistence ethic by the free market (Scott 1976). As shown above in the link between development and moral economy, the premises for such a revolt is present also in the case at hand. It has, however, only materialized in a flash, and not as a continuous phenomenon influencing daily life in Bousraa. What we need to elaborate on, then, is the continuous efforts made by the population to (ideally) halt or slow down the implementa-

tion of the plantation, what these actions are, and how they fit into the larger scheme of things. The population employs a varied set of tactics in this regard - from sabotage and “militant” uprising to disinformation, the seeking out of external allies, demonstration, slander and protest. Michel de Certeau (1984) describes this kind of tactics as actions that take place in the space of “the other” (xix). Further, it is described as taking small action over time, constantly looking for chances to turn situations into “opportunities” (xix). For an example of one such tactic, de Certeau describes what he calls “la perruque”:

“La perruque is the worker’s own work disguised as work for his employer ... La perruque may be as simple a matter as a secretary’s writing a love letter on “company time” or as complex as a cabinetmaker’s “borrowing” a lathe to make a piece of furniture for his living room ... the worker who indulges in “la perruque” actually diverts time (not goods, since he uses only scraps) from the factory for work that is free, creative, and precisely not directed toward profit.” (1984:25)

Again there is the contrast between making a profit (for another) and making something based in other *values* than that of money. The bulk sum of these forms of resistance fit into the theoretical framework of James Scott (1985), in many ways the definitive work on peasant resistance. In it, Scott defines them as:

“Everyday forms of peasant resistance - the prosaic but constant struggle between the peasantry and those who seek to extract labor, food, taxes, rents, and interest from them. Most forms of this struggle stop well short of outright collective defiance. Here I have in mind the ordinary weapons of relatively powerless groups: foot dragging, dissimulation, desertion, false compliance, pilfering, feigned ignorance, slander, arson, sabotage ... they require little or no coordination or planning; they make use of implicit understandings and informal networks; they often represent a form of individual self-help; they typically avoid any direct, symbolic confrontation with authority” (Scott 1985:xvi)

Scott continues by classifying these actions as representations of a class struggle (ibid): they are the utilization of the tools at hands to achieve some form of footing within the power struggle between ruling and subordinate classes (ibid). The outright violent,

“revolutionary” uprisings are rare, and in general an expression of great desperation (ibid). Scott continues his argument by showing how this class struggle over time evolves the peasant’s *revolutionary consciousness* in regards to avoiding claims on their land, surplus and modes of production (ibid):

“Their individual acts ... may, in the end, make an utter shambles of the policies dreamed up by their would-be superiors in the capital ... just as millions of anthozoan polyps create, willy- nilly, a coral reef, so do the multiple acts of peasant insubordination and evasion create political and economical barrier reefs on their own ... And whenever ... the ship of state runs aground on such reefs, attention is usually directed to the shipwreck itself, and not to the vast aggregation of petty acts that made it possible.” (ibid:xvii)

A central idea then becomes the accumulated effect of many small acts of defiance and sabotage - both in practical change (if any is achieved) and as message and communication regarding the processes that are being protested against. Scott elaborates on this in his next book (1990). The most notable addition to the discussion regarding resistance that surfaces from it is the idea of *public transcripts* and *hidden transcripts*. He defines the public transcript as “open interaction between subordinate and those who dominate” (1990:2) - that is, the forms of interaction that are sanctioned and accepted by those in power. Hidden transcripts, conversely, “takes place “offstage”, beyond direct observation by power holders” (ibid:4). These hidden transcripts consist of “speeches, gestures, and practices that confirm, contradict, or inflect what appears in the public transcript” (ibid:4-5). This means that we relate to two modes of communication: one that is accepted, and one that is not - the interaction between transcripts is described by Scott: “... the frontier between public and the hidden transcripts is a zone of constant struggle between the dominant and subordinate” (ibid:14). The hidden transcript (or “offstage” communication) as such becomes an integral part of any form of resistance. It is in the hidden transcript that any form of organized resistance is planned; it is where the attitudes of the subordinates are shaped; and it is where we may find information as to what specific acts of resistance *mean*.

Having gone through the three main theoretical starting points for the analysis of the situation in Bousraa, we can pinpoint some general connections between the themes of

moral economy, development and resistance. These connections can be seen almost as an input-output model, where we have a society based largely on moral economy and subsistence ethic, which has the market mechanics of globalization imposed upon them endogenously by the state, a corporation, or, perhaps most likely, by the two in collaboration. This imposition generates a set of reactions, as the subsistence ethic is put in peril; one example would be that a farmer has to give up his land and take wage labor - wage labor has no substance for a farmer concerned with, primarily, producing enough food for his family. He not only loses access to his only means of production, he also subsists on the whim of the economically dominant actors that have “taken” his land from him. By the mechanics of the global market economy, he is at the mercy of prices of (for instance) rubber in Africa - should rubber prices drop due to overproduction at a location thousands of miles from him, or due to the invention of some product making rubber superfluous, the subsistence the new system has given him will be reduced, or even vanish. Where his farm previously allowed him a guarantee for a subsistence minimum in collaboration with the rest of his community, he is now in peril of being thrown into a subsistence crisis because of factors he can not see or control. What he can see, however, is the local manifestation of all of these things: the “development project”. As a response and reaction to this, the community generates resistance - resistance to unfair treatment, unjust compensation, the removal of important cultural traits, the removal of the community’s ability to subsist on its own, and so on. In these acts we see the manifestation of the clash of the global and the local. While the farmer may not be adverse to, for instance, having improved infrastructure in his community, he will be adverse to having his land taken from him. In the gray scale between these things lies the meaning of his resistance, and what it communicates. This can tell us something about what constitutes meaningful “development” for a subsistence farmer.

Relating this to the case at hand, the puzzle comes together. The Cambodian state has in this case (and many similar cases) granted concessions for economic development on land with disputed ownership⁷. The farmlands of the Bunong population of Bousraa

⁷Land grabbing is one of the most pressing issues when it comes to human rights in Cambodia. The government is widely regarded as highly corrupt, and there are doubts towards the legitimacy of many of the concessions. See Global Witness (2009), Transparency International (2010), Wessendorf (2011), CHRAC (2009 & 2010), Amnesty International (2011).

have been leased to a rubber company for the implementation of several plantations - the total size of the project including all actors (there are other plantations being established in the area as well) is currently unknown, but at the time of fieldwork, the establishment of the “Varanasi” plantation had led to the clearing of some 2600 hectares of forest, much (if not most) of it being claimed by the community in Bousraa, and including not only swidden fields, but fallow land, graveyards, spirit places etc. This project is termed as “development” in two ways. First, it is part of the development of an until recently quite inaccessible province in a financial way. Migrants, investors and entrepreneurs are moving into the province due to this increased accessibility, and the area is opening up to the exploitation of its natural resources. Secondly, it is part of the state formation of Cambodia, and the project of the Cambodian government to assimilate its “margins” into the nation - namely exerting a larger degree of control upon the “unruly and primitive” indigenous groups inhabiting the area. The project is presented as helping these groups, by giving them regular jobs and a steady income, and by providing improved infrastructure. The rhetoric and discussion regarding these aspects are presented in the chapter on development. The inhabitants of Bousraa, however, do not want this kind of development, and as such are resisting the project with whatever means they have. Through analyzing the acts of resistance in Bousraa, an impression of what works and what does not is observable. An argument can be made in light of the attempted “development” of a society based on moral economy that the term “development” is by no means universal, and by transferring the model of financial development from a capitalist viewpoint onto a moral economy is not fruitful for either party.

1.3 Places

Before moving on some geographical notes are in order. This section will (briefly) introduce Cambodia, Monduliri Province and finally the Bousraa village complex.

Cambodia is situated in Southeast Asia, bordering Thailand to the west and northwest, Laos to the northeast, Vietnam to the east and southeast, and the gulf of Thailand to the South. The latest numbers stipulate the population at 13,395,682 individuals (General Population Census (GPC) 2008). The country is governed by the CPP and prime minister Hun Sen, as it has been since 1985 (Chandler 2007). Cambodia has for the

last thirty years had a reputation as a war-torn third world country - the civil war, the Khmer Rouge genocide, a countryside riddled with landmines, widespread human rights abuses and corruption - not the most charming description of a country. Since the turn of the millennium Cambodia has regained some of its footing in the region and in the world. Relative stability has stimulated tourist influx and international investment, and the country's GDP is steadily rising (UNDP 2011). The country's economy is still heavily reliant on foreign aid, however (UNDP 2011), and reports of various forms of human rights abuses, in several cases carried out by government officials or companies associated with government officials (see for example Global Witness 2009, Amnesty International 2011) are rife in the media and in the hundreds of NGO reports that are being produced in the country every year.

Mondulkiri Province is situated in northeastern Cambodia. It borders Ratanakiri Province in the north, Kratie Province in the west, and Vietnam in the south and east. The demography of Mondulkiri is dominated by various ethnic minority groups, who constitute the majority of the population (GPC 2008). Mondulkiri is the most sparsely populated province in Cambodia, with only four individuals per square kilometer (GPC 2008). The province has not been easily accessible until recent years, which, coupled with the hilly and densely forested geography, is considered the main reason for it not being very densely populated. The province first opened up in the early 1960s, when Cambodian soldiers and their families were sent to Mondulkiri to settle, and to establish a Khmer outpost (Nikles 2006). Since then the province has been relatively separate from the rest of the country, with only basic travel on road being possible, in addition to airplane travel. With the new road (finalized in 2010), migration (which has been steadily increasing)⁸ has intensified, and the province is set to see a much larger influx of lowland Khmers over the next few years as the province has become more accessible, investment is going into the area, and jobs are being generated in every sector. Large-scale development in the form of plantations, hydro-power dams, mining ventures and so on are aiming to utilize the province's large pool of natural resources, and the tourist trade is also picking up rapidly, with guest-houses, hotels, restaurants and tour operators being established at a remarkable pace. The

⁸From 1998 to 2008, the population in Mondulkiri doubled (GPC 2008), and from 1992 to 1998, it doubled as well (Nikles 2006).

district capital, Sen Monorom, has gone from being a dusty “frontier”-style village (some will argue that it is still rather dusty) to being more of a sprawling village turning into a town, with new buildings of all shapes and sizes emerging rapidly. There are several national and international NGOs present, and more and more companies are setting up offices and providing services to inhabitants. Around Sen Monorom there are still several mainly Bunong villages⁹, but due to especially land trading and -grabbing, these are becoming “watered down” with Khmer inhabitants as access to farmland becomes difficult¹⁰.

Bousraa village is situated approximately 42 kilometers from Sen Monorom, in the province’s Pich Reada District. Bousraa is a “village complex”, meaning that it consists of seven villages in total, each with their own village chief. In appearance a first-timer would assume it is one, rather spaced-out, settlement, but in fact it is seven village entities that have more or less grown into each other. Villagers reported that this came about after the Khmer Rouge period, when the council of elders decided to move these seven villages closer to each other in case of similar events in the future. After population growth, migration and increased construction activity in the area, the villages now appear as one, with the exception of village four and parts of village one, which are still somewhat retracted from the others. The villages are still predominantly Bunong, but more and more Khmer lowlanders are moving in, many of them to get jobs related to the establishment of rubber plantations in the area. When commune authorities were contacted, they gave the following population data¹¹:

Number of families by ethnicity:

⁹Two of the villages closest to Sen Monorom, Putang and Lao Ka, are now appearing more or less as Khmer villages, with the tourism trade being a major factor in income generation, especially in Putang. Informants in Lao Ka said that so many of the villagers have sold farmland to investors that the possibility of moving the village is being discussed.

¹⁰A process often referred to as “Kmerization” - see for instance Bourdier (2006), Nilkes (2006) etc.

¹¹The data presented here was retrieved from Commune authorities on February first, 2011. The document that was presented to us was stamped April fourth, 2010.

Village	no. of Families						
Ethnicity	Bunong	Khmer	Cham	Thai	Lao	Kraom	Kreung
1: Pu'Tit	127	13	0	0	1	0	0
2: Pu'Reang	99	9	0	1	0	0	0
3: Bousraa	95	21	1	0	0	0	1
4: Pu'Teull	102	14	0	0	0	0	0
5: La'Meh	93	42	0	0	0	1	0
6: Pu'Chra	83	24	0	0	0	0	0
7: Pu'Lukh	155	31	0	0	0	0	0
Total	754	154	1	1	1	1	1

Total population by sex:

Village	Men	Women	Total
1: Pu'Tit	315	302	617
2: Pu'Reang	283	223	506
3: Bousraa	255	259	514
4: Pu'Teull	264	245	509
5: La'Meh	293	280	573
6: Pu'Chra	218	262	480
7: Pu'Lukh	445	392	837
Total	2073	1963	4036

A note should be made of the population swelling witnessed during May 2010 - this influx of in-migrating Khmers is obviously not accounted for in the statistics provided by the commune authorities. From what could be gathered from informants, migrants and authorities in Bousraa, however, it is reasonable to assume that several hundred Khmers can be added to the above statistics.

1.4 Brief Introduction to Ethnic Minorities in Cambodia; the Bunong

The Bunong are one of several indigenous groups inhabiting the northeastern part of Cambodia (Bourdier 2006, GPC 2008). They make up the majority of the population

in Mondulkiri, with a population estimated at 27,262 individuals (GPC 2008¹²). The majority of the Bunong practice subsistence farming, with highly limited production for the market, as well as foraging in the forest surrounding villages and settlements (Nikles 2006). Subsistence farming has traditionally been carried out by rotational farming, where a plot of land is cleared of trees, burnt to the ground, and then planted with a variety of fruits, vegetables, rice and other plants (i. e. tobacco) (Bourdier 2006, Nikles 2006). The plot is farmed for two to five years before it is abandoned to regrow for a longer stretch of time, up to 10-15 years (Nikles 2006, Bourdier 2006, informants). The majority of the Bunong are animist, and as such believe that nature is spirited - there are spirits living in plants, trees, rocks and water, in household objects, as well as ancestral spirits, and the needs of these spirits must be observed and tended to ensure the well-being of individuals, families and villages (Nikles 2006). Due to the impact of Cambodian society and missionaries, not all Bunong consider themselves animist - a relatively small percentage are Buddhist, while others again are different varieties of Christians, most notably Catholic or Protestant. The Bunong population in Bousraa, for instance, is religiously varied. My main informants were animist or “informal Catholics”, but there are several churches in Bousraa, and many of the people I talked to belong to these. The central ethnographic aspects of the Bunong connecting them to the argument in this thesis are presented in greater detail in chapter 2.

1.5 Methodology

The first and main fieldwork was conducted from early January until late June, 2010, and was followed by a short fieldwork in January and February of 2011 of approximately five weeks. The first month was spent going to different Bunong villages with an interpreter, with a main focus on getting to some of the more far-off settlements in Mondulkiri. After having chosen Bousraa as a focal point for my work, I started going back and forth between Bousraa and Sen Monorom on a daily basis accompanied by an interpreter. In this period we mainly worked with introducing ourselves in the different villages, finding key informants and getting a general grasp of the situation. This going back and forth continued until the middle of April, when I found more permanent lodging in Bousraa

¹²This data is culled from the statistics based on what was given as native tongue. The exact number may as such be slightly different, as language is not the only factor for defining ethnicity.

by renting a room with a Khmer/Bunong family, having interpreters come and go, and spending evenings, nights and mornings “alone” in the village. In the beginning, we conducted semi-structured interviews relating mainly to land, the plantation and the resistance to the establishment of the plantation on village farmland. These conversations taught us a great deal about who was willing to talk more in-depth, and so we formed a “collection” of informants that we revisited regularly for longer conversations, all the while talking to new people in hopes of expanding our outlook. The period in which I lived in Bousraa was very rewarding, as we had already formed connections with several informants, and so I could go to visit them on my own and actually keep a thematically relevant conversation going in simple Khmer (or occasionally *very* simple English, if someone with that capability was present). The conversations often started as one-on-one and evolved into group interviews as people came by, heard what we were talking about, and joined in. I was also fortunate enough to be invited to farmlands and forest, and were as such given more of a practical demonstration of the Bunong’s relationship to their land.

There were some challenges connected to doing fieldwork in Bousraa at this time - particularly the tension in the village between villagers and government and Socfin KCD officials. The authorities were wary of foreigners asking questions, which led to me being “arrested” on several occasions, and forced to produce all manners of papers, and even being sent to the central police station in Sen Monorom (whose staffing officers didn’t seem to care whether I was in Bousraa or not). Also, we discovered on several occasions that informants were outright lying about being part of resistance action, about the times and places of meetings etc. - all signs of fear in the population as far as I could deduce - and also, no doubt, reflecting upon the need for trust when discussing these topics. This is more thoroughly described in chapter four.

Another challenge with doing fieldwork in Bousraa was the language situation. I have spent a fair amount of time in Cambodia between 2004 and 2010 (approx. 14 months in total), and so have managed to attain a decent competence in the Cambodian language (Khmer). The Bunong, however, have their own language which is vastly different from Khmer, and in which I, at the time of commencing fieldwork, could only say “hello”. There were several approaches to this problem to consider. First, I could attempt to

become fluent (enough) in Bunong. This seemed unrealistic for such a short fieldwork. Second, I could conduct my interviews in pidgin English and stuttering Khmer. Less than ideal for building relations. Third, I could engage one or more interpreters, while juggling (very) basic Bunong and gradually improving my Khmer. Many Bunong speak very good or decent Khmer, and most Bunong in villages where interaction with Cambodians has been going on for some time speak Khmer more or less fluently. Young people are also, in general, fluent in Khmer through schooling. As Bousraa has a fair share of Khmer inhabitants, and has had for many years, the general level of Khmer-competence among the Bunong of Bousraa was perceived to be good. This justified focusing the bulk of my linguistic efforts on Khmer, as I already had a solid base in this language, and was keen on having the opportunity to conduct interviews not only through an interpreter, even if using Khmer would limit the number of informants available to me to some degree, as well as presenting some challenges in regard to using a non-native tongue - key concepts and specific words are often significant, and meanings between two languages do not always (or even often) overlap fully. Working with this kind of “approximation” leaves something to be desired when it comes to linguistic accuracy - this, in the end, was another reason for choosing to work with interpreters more skilled in both Khmer and Bunong than myself. I worked with four different interpreters (to ensure access to a variety of informants, as well as juggling the positionality of both myself and the interpreters - see Borchgrevink 2003) for varying amounts of time.

1.6 Onwards

So, the scene has been set for the continuation of this thesis: in a village pressured by large-scale international companies establishing operations of overwhelming magnitude on land that has belonged to the Bunong for centuries, I aim to illustrate the effect of a development project on a community based on moral economy and subsistence ethics. The rest of the thesis aims to identify and explain reactions and counteractions to this by the society, and to put these actions and reactions into a bigger context of moral economies, development and resistance

Chapter two deals with presenting relevant ethnography regarding the Bunong, and to contextualize this ethnography to the moral economy theory, to provide a basis for anal-

ysis. By isolating specific issues regarding the Bunong, their spirituality, their production and their relationship to land, an overview of why the ethics of the community are incompatible with the ethics of the market economy is presented.

Chapter three goes into the details surrounding the establishment of the rubber plantation “Varanasi” in Bousraa. The role of the Cambodian state in the “development” of the indigenous communities is discussed, and the rhetoric of both government and company presented. The picture that emerges is that a capitalist agenda is behind the wording of the project - that while the project, in part, is presented as an asset and a major opportunity for the Bunong to “catch up” to the rest of the country, the overall scheme is to incorporate them into a more controllable population, and to exploit natural resources that are present on lands that the Bunong, according to the legal framework in Cambodia, have tenure rights to - something which is conveniently overlooked. This provides the basis for further analysis of the reactions to the implementation: it becomes clear that “development” is not quantifiable in any meaningful way.

Chapter four deals with the resistance of the Bunong in Bousraa to the establishment of the plantation, and looks to uncover and explain different strategies for resisting the plantation establishment, and for stopping it. In the context of the moral economy and the idea of development, we can deduct from these actions a communication of what is acceptable and not, and what is desirable and not from the point of view of the affected community.

Finally, the conclusion ties these three parts together and presents some concluding thoughts on the past, present and future of the indigenous groups in Cambodia and the attempts to “develop” them.

2 Moral Economy



Figure 3: A mirr near Village 4.



Figure 4: A buffalo is sacrificed for a wedding in Village 1.

In this chapter I ethnographically examine the Bunong in Bousraa from the perspective of the moral economy. The chapter starts off with discussing the centrality of land for the Bunong as an object of production. Furthermore, the chapter considers the Bunong's spirituality in their relationship to their land: how their Animist beliefs further enhance the relationship between community, individual and land. This is followed by defining land as a social good in Bunong society, which, by restriction of access, can be the basis for the moral indignation associated with the moral economy concept. Finally, an overall contextualization of the Bunong and their moral economy is presented.

2.1 Land as Object of Production

To create a meaningful analysis of the Bunong's relationship to their land, it is reasonable to start by the physical relationship: land as object of production and basis for subsistence. The Bunong have traditionally practiced swidden/rotational/"slash-and-burn"¹³ agriculture. This is a trait shared by many of the indigenous groups in Cambodia's north-east provinces - the process is well documented in (among others) Bourdier (2006), which deals primarily with the Tampuan of Ratanakiri Province, north of Mondulhiri, and Nikles (2006). There are many different ways of carrying out this form of agriculture, but Erni (2005:4) determines three factors for a minimum definition: it entails an alteration between a short span of cultivation and a longer span of fallow, it entails the regular shifting of fields, and it entails the removal of natural vegetation, normally by use of fire.

In the case of the Bunong, the plot (hereafter termed by the Bunong word *mirr*¹⁴) is indeed cleared by fire. This takes place at the end of the dry season (in April/May), after trees and brush have been cut down on the *mirr* for approximately the preceding month. After the wood and brush has been burnt, the *mirr* is covered in ash, which acts as fertilizer for the coming crops. The *mirr* is then sown after first rain. The crops are varied - the main product is dry rice of different varieties, and this crop is interspersed with a variety of vegetables (aubergine, corn, yams etc.), fruits and occasionally tobacco and cotton. This varied crop in general totals about one quarter to one third of the total

¹³The term used hereafter will be *swidden* agriculture, in accordance with ethnographically similar material (Bourdier, Nikles etc.)

¹⁴Mirr is Bunong for "forest field" (approximately) - the word is similar in several indigenous languages in the area, see for instance Bourdier (2006), who uses *miir*.

production on the *mirr* (Bourdier 2006). The *mirr* is farmed for two to three years, and then left fallow for five to ten years¹⁵. This fallow period will, ideally and given enough time, ensure the complete regrowth of the forest before it is cut down and burned anew. The *mirrs* are “phased out” of the farming cycle: small crops of various kinds can be sown on them without re-clearing, for instance, and regrowth yields various other products that are gathered when the land is fallow (see below). It is common for one household to farm one or two *mirrs*, each one normally 0.5-1ha.¹⁶ (Bourdier 2006, Nikles 2006, Informants), and some villages also have the occasional communal *mirr*, or other social mechanism to guarantee everyone some form of harvest (White 1996). Herein lies an interesting aspect regarding the subsistence ethic: by varying crops, farm locations and having several plots available, the household ensures a production that is geared towards not the creation of surplus and profit via sale (although this certainly happens), but towards securing a needed yield for individual, family, household and community. If one crop fails, another may succeed, if one *mirr* is struck by flooding, another will be OK, and so on.

Some villagers have also started cash cropping of various kinds. The most common products at the time of fieldwork was cassava and cashew nuts¹⁷, which are farmed in more permanent fields (cassava) or orchards (cashew). The produce is collected by wholesalers and brought onto the market. This is, however, not the produce that represents the bulk of the Bunong’s interaction with local markets: first and foremost there is resin tapping.

Liquid resin is gathered from the *Diptherocarpus* trees that are present in the forests of Mondulkiri. The resin is gathered by cutting a bowl-shaped hole in the trunk of the

¹⁵As in Nikles (2006), the information gathered on this subject varied significantly. Informants reported farming periods as low as one year and as high as five years on one plot, and fallow periods as short as five years and as long as 15 (!) years.

¹⁶This would entail that in Bousraa, with approximately 850 households affected by the Socfin KCD operation (FIDH 2011), total area of planted *miirs* would approximate 425-850ha. The concession, in comparison, is at time of writing totaling approximately 6978ha. Including fallow land (at an estimated average of two plots per household) the *miirs* would total approximately 1275-2550ha., still less than half the area of the concession.

¹⁷Cassava was, at the time of fieldwork, by far the most popular - cassava prices were reportedly going up, and there were difficulties meeting export demands, which led to many farmers changing their primary crop. This applies to Cambodian as well as Bunong farmers.

tree, which is then briefly set on fire. The resin seeps into the bowl, and can be scooped out, poured into cans, and traded. The resin can be sold to wholesalers in the area, or it can be transported to Sen Monorom. Most villagers involved in resin tapping in Bousraa reported selling it to wholesalers locally, as the trip to Sen Monorom is long, and the road is not in the best of conditions, especially in rainy season. The resin is used for boats (for varnishing the hull), torches, and paint products (Baird 2003). Resin tapping is considered hard work (as the trees are often deep in the forest), but the gains are seen as outweighing the costs, and the collection is the most important source of income for many families. In times of dearth, the resin can also be traded directly for rice (Nikles 2006).

Via the resin tapping and cash crops we can see the beginning relationship between the Bunong and the market. This is a process that is changing rapidly, but in general principles, not that much is different. The villagers still rely mainly on production for subsistence, and aim to get what they *need* from their *mirrs*, paddy fields, vegetable gardens and foraging trips. In addition to this, the resin collection is used to supplement self-production with either cash or merchandise that can not be produced locally, such as salt, MSG¹⁸ and petrol. Villagers in Bousraa also mentioned several “luxury goods” such as clothes and phone cards when asked what they used money made from resin tapping for.

Another important reason for the prevalence of swidden agriculture in the northeast is the natural environment itself. Contrary to lowland Cambodia, the two northeastern provinces are not especially *flat*. For paddy rice cultivation (which is also present in the highlands, see below), a flat field is required, and steady access to water needs to be maintained. While the yields of the dry rice may not be as impressive as that of the paddy varieties, paddy cultivation is much more susceptible to natural intervention destroying or reducing crops (Bourdier 2006, Informants). Furthermore, the varied crops of the swidden plots are not possible in rice paddies, as they are flooded after planting and remain so until harvest. Keeping in mind, then, that the main focus of villagers have primarily been on ensuring subsistence, the *mirrs* are in every way competitive compared to the paddy fields - not in ideal yield, but in yield predictability and stability.

¹⁸Monosodiumglutamate. Popular flavor enhancer used in virtually all cooking in Southeast Asia.

The practice of paddy rice cultivation was adapted by the indigenous communities in the northeast after the Khmer Rouge regime¹⁹. During this period, most villagers were relocated to Koh Njek district in northern Mondulokiri, and forced to work in labor camps, mainly with farming rice paddies. Having learned the techniques during this period, some villagers continued this practice upon returning to their villages in the early 80s, in cases where the soil was suitable. Various reasons are given for why people choose to farm paddy rice as well as *mirr* rice. The potential for higher yield is mentioned, also the relatively limited amount of labor that needs to be done to plant paddy compared to the clearing and burning of the *mirr*. Another aspect is the option to use buffaloes for some of the more strenuous tasks, if the household or village has access to livestock. The variety of the crop is maintained, however, by planting vegetables and fruits in a smaller garden, or by farming both paddy and *mirr*.

The forest areas surrounding villages are also utilized without the harnessing of nature involved in the preparation of *mirrs*. Villagers forage for a variety of fruits, vegetables and roots in surrounding forests, and also on the *mirrs* that lay fallow. Fish are caught in streams, and hunting has also supplemented the diet of the Bunong, although this is gradually becoming impossible due to restrictions and legislation implemented as part of various conservation programs. Wild honey is gathered from the forest, as is bamboo.

A note should be made here about the distribution of land and resin trees in the villages. Nikles (2006) defines the forest land as a “common pool resource”, meaning that the villagers have equal stakes in the produce of the forest, and land for *mirrs*. However, resin trees are owned individually - who owns the trees can be identified by the way they are cut to drain resin. The distribution of resin trees is based on simply finding an untapped tree first, and this tree being within the accepted boundaries of the forest belonging to the village. The resin trees are inherited when the owner dies or can not tap them any more. There are some issues connected to the idea of the forest as a “common-pool” resource in the example of Bousraa. First of all, the clearing of large tracts of

¹⁹The Khmer Rouge regime lasted from 1975 until 1979. During this time, approximately 1.4-2.2 million people perished due to mass executions, starvation and disease under one of the most murderous “communist” projects ever undertaken. See for instance Chandler (2007).

this communal resource by Socfin KCD has led to problems in defining and distributing compensation, as there is no real individual demarcation, except in the form of use (see chapter three). Secondly, there is the conflict that has arisen between a ban on clearing “fresh” forest for *miirs* (Nikles 2006) and increased population density. In Bousraa this conflict is clearly defined in terms of people losing access to their land: there is not enough to go around, and with population increase and the clearing of large tracts for the plantation, the problem grows significant. Informants reported that while they could clear more plots in the past, as well as keeping fallow land, the ban combined with the loss of land in connection to the plantation has left many people with less than they “should have”, as all available land was “taken”. Some informants reported wanting to go further away to find room for their *miirs*, but were unsure if this was a good idea, as they would have to travel far from their homes for longer periods of time, and transport costs connected to the harvest would also become an issue. In short, a community which has relied on free and common-pool access to their object of production has started developing a culture of ownership as an individual trait, not a communal one. Those that were lucky enough not to have their farms compromised by the concession (yet) are as such left with a greater set of resources than those who lost their land in the clearings. The common-pool relationship to resources can, however be seen in the distribution mechanics still prevalent in Bousraa.

Regarding distribution mechanics, some notes should be made. If we first consider Joanna White’s 1996 study of the “indigenous highlanders of the northeast“, an interesting example is mentioned:

“At certain times of need there are also communal village systems to turn to. For example, when a new village house is being built it is not unusual for each household to make male labor available to assist in construction; this assistance is eventually reciprocated. Different groups have different mechanisms for support. The Phnong [Bunong], for example, have a tradition whereby at the time of harvesting their staple crop of rice they invite relatives and friends to assist them during the first day of harvesting.” (1996:20)

The heavier workloads in families and extended families are shared among the villagers. When it comes to the specific periods of harvest, or forms of emergencies or periods where

the available workforce is limited, there is also a system for lightening the workload:

“Extended family groups assist each other at key stages of the agricultural cycle when work is particularly pressing or difficult, such as when trees must be cut to clear new areas of forest, or during the harvest, or in times of labor shortage due to death or illness. When rice stocks run low it is also common for borrowing to take place between members of the extended family. This exchange of labor and goods amongst kinship groups often takes place on an inter-village basis.” (1996:20)

Furthermore, there is the system of communal *mirrs*, rice deposits for the community, and granary systems (1996:20). No informants in Bousraa told of such practices being followed today, but they have been documented in other studies of the indigenous groups of the northeast (White 1996, Bourdier 2006), and old people in the village still remembered them. As one elderly woman reported:

“Before, if there was a problem with a field, we would help each other. Maybe someone else had a very good harvest and would give those in need some baskets of rice, or they could help on another farm and have rice in return. This does not happen as often anymore. Now people are more interested in money.” Informant in village 4.

What does still exist, however, is the “lending” of labor between families and extended families at the beginning of harvest season, and in building houses and undertaking other major tasks. It is also common for the inhabitants of Bousraa that still have ample access to land²⁰ to allow members of family and extended family to help with the farming or even “borrow” a plot for farming for themselves, in return for labor on farms or orchards of the owner. So, even if there are no communal *mirrs* in Bousraa today, the redistribution of produce through the exchange of labor is very much present - and as such assuring a minimum of subsistence for members of the community through the exchange of labor. This is perceived as fair and right by villagers, which concurs with the notion of the subsistence ethic: the exchange has to be fair and for the good of the community.

²⁰The plantation projects in Bousraa have affected the different villages and households to varying degrees. Some families still have access to most of their *mirrs* and fallow land, while others have no land left of any kind. See chapter on development for discussion of this in terms of generating difference.

Having demonstrated how the Bunong farm and gather from their *mirrs*, paddies and forests, and how produce and land is distributed in the village, it is time to link this relationship to nature and production to the subsistence ethic theory. Recapping from chapter one, the subsistence ethic is determined by how the community distributes product internally, and by what mechanisms exist (or don't exist) in the form of safeguards for subsistence for the community as a whole. What we see, then, is that the whole system of production is geared towards safety and stability, not yield and profit. The objects of production are as such completely dependent on a symbiotic relationship to the natural environment surrounding the villages, as the depletion of soil, deforestation or dispossession would cause the system of production to become less secure and reliable. This relationship, and the goal of subsistence rather than profit and surplus, form the basic idea of the subsistence ethic of the Bunong.

From the previous sections, it becomes apparent that there is grounds to claim a subsistence ethic for the Bunong of Bousraa. The original nature of the Bunong's system of production is one that favors security rather than possible yield, and in the case of uneven distribution due to accident, death, natural causes or a rubber plantation, labor can be exchanged as long as there are still farmers that have arable land, orchards or paddies. Via the exchange of labor and the redistribution of crops and farmland, the society and its members are secured a subsistence minimum one way or the other. These mechanics have roots in smaller village systems, when families were linked tightly together and could depend on each other to "see each other through" - but are firmly rooted in Bunong culture, and as such are present today, even in a relatively large and "diluted" set of villages as the ones in Bousraa. This notion of "community first" and the mechanics that make it possible, constitute the subsistence ethic of the Bunong.

Having established the subsistence ethic, it is time to investigate further the relationship between the Bunong and their land - this time regarding their spirituality/religion. We will see that this further implicates the subsistence ethic, and finally the moral economy through the definition of land as an important social good in Bunong culture.

2.2 Land as Spiritual Good

The majority of the Bunong are Animists, as were the majority of the informants interviewed for this study. This has implications for how the Bunong relate to their land, and how they see the land not as detached from the humans, but as an environment shared with spirits of the forest, of the rice, of the trees and of the ancestors.

First of all a note on what Animism implies: Animism is the belief that natural environments are inhabited by “spirits”. This means that beyond what can be seen, there is another realm existing alongside this one, where ancestors are still present and have the power to interfere in the lives of individuals (and vice versa), where there are “good” spirits that have the power to help and “angry” spirits that may cause sickness or death. These spirits must be appeased at crucial times of the year to ensure harvests or rain, for instance, and in cases of the breaking of taboos, crime and other “negative” actions (White 1996, Nikles 2006). The spirits are appeased by sacrifice, mainly of livestock (buffaloes, pigs and chickens being the most common animals - buffaloes reserved for special occasions as a result of their cost) and of jar wine²¹. After sacrifice, the meat is divided according to the occasion and the participants, and rice beer is drunk. The appropriate sacrifice for the different occasions is normally determined by village elders, although certain situations carry certain flexibilities - adjustments occur in terms of villagers’ wealth, of the offense in question and so on. For instance, at a wedding I attended in Bousraa, the elders had decided that the couple had to sacrifice a pig in addition to the already planned sacrifice of a water buffalo, as the elders had discovered that the couple had engaged in premarital sex. This is considered inappropriate, and so the sacrifice was made to safeguard the couple and the rest of the villagers from potential sickness as a result of angered spirits. The goodwill of the spirits is as such seen as an integral part of the welfare of the community - the inappropriate acts of the couple could not just potentially harm themselves, they could also anger the spirits to such an extent that the whole village would suffer illness. Nikles (2006) states:

“... ceremonies are not just held for the spiritual forces of the natural environment, but also in order to appease and respect the spirits of the ancestors.

²¹This drink is brewed in clay jars in the different households. Spirits are believed to inhabit the jars, and so the drinking of the jar wine often has religious overtones.

Because if they are neglected or angered, they can influence human life by bringing sickness, death or a bad harvest to their relatives. All ceremonies, irrespective of the reason, involve jar wine and the sacrifice of an animal, most often a chicken or a pig.” (2006:55)

She also states the most common reasons for holding ceremonies, which include general sickness, protection from spirits, a longer absence from the village, pregnancy complications, a new house has been built, a birth in the village, a wedding, the playing of *gongs* or *jangs* or if using water from a spirit well (2006:55).

The Bunong agricultural year and its different stages are marked by different ceremonies undertaken at more or less regular intervals over the course of the year. These ceremonies are meant to appease the different spiritual entities that are believed to inhabit the farmlands, the forest, and the rice, as well as those of the ancestors. The two main ceremonies that are performed to secure the harvest are the rice ceremonies and the rain ceremonies. There are normally between two and four ceremonies for the rice, and they are conducted by the members of the household, in the *mirr* (Nikles 2006, informants). The intent of the rice ceremonies is to ensure a good harvest, and to prevent the crops from being destroyed before they can be harvested (i. e. from insects). Neighbors and relatives (and the occasional anthropologist) are commonly invited to partake in these ceremonies. The rain ceremonies are somewhat different. They are undertaken twice a year; first at the end of the dry season to ask the spirits for rain, and for a good harvest, and then again at the end of the harvest to thank the spirits for the same. These ceremonies are carried out communally, to show the spirits that the community stands together, and that everyone is dedicated to their well-being. An interesting note on this point is that villagers who grow paddy rice also perform these ceremonies: it is not limited to those who prepare *mirrs*. The spiritual relationship to the land is the same, regardless of the production mode carried out on it. Bousraa has paddy fields to the west and southeast, and villagers interviewed for this study were engaged in both the cultivation of *mirrs* and paddies.

The agricultural cycle and the rituals associated with it shows us that the spirits of the land are important to the system of production of the Bunong. If the spirits are not at ease, the harvest may fail, which could lead, in the worst possible scenario, to hunger

over the coming months. The communality of the rain rituals also illustrates that the connection to the natural environment (and the spirits that inhabit it) is a relationship shared by the village as a whole, and any failure to appease the spirits would affect all the members of the community - either by diminished crops or by sickness etc.

Another illustration of the connection between the Bunong and their land is the usage of the forest as burial grounds. The Bunong bury their dead in coffins in selected graveyard sites in the forest, normally close to their villages. Graves are covered with what looks like little houses; normally a frame and a roof of sorts, the more recent ones I observed had two sheets of tin for a roof. The burial ceremonies are manifold, beginning with the day of the burial, when a sacrifice is made, jar wine is drunk, and an empty jar is half-buried near the head of the deceased. For the following days, the family of the deceased bring gifts to the grave, especially foodstuffs, cigarettes, drinks and such, to help make the transition to the “new world” easier. After seven days another ceremony is held, where there is another sacrifice, more jar wine, and the construction of the grave house. After one year the final ceremony is held, this is the most significant of the ceremonies. It involves more people, more sacrifices and a more extensive arrangement. After this, the grave is not visited again.

While burial forest is not taboo to enter, it is still a sacred place. If people have recently passed, their spirits are still “lingering” (until the very final ceremony one year after death), and should not be disturbed unnecessarily. Villagers will not establish *mirrs* in burial forest, but may harvest wild plants etc. There was a case in Bousraa where the rubber companies bulldozed and completely cleared the burial forest of several communities, which caused great unrest and anger; in the affected communities and in the villages. As the spirit of ancestors have the ability to affect living villagers’ health and well-being, the massive distortion of their peace was seen as an enormous threat to the village as a whole. This incident is discussed in some detail in the “Development” chapter.

A note should be made here on the other religions present in Bunong communities - Christianity in Bousraa in particular. Many Bunong have over the recent decades converted to either Protestantism or Catholicism. Villagers give various reasons for the conversions,

but the most common ones seem to be either that it happened as a result of fleeing to Vietnam during the Khmer Rouge regime, where they learned the ways of Christianity from friends and relatives, that they were frustrated with the spirits demanding constant sacrifices without providing tangible results (especially prevalent in individuals or families that have lost family members to illness), or the input given by missionaries working in the area. Bousraa has a thriving community of Christians - there are several churches, and sermons are held every Sunday. It seems to be the case, though, that a conversion to Christianity does not necessarily mean a complete break with Animist traditions. Several Christians said that they still liked to participate in the ceremonies and rituals of their Animist relatives and friends. They regard performing sacrifices and enjoying themselves drinking jar wine as something unproblematic to partake in, even if it is part of a “different” religion than theirs. From what I could gather after several interviews on the subject of religion, the Catholics are more liberal in this regard, while the Protestants seem to more explicitly distance themselves from Animist tradition. Conversion to Buddhism seems more or less non-existent (except for intermarried Khmer-Bunong couples where both religious traditions are honored). This was described to me as a result of Christianity, its worldview and its vocabulary²² being more suited to the animist predispositions of the Bunong: there is not *that* big a difference in believing in many spirits in many places and believing in one (the greatest) spirit in all places²³. It is reasonable to assume that the added economic advantage of not having to spend money, wine and livestock for ceremonies has also played a part in several conversions.

The rituals performed for the spirits also hold value as redistribution mechanics. In the larger communal ceremonies, for instance, those families that have more livestock are expected to contribute more to the sacrifices, thus distributing this wealth between a larger group of individuals. In one case where the villagers of village 2 in Bousraa were offered and accepted compensation from Socfin KCD (due to a graveyard forest being cleared), the buffalo that was slain (paid for by Socfin KCD) was redistributed by weight

²²A missionary working with the Mnong Gar in Vietnam allegedly told Norman Lewis of his frustrations with converting “savages” in the 1940s and 50s; he had tried to have the phrase “Jesus loves you!” translated into the local language in a meaningful way, and, having explained the core concepts to interpreters, had been presented with the phrase: “The great spirit is not angry!” (Lewis 1951).

²³This is, of course, an oversimplification, but it is in thread with what villagers reported in interviews.

to villagers that were affected by the clearing, with those that had most graves destroyed getting the most, and villagers that were unaffected getting a significantly smaller amount of meat - but getting some part of the animal all the same. During a wedding ceremony I attended, where sacrifices were made of a buffalo, two pigs and several chickens, the meat was distributed by kinship affiliation to the two families, but with all attendees having a small claim in the animal - even I, as a mere observer, was offered and expected to take my share of the buffalo ²⁴. The exchange of sacrificial meat can also represent the forming of alliances between families, clans or groups, pledging allegiance to each other by way of ceremonies (see Condominas (1957)²⁵)

What we see from these paragraphs is that spirits play an important role in the everyday lives of the Bunong. They are perceived to have powers to influence the daily lives of villagers, and to, if angered, bring great misfortunes on individuals, families and villages. They are important in securing subsistence, in making sure a marriage is happy and successful, in welcoming a child into this world, and in sending another one off into the next. The ancestral spirits have specific needs that must be tended to, or they, too, can bring misfortune to the village. They must not be upset, or they will interfere with the daily lives of villagers. The spirits are, as such, a controlling force in the lives of villagers. An interesting example can be found in Bourdier (2009):

“While working for an NGO in Ratanakiri in the early 1990s, an anthropologist recalled villagers’ responses when he asked what they wanted in order to improve their health. Villagers replied without hesitation: more buffaloes for spiritual offerings. For lesser diseases of misfortune which occurred amongst householder, pigs and chickens were also considered appropriate medicine” (Bourdier 2009:34, quoting Jonsson 1997).

What emerges from this example and from the above, is that the relationship to the spirits, and thus to the land, is an important part of perceived welfare in the communities. Paying tribute to the spirits through ceremonies allows for the securing of good health, the increased chance of a good harvest, and the protection from bad luck for the community. The spirits are, as such, part of the welfare system that exists in the villages. The analogy

²⁴The present stake in a buffalo for a foreign anthropologist seems to be approximately 200 grams.

²⁵Especially “Baap Can’s Alliance. An Exchange of Buffalo Sacrifices” (1957:19-80)

may be a stretch, but one is inclined to think about paying tax where I'm from - for this money I get healthcare. The Bunong pay tribute to the spirits, and so, hopefully, will not need healthcare. This is of course an enormous oversimplification - this is not to say that the Bunong do not need proper healthcare - but on a conceptual level there are similarities.

There is also the moral aspect of ritual: that ritual dictates what constitutes "good" or "proper" behavior. As in the example mentioned above regarding premarital sex, this is an illustration of what is considered acceptable acts by villagers. As such the rituals and sacrifices also comprise a system of punishment for acting inappropriately - a moral code, if you will. The village elders decide what compensation must be paid to the spirits for an indecent act, and the ceremony is carried out, just as in the case of sickness. In the case of conflicts between villagers, for instance, it is common for the conflict to be mediated by elders, and the conflict resolved by way of ceremony and the sharing of meat and rice wine (Nikles 2006).

One final example will be mentioned here before moving on, and that is the issue of land and identity. While perhaps not being directly a spiritual relation, it is still significant for many of the same reasons that religion is significant - especially since it seems, for some informants, to transcend the question of religion and isolate a relationship to land that exists independently of it.

In several conversations with people in Bousraa, the question of identity was raised. Informants would claim that the company was out to "destroy" the Bunong, for instance, which led to a discussion about what it means to be Bunong. Many informants, independently of their religious beliefs²⁶, stated that language and agriculture were the two main factors²⁷ determining Bunong identity. This adds another dimension to the discussion of the relationship between the Bunong and their land: the fact that the Bunong perceive themselves as linked to their land by their identity in itself. The removal of this land,

²⁶The group of people with which I discussed this the most consisted of Animists and Catholics. The Catholics appear to be fairly liberal when it comes to inter-religious compatibility - many would partake in Animist ceremonies, even if they did not believe in their effect anymore.

²⁷For others again, religion, the Animist ceremonies and the spirits were also on this list. The example is included for added depth.

then, would imply (for some) the removal of an integral part of who they are, who they have been and who they want their children to be. For example:

“The way we use the land - from farming our *mirrs* to gathering resin and honey - this is what makes us Bunong. If they take this away, we will only have our language. Many of us have changed their religion, but we are still using the land as we always have.” Informant in village 1.

Land and agriculture are seen as culture- and identity-bearing components of the community by these informants. They strongly believe that the changes they are going through may end up “destroying” what it means to be Bunong, and so, finally, “destroying” the Bunong as a group identity and a culture. This “destruction” is examined in greater detail in chapter 3.

Having established that the Bunong’s relationship to land is also an issue of spirituality and identity, it is time to move to the last part of the discussion about this relationship: defining the land of the Bunong as a social good. As access to this social good is being restricted we see moral indignation in the communities, which attests to the moral economy being challenged.

2.3 Land as Social Good

Remembering from chapter one that moral economy theory has largely been based on the incorporation of non-market societies into the open market and the resulting unrest from this operation (Scott 1976, Thompson 1963 & 1971 etc.), a few points should be made. First off all, there has been contact between the Bunong and lowland traders for a long time, and recent decades have seen this contact increase (Nikles 2006) without there being violent resistance or uprisings. The acts of resistance seem to be connected more to the detaching of land from communities rather than simply that of forcing a community to relate to the market. This is, of course, a bit of a blurry argument - you could argue that the detachment would not happen if it wasn’t for the open market moving in on the natural resources that have traditionally been utilized by the Bunong, and that would be absolutely right. However, it can be fruitful to expand the basis on which to make an analysis of the moral economy of the Bunong by introducing Arnold’s (2001) idea of

social goods. The idea of social goods as basis for a moral economy entails that while the incorporation of non-market economy into market economy is a viable approach, a much broader analysis is possible if we regard certain key elements in a community as the social goods upon which the community base their self-conception. Arnold uses water in the American west as his examples. I will attempt to use land in northeastern Cambodia as the same.

As we have seen, the Bunong have had market relations with the lowlanders for some time, and these relations are still present, especially in the resin trade, where the Bunong have supplied a market with a commodity that is at their disposal. While the Bunong have experienced exchange to be unfair in these transactions (White 1996), they have not been the cause for more unified acts of outrage, protest or resistance. These acts have been reserved for situations where dispossession of large amounts of land have been imposed on communities. There were massive protests connected with the Chinese company Wuzhisan establishing a pine plantation in Mondulkiri on a government concession, for instance (CDRI 2005:117), and there are and have been similar acts in progress in Bousraa since the first clearing in the Socfin KCD concession. What we see is that for the Bunong's moral economy to be challenged, the simple mechanics of unfair exchange are not enough. In light of the relationship to land described above, I regard the land of the Bunong as a social good upon which several key concepts within their community rests.

Having seen how Arnold uses water and the access to it as integral for the placement of communities in the west, it is time to adapt his concept to the Bunong. The relationship to land can be seen as comprising of four key factors. Firstly: land is the object of production. This, of course, entails that to produce energy for subsistence and reproduction, land is key. As we have seen through the description of the subsistence ethic, this production is also used to, by way of redistribution of harvest and labor, secure all members of the community a subsistence minimum. Secondly: land is important for villagers' health through the relationship to the spirits that are inhabiting it. If these spirits are angered, the health of villagers may worsen. Thirdly: land is a welfare component in the Bunong's worldview. By securing good relations to the spirits, and by practicing redistribution of goods and labor via various forms of exchange, the overall welfare of the

community is assured. Lastly: the land of the Bunong is important to Bunong identity: the Bunong identify and define themselves by their relationship to their land, and regard the removal of the land and the practices connected to it as a direct attack upon their identity as a group. The removal, detachment or dispossession of land is as such an attempt to remove the very basis upon which the Bunong's community rests, and this is more than can be tolerated.

In this we find a plausible explanation for the moral outrage seen in Bousraa in connection with the establishment of the plantation. By the reshaping of Bunong farmland into a monoculture landscape of rubber trees, the communities lose their object of production, their basis for subsistence, they are in danger of the wrath of the spirits which may cause sickness or death, the communities risk becoming detached because of the increased inequality resulting from not having redistribution mechanisms anymore, and they lose their identity as self-subsistence forest farmers. This discussion goes on in chapter 3, in relation to the actual processes going on in Bousraa and how people respond to them. What we can see from the perspective of social goods is that there is a moral economy at play in Bousraa, one that has its perimeters and that will make inhabitants react if it is severely compromised. The Bunong may tolerate unfair trade, various taxing schemes from local authorities and even legislature that reduces access to farmlands (see Nikles (2006) on government policies banning the clearing of "fresh" forest for swidden agriculture, for instance) - these are smaller infractions that exist in a framework where there is flexibility to discuss whether the claim is fair or not. The massive undertaking in Bousraa, on the other hand, holds no such flexibility - if there ever was any, the way the project was implemented was sure to eradicate it for good, as we will see in the next chapter.

2.4 Moral Economy and the Bunong

Before moving on to the discussion of the "development" of Bousraa, a brief recap is in order. Due to the relationship between the Bunong and their land, and the outrage that emerges when this relationship is challenged, we can talk about the moral economy of the Bunong. This moral economy explains the reaction to the challenged access for the Bunong to their land, as they are faced with in Bousraa by the establishment of the rub-

ber plantation “Varanasi”. The fact that the implementation of this plantation has left villagers in bottomless spiritual debt due to the disturbance of the angry forest spirits and the spirits of the ancestors, as well as leaving them without a secure means of subsistence, is cause enough for moral outrage in itself. If we then add the notion that land is what carries the significance of the four concepts subsistence, security, welfare and identity, we can see land and the access to it as a social good which the Bunong rely on to define themselves and to subsist as a group. It can be expressed with Mauss’ (1954) idea of the “total social fact”: Land is not only economical - it is at the same time religious, moral, aesthetic and so on, and thus holds greater significance in the community than as a mere breadwinner.

By taking away this land, or more accurately the access to this land through transformation, it is possible to predict the moral outrage that will ensue, as the land held such a key point in the Bunong societies. Changing the land and the access to it has ramifications that go beyond a simple means of production-perspective - the plantation offers waged day labor for those that are willing and able - it shakes the Bunong’s own idea of what they are in it’s foundations. The fact that the “exchange” in this process has been perceived as massively unjust (see chapter 3) also fuels the moral outrage in the communities, and hampers any attempt at rectifying the situation. While there is willingness in the communities to make the situation work in some way, there is no longer interest in negotiating, as promises have been made and broken in so many instances that no trust can be found between the actors. It has come to the point where the community does not trust the implementers of the plantation, as they have made various promises regarding compensation, communal goods, choices relating to new land, and so on, and the plantation owners and coordinators are blaming the community for lying about the land they have used, while the government has claimed ignorance and left it to the local actors to resolve the situation. It is a mess of miscommunication and violation of basic rights, and as such the resistance now met by the plantation companies can be seen as a result of just this: the failure to regard the Bunong as a group whose culture and identity is centered around the idea of self-subsistence and land tenure in a spirited natural environment. As we will see from the following chapter, the project has in many ways taken a jab at the core values of the local communities, and resistance is as such, not surprisingly,

widespread.

The next chapter deals with the specifics around the detachment of land from the communities in Bousraa, namely the implementation of the rubber plantation “Varanasi”, how the concession was granted, a timeline for the implementation and the reactions it met in the community. We will see that we are not, in fact, talking about “development” in the general perception of the word, we are talking about underdevelopment: the generating of negative economical change for a community that has been based on a subsistence economy rather than a profit-maximizing economy.

3 Development

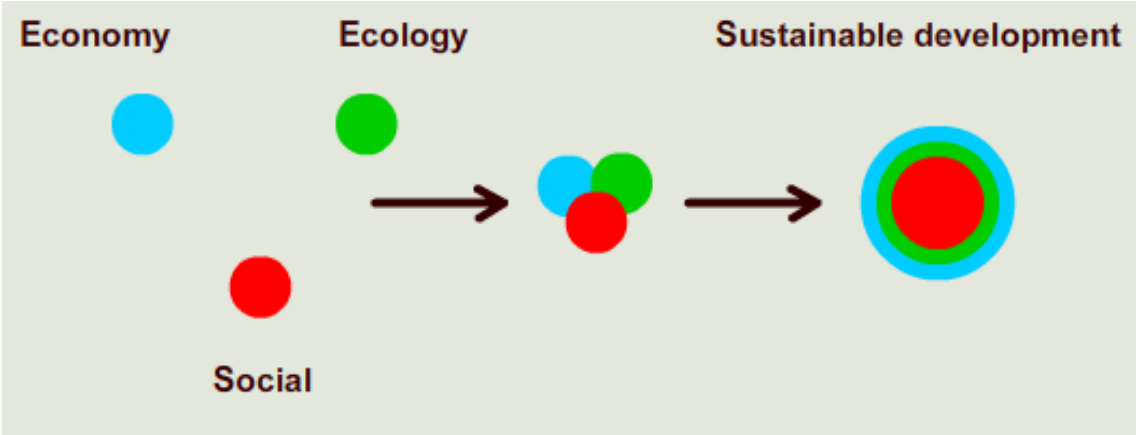


Figure 5: “Sustainable Development” according to Socfin. Image taken from <http://www.socfin.com/>



Figure 6: “Sustainable Development” in practice? The “Varanasi” plantation in Bousraa, February 2010.

Having seen that the moral indignation in Bousraa can be linked to the Bunong's moral economy, it is time to focus on and analyze the specific case at hand: the establishment of the rubber plantation "Varanasi" in Bousraa.

First, a general overview of what "development" constitutes in the Cambodian context is presented. Drawing on examples from various reports and studies, I show that the development that is being imposed on communities with the sanction of the state is not necessarily meaningful for the same communities. This discussion is linked to James Scott's ideas of *high modernism* as a state-formation project. Bousraa is contextualized into this framework as part of the margins of the Cambodian state. Secondly I present an overview of the situation in Bousraa from concession date until present day. I show how some patterns are forming: that the way the project was and still is implemented is not compatible with the Bunong and their ideas about development. In the third part of this chapter, the ideas of development that exist within the Bunong population in Bousraa are examined and voiced. The villagers feel like they are being treated like a group that do not know their own good by those that hold decision-making power in the project, although they have distinct ideas about how they want to be treated, what they are willing to change, and what is "destruction", not development. The idea that the term development is not compatible with both sides of the conflict starts to emerge, and is furthered in the fourth section of the chapter, which deals with what meanings are incorporated into the "development" paradigm. These meanings are vastly different, which means that the project is a fallacy on the level of "development" as ideal: the introduction of this group into a market economy does not generate opportunity and sustainability, it generates difference and underdevelopment. Finally, some conclusions on what development is and should be are drawn.

3.1 Development in Cambodia: Capitalist State Formation?

"... the most tragic episodes of state development in the late nineteenth and twentieth century originate in a particularly pernicious combination of three elements. The first is the aspiration to the administrative ordering of nature and society ... "High modernism" seems an appropriate term for this aspiration ... The second element is the unrestrained use of the power of the

modern state as an instrument for achieving these designs. The third element is a weakened or prostrate civil society that lacks the capacity to resist these plans. The ideology of high modernism provides, as it were, the desire; the modern state provides the means for acting on that desire; and the incapacitated civil society provides the leveled terrain on which to build (dis)utopias.” (Scott 1998:88-89)

Scott’s three elements could have been targeted at Cambodia specifically. The Cambodian state is increasingly granting concessions for the development of large tracts of land all over the country, thus formulating its “aspiration to the administrative ordering of nature and society”. These projects are then enforced by the power monopoly (the police and the army) in the “unrestrained use of the power of the modern state for achieving these designs”. The civil society, those that have claims in the concession areas, “lack the capacity to resist these plans”. The government is perceived as highly corrupt²⁸, giving concessions to the highest bidder without regard for its own legislation. Through the cornucopia of NGO reports, UN reports and newspaper articles that surface about issues like these every year²⁹, we see the contours of Scott’s “high modernism” as applicable to the Cambodian government and its state formation project. It can be useful here to look further into what constitutes this “high modernism”. As Scott puts it:

“What is high modernism, then? It is best conceived as a strong (one might even say muscle-bound) version of the beliefs in scientific and technical progress that were associated with industrialization in Western Europe and North America from roughly 1830 until World War I. At its center was a supreme self-confidence about continued linear progress, the development of scientific and technical knowledge, the expansion of production, the rational design of social order, the growing satisfaction of human needs, and, not least, an increasing control over nature (including human nature) commensurate with scientific understanding of natural laws.” (Scott 1998:89-90)

This idea of the continued linear progress seems to demarcate much of the government’s stance on the relationship to the natural environment. Forests, for instance, have tremen-

²⁸See Transparency International (2010)

²⁹For a small selection of reports, see for instance Global Witness 2009, CHRAC 2009 & 2010, FIDH 2011, IPNN 2010, Wessendorff 2011, Amnesty International 2011.

dous value to the Bunong, as we have seen, in a variety of ways, but to the government and its projects and ambitions directed towards a linear increase of production, it is merely unused space or untapped resources. By harnessing these resources (i. e. by allowing the planting of rows of rubber trees on what was once forest), the state is incorporating what was once marginal space into its controlled territory, and with it exercising more control on a population that has previously been somewhat elusive to the state-formation projects³⁰. This population is then expected to adapt to the new economics that are introduced together with the harnessing of nature, and as such are expected not to farm for subsistence anymore, but rather take day labor on a plantation that exports produce to the international markets. It is important to note on this point that this situation is not exclusive to the previously remote areas of the northeast - the expropriation of communities with basis in dubiously granted concessions is a problem of national magnitude, and affects communities in all corners of the country (CHRAC 2009 & 2010). What can be seen as a general tendency, however, is that with the increased accessibility to the resources in the northeast, and the vastness of the untapped resources in an area with the country's lowest population density (4 persons per square kilometer, GPC 2008), these processes are happening at an accelerated rate, mainly because the "opening up" for exploitation of resources has been happening at a relatively quick pace, while vast areas are seen as "unpopulated forestland" and as such are quickly slated for development as there are no human needs to consider. As we have seen, however, this is not the case. Vast areas of forestland has been utilized by the indigenous groups for centuries (see for instance Bourdier 2006, Nikles 2006, Bourdier (ed.) 2009, CKS 2009), but as the pressure of migration and resettlement of lowlanders on these groups has been relatively minor, the areas have not been overcrowding. As the state increases its control over natural resources in these areas, the land available to the minority groups is becoming increasingly scarce.

Furthering the problem is the fact that while the country has legislation for both indigenous rights, a land law that allows the claim of ownership of land that has been used uncontested for five years, and the possibility of getting recognized ownership over communal lands (IPNN 2010), these rights are either overlooked when it comes to granting

³⁰For a more extensive discussion on this, see Scott (1998), Scott (2009), and, for a Cambodian example in the context of colonialism, Guerin (2009).

concessions (FIDH 2011), or the process of registration of either private or communal land made inaccessible to villagers, as they are in no way predisposed to manage a complex bureaucratic process of forms and official language, all written in a language they often cannot read and in many cases cannot speak. By this undermining of the existing legislature, the state effectively hinders any but the most basic intrusion into their planned expansion of agroindustrialization on the lands of the indigenous groups.

With the inclusion of the indigenous communities as paid workforce instead of subsistence farmers, the food security which has been present in their communities for centuries is eroding (Ironside 2009). The production of cash crops is increasing, and this, coupled with Cambodia's entry into the WTO, means that recent subsistence farmers are now competing with long-standing cash crop producers in the region that have established themselves within a trade that the indigenous groups are only beginning to enter (Ironside 2009). It seems that the change of agricultural preference is finally coming to the margins of Cambodia via these mechanisms, and, as such, an era of opposing this change is coming to an end. As Guerin (2009) states regarding the attempts to get the highlanders to change their agricultural ways under colonial rule:

“The successive *Résidents* of Stung Treng did not stop complaining about the reluctance of the highland farmers to adopt agricultural techniques that the French officials believed to be more productive. The swidden cultivators of Stung Treng and Moulapoumok did not change their agricultural techniques because, contrary to what the French and Khmer leaders thought, it was not in their best interest to do so.” (Guerin 2009:136)

Whether it is in their interest or not, this change is now, by the enabling powers of the state, being forced upon many of these groups. This is what is happening in Bousraa with the establishment of the rubber plantations there, and this is the context in which the rest of this chapter is placed.

3.2 The Case at Hand: Socfin KCD in Bousraa

A note on case selection: At the time of fieldwork, there were at least two rubber companies in Bousraa, one Vietnamese and the Socfin KCD joint venture, in different stages of

*implementation*³¹. The reason for focusing on the Socfin KCD concession(s) is that this was by far the one that was discussed the most in the community, it was the concession with which there was the most trouble associated, and it was the concession that had received the most (mainly negative) press coverage and NGO interest. Based on this, and to narrow down my scope, the focus on Socfin KCD and, mainly, “Varanasi” was chosen.

The concession for the “Varanasi” plantation was granted to KCD in 2008. Socfin and KCD created a joint venture project for the exploitation of this concession that same year, working together as Socfin KCD. The concession was granted for 70 years (FIDH 2011). Socfin KCD currently administers at least two concessions in the Bousraa area, the aforementioned “Varanasi”, and the newer concession “Sethicula”. The size of the concessions at the time of writing is estimated at 4273 hectares (Sethicula) and 2705 hectares (Varanasi), for a grand total of 6978 hectares. In addition there are several other concessions in the area, both for additional rubber plantations and for mineral ventures (FIDH 2011, see the cadastral map). Getting clear information about the concessions granted in Mondulkiri is a bit confusing, as numbers seem to vary quite a lot, as well as there being no definitive record kept of them (FIDH 2011). This was reflected in interviews done in Bousraa - many villagers reported different sizes, locations and company names when interviewed. There was talk of a third concession, but this has not yet materialized.

Socfin KCD is owned by Socfinasia (80%, administrative responsibility) and KCD (Khao Chuly Development) (20%). Socfinasia is an investment vehicle registered in Luxembourg that primarily engages in managing the portfolios of large amounts of rubber and palm oil plantations in Southeast Asia (FIDH 2011). The company is again owned by Socfin, a company that dates back to 1909³², and that has a somewhat tattered record of human rights abuses on their plantations (FIDH 2011). Socfin is owned, in part, by the Bolloré group of France, and by Belgian families Fabri and de Ribes, with the Fabri families having ties to millions of hectares of plantations in Africa and Asia (FIDH 2011). The plantations in Bousraa under the management of Socfin KCD are, as such, parts of a larger empire of multinational companies that administer massive amounts of simi-

³¹See FIDH 2011, which lists Dak Lak Mondolkiri Aphivatch Caoutchouc Co. LTD (5108 ha.) granted to Dak Lak Limited Rubber Company, in addition to the two Socfin KCD concessions.

³²Socfin website: <http://www.socfin.com/>

lar plantations, some with dubious reputations. The “History” section of Socfin’s website (<http://www.socfin.com/>) goes as far back as 1890, when Adrian Hallet goes to the Congo for King Leopold II of Belgium. While it may be unfair to draw the practice of rubber exploitation in Belgian Congo into the equation of Bousraa, it is interesting to see how a rubber empire that grew on the shoulders of a massive colonial exploit that killed an enormous amount of people have now found it’s way into northeastern Cambodia. KCD is a Cambodian entrepreneurial firm with strong links to the Cambodian government (Mr. Khao Chuly himself is a private adviser to prime minister Hun Sen (ADB 2009)).

A brief timeline of the events that led up to the unrest in Bousraa is in order here³³. After having founded the joint venture, Socfin KCD started clearing land for the plantation in April 2008. This was met by protests from villagers in May, which led to Socfin KCD agreeing to compensate villagers affected by clearings. Reports of threats are voiced in the community. On the 8th of October 2008 the contract for Varanasi is officially signed. The same month community representatives file a complaint regarding the concession to the Council of Ministers, the Prime Minister’s Office, the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, the Ministry of Interior, and the Ministry of Land Management, Urban Planning and Construction. To date, no reply has been given to this complaint. In December negotiations start, but no agreement was reached. On the 20th of December 2008, 400 Bunong rally against the company, destroying seedlings, burning and destroying excavators. The army intervenes. January of 2009 sees six community representatives arrested without charges. They are told that they will be arrested again if they talk to the media or NGOs. In February 2009 a sacred forest is bulldozed. Socfin takes over operational management at this point. In May and September of 2009 clearing continues, and the first planting commences. In December 2009 Socfin halts clearing for three months to conduct negotiations. Throughout 2010 more reports about razed sacred forests and burial forests are submitted. On the 21st of January 2010, a group of NGO representatives are denied access to the plantations. Meetings between villagers and com-

³³FIDH (2011) has a timeline of the events in Bousraa, which is more or less condensed and adapted here. The FIDH report is the most accurate and well-researched report on the Bousraa case I have seen to date, and it is as such quoted extensively. The FIDH mission group have also conducted extensive interviews with high-level plantation employees, something which I have not. The report is, as such, a brilliant source of information for practical details concerning the plantations in Bousraa.

pany continue in March, with no further progress. In March and April the contract for SETHICULA is finalized. In late 2010, several of Socfin's expatriate staff is replaced, and Socfin establishes an office to focus on relations to the local community. They hire Mr. Sylvain Vogel, an expert on Bunong language, to head this office, which includes Bunong staff. The clearing of land continues. Some cases of razed sacred or burial forest are resolved by Socfin paying for ceremonies to make amends to the spirits.

The above synopsis, the peculiarities of which will be addressed later, already shows some general traits of the process this project was created in. A company with government ties is given a concession, this company then teams up with foreign capital and expertise, and exploitation of resources commences. The complaints made by the community are at first silenced, then attempted dealt with efficiently. The resistance to the project still goes on to this day, with no clear, uniform solution in sight. In the following paragraphs some comparisons in the different modes of production will be undertaken, and the peculiarities of the process concerning the plantations in Bousraa will be examined. Furthermore, the outline of the consequences the implementation has on the community is presented.

Rubber farming is agroindustrialization at its finest. The process of establishing a rubber plantation begins with clearing the land for any trees that are present on it, before digging holes and planting rubber saplings. These saplings are planted in straight rows, normally with a 2-3 meter gap between them³⁴. For the first two to three years it is possible to grow mixed crops between the rows of rubber trees, but when the canopy closes over the rows, it is, in all practical respects, a monoculture. The rows are tended for approximately 5-7 years, when they are mature and ready to produce. Production consists of making small incisions in the bark of the trees, which causes the rubber to "bleed" out of the tree. This rubber is collected in a cup near the base of the tree, which is emptied every other or third day. New incisions are made, and the process repeated. The most common rubber trees have a lifespan of approximately 32 years, with approximately 25 of these being productive years. The rubber is processed, dried and finally sold on the international market. As one can grasp from this very brief account of what farming rubber entails, it is far removed from the crops of the average swiddener. The fields are enormous, and

³⁴The particulars of rubber planting are sourced from Socfin's website (<http://www.socfin.com>)

look almost military in their precision - the set distance between trees, the “corridors” that are formed between the rows. It is a massive reshaping of nature. Scott terms this “scientific forestry” (1998, chapter 1). Rubber plantations are not known to deplete soil or promote erosion, but by being monocultures they seriously curb biodiversity where they are implemented.

Swidden agriculture, on the other hand, is, as we have seen, a mode of production geared towards variety and stability for the sake of security. It is regarded as sustainable³⁵ given that population pressure is not an issue (Bourdier 2006, Nikles 2006 etc.). The resin tapping of the Bunong is also deemed to be sustainable by Baird (2010):

“This study indicates that Dipterocarpus wood resin trees are among the most resilient NTFP resources in mainland Southeast Asia, and that their commercial use in Teun Commune is not particularly problematic in relation to the long term sustainability of the resource.” (2010:1040)

The reshaping of nature into a monoculture, and the loss of farmland and subsistence security are in and of themselves incompatible with the Bunong’s relationship to nature. Add to that the bulldozing of graveyard sites and sacred forests, and serious issues start appearing. A few issues regarding the implementation of the plantation will be discussed hereafter.

First of all, let’s investigate the question of ownership to the land. According to the Cambodian Land Law, anyone utilizing a piece of land can make a claim for legal ownership as long as the claim is not contested (FIDH 2011 quoting the Land Law (2001)). As the indigenous groups of Cambodia do not have a tradition for private land titles (Bourdier 2009, White 1996, FIDH 2011), the most likely way to ensure tenure is by applying for a communal land title. This is, however, a complicated bureaucratic process, and a process which takes time and money (FIDH 2011). The first communal land title *ever* was granted in 2010 (Wessendorf 2011:297), and there is, as such, no standing tradition for making it through this process and securing tenure rights to a community’s farmlands.

³⁵The impact on climate due to the large amounts of carbon emissions from swiddening on a world basis is an issue, as is the erosion and depletion concerns connected with increased population pressure which causes longer farm times on each plot of land and shorter fallow times.

In Bousraa, the concession for Varanasi was granted before the villagers could send their application, and so the land, at the time of implementation, was classified as state land. Two interesting comments to this is that: 1. FIDH states that there is no record of the concession land in Bousraa being transferred to the status of private land and 2. That the concession for Sethicula is not legally termed a concession - it is termed a lease, as large amounts of the concession is, in fact, situated within the Phnom Nam Lia Wildlife Sanctuary. In other words: the legislative powers of the state are obviously in favor of the project being implemented. Several villagers in Bousraa reported that the government claimed it “didn’t know” that the land was being used by approximately 850 families (FIDH 2011, informants). By the simple fact that there is a local administration present, this is simply untrue. Anyone that has ever traveled to Bousraa has seen the fields of the village. They have been very much visible, and there have been roads and tracks connecting them to the village proper.

The project is, then, as FIDH also concludes, riddled with irregularities on a legislative level. When it comes to how the project was presented and “sold” to villagers, there are also several issues. First, there is the case of what was going on before clearing started. Many informants reported that representatives from the company (they did not identify themselves as that at the time) made a tour of the Bousraa villages, going to peoples houses and asking if people “wanted development”. Having their own conception of what this would entail, most villagers said yes. Villagers assumed that these were people from an NGO or similar that had come do see what they could do to help the community. Informants said they had given a new or improved school, a better road to Sen Monorom and an improved health station as their main wishes, was the area to be “developed”. There was at this point no talk of clearing land, of any economic land concessions, or of the reshaping of farmland and forest into plantation land. The villagers had no impression that answering positive to the question of “wanting development” would imply anything at all - except perhaps the chance for improved infrastructure in the community. This information has later been used against them when the complaints have surfaced, in the form of Khmer employees of Socfin KCD blaming villagers for “going back” on what they said to this round of questions:

“At first they came, asking us if we wanted development. We said yes, we

want development. The road to Sen Monorom is not very good, especially in the wet season. The schools are in bad shape, and we'd like a health station we can go to. We said all these things. Later, when we complained about the forest being cut, the Khmer workers told us "It's your own fault! You said you wanted development!" - Informant in Bousraa 1

It already becomes clear that there is a divide between villagers' understanding of the term development and the (in this case) Khmer workers' understanding of the same. Where the Bunong assume that development is mainly about improving existing conditions in terms of health, education and infrastructure, the Khmer workers in this example have expressed it as something that does not come for free. Development in their understanding of the word is something that you pay for, such as in the current example: Do you want development? We'll take your land, then. It belongs to this story that Socfin KCD has put money into refurbishing two schools in Bousraa, have set aside money for teacher's salaries, and had, at the time of writing, equipped a health station that had not yet opened, but supposedly would soon, and that would be prioritizing Bunong patients. The road is still not impressive, but I assume it reasonable to believe that it will be improved once the plantations start producing in a few years. The amount of money spent by Socfin KCD on community programs is not currently known (FIDH 2011). What all informants agreed on, though, is that they would rather have kept their land than lose it. While several informants thought of the plantations as opportunity, they agreed that it did not come about in a fair and free manner. The discussions with the community were non-existent, and the respect for the wishes of community members the same. Villagers are not inflexible - there exists a plethora of views on how this could and should have been solved, what has come of it and what will come of it - but first and foremost there is a general feeling of distrust towards the company that took their land without their consent, and with no regard for the already existing demarcations of the community on it, in terms of burial grounds, sacred forests, fallow land and farmland. This has caused a great deal of chaos in regards to compensations, which will be discussed later.

When it comes to the implementation itself, villagers reported that it started without any form of dialogue or consent. As mentioned in the timeline of events, the complaints from the community materialized shortly after the first clearing was started, but were of

no consequence to the continued clearing of farmland and forests near Bousraa. While there was talk of compensation, there was also talk about threats. Informants reported that they were asked if they “were troublemakers”, and if they were willing to “pay the price for being a troublemaker”. As the clearing went on, the company offered the villagers affected by the first clearing three options. They could receive monetary compensation for their land at \$200 per hectare, they could receive a parcel of land within the plantation to grow rubber trees on, or they could receive a new plot of land to keep farming. When interviews were undertaken, many informants had taken monetary compensation, as they saw their land disappear, and felt that it was the only way to at least be left with something. They also did not believe that the company would provide them with land, or had not received a clear reply from the company regarding where the land would be located. The informants that had said they wanted a new plot of land elsewhere had still not been granted land, and so had no plot of land to farm. This, of course, is a huge problem, as it erodes all means of subsistence for the farmers that are determined to remain farmers and forces them to seek alternate sources of income - in the case of Bousraa this more often than not entailed getting day labor at the plantation, on the land they once farmed. None of the interviewed villagers for this study had agreed to farm rubber. Several informants were talking about “going to the forest”. This meant leaving Bousraa, going to a remote area and making a farm there. In a situation where, for many people, the only option for ensuring food on the table was to take day labor on the plantation, this seemed like a better option. It is unclear whether this happened at all - no informants reported going looking for land, for instance - but the topic surfaced in many conversations, often with those who had agreed to monetary compensation, as they would need a more permanent food security solution.

In the end, many of my informants reported having taken money due to a lack of real choice. Distrust towards the company after several issues had surfaced, coupled with the fact that clearing had started without villagers’ consent were mentioned as main factors - in general the impression made by the company on the various members of the community was nothing short of disastrous.

What becomes apparent after investigating how the plantation was implemented, the lack

of dialogue and the disregard for villagers' wishes, coupled with the villagers' traditional relationship to their land, is that the two views presented are completely incompatible. The Varanasi project is, from its outset, at a collision course with the subsistence ethic of the inhabitants of Bousraa, and with the moral economy that this ethic is based upon. As an overarching scheme, we can see that by detaching land from villagers, they get forced into wage labor on the plantation, having to take what compensation they could get to somehow cover parts of their losses. Remembering Scott (1998), this can be seen as part of a state-formation project where the government, by way of an economic land concession, are extending their population control into new realms, all under the guise of "development" - the rhetoric suggests a view of the indigenous groups of the northeast as poor savages in need of help to escape poverty.

In addition to changing the subsistence basis for the community in Bousraa, the project had other consequences for the population, one of them being the generation of difference within the community. As the clearing went on, villagers reported that some of them lost their farmland fairly quickly - for some this also included the fallow land, while others did not lose all of it, and yet others have hardly lost anything. This skews the generation of produce in the favor of those that were not heavily affected by the first clearing on the concession. Villagers reported helping those that still had farmlands with their harvest in return for a cut of the produce or for day wages, while having to take day labor on the plantation remained the only option for continuity. As production of foodstuffs went down, more and more villagers saw themselves having to buy food they would normally have produced themselves, such as rice. It seems reasonable to assume that over time, with more and more farmland disappearing, the food vendors in Bousraa will have good days. A speculation can be made into whether the food prices will also escalate with diminishing local availability, something many villagers feared. It is pertinent to note here that many of the shops and stalls in Bousraa are owned by Khmers - another factor that is important regarding the further development of class in Bousraa: it seems obvious that the tendency goes towards generating a new lower class of day-laborers with no means of self-subsistence, whose money are spent in the shops of the Khmer population, thus transferring the bulk of wealth generated from working the plantations from the Bunong to the Khmers. Remembering the definition of development as "the relationship between rich

and poor countries (with an emphasis on the commitment of the rich to help the poor become rich)” (Hart/Padayachee 2010:52), we see that something is not sitting right. In the case of Bousraa, the underprivileged are being transformed from independent subsistence farmers to wage laborers with little or no option of accumulating capital - or, “becoming rich”, so to say. With a basis in this, it becomes clear that “development” is not a term that is quantifiable in the current context in any meaningful way. The population does not, per se, see a net gain or increase in their standard of living: it presents itself as more of a trade-off, where the losses may or may not outweigh the gains. Considering again the relationship to land already inherent in the community, the scales seem to tip towards a loss. This notion is discussed later in this chapter.

The problems that are present in Bousraa, then, can be seen as directly related to the system already in place in the villages before the plantations, and the strain put on this system by an external actor working under government acceptance. The incorporation of the Bunong into the market economy and the extended state control, with no real choice for the inhabitants, does not work, and does not contribute to the “development” of the population of Bousraa. The adaptability of the Bunong to the new structure is also not perfect: from being self-supplied, working a farm in a rhythm that is well-known, to being a “cog in the capitalist machinery” provides a new set of challenges. Many Bunong have lost their jobs at the plantation, or not been able to secure one in the first place due to a lack of paperwork (also discussed below). This has led to a large influx of migrant workers in Bousraa. In May of 2010 we witnessed trucks upon trucks upon trucks of Khmers coming to the villages to participate in the planting of a new clearing. FIDH (2011) notes that two thirds of the workforce of Socfin KCD is Khmer, but that they are “taking measures” to encourage and ensure employment for the Bunong. At the time of fieldwork many villagers expressed frustration that they were losing their last option, as they couldn’t even work on the plantations. Bousraa’s population is bloating with these migrant workers, which is also putting added pressure on the original population.

Having looked into the practicalities of the plantation establishment and some consequences and concerns relating to it, it is time to move on to the villagers themselves. The next section deals with their responses and reactions to being involuntarily entangled in a

this large-scale economic development project, and their thoughts on what development should be.

3.3 Villagers on Development

““Talk about development...”, Pal commented. “It is development for the company, not for the villagers since they no longer have any land...”” - IPNN (2010)

“There is a policy to support indigenous peoples, but we are asking them to change their traditions. They need to settle down and stop being nomad otherwise they won’t get out of poverty” - Mr. Kin Chean, Deputy Director, Agriculture Department Mondulakiri Province to FIDH (2011).

“According to the authorities, villagers will benefit from the company, getting new jobs, hospitals, schools and houses for rubber workers.” - WRM (2009)

“Recently, the Agence française de développement, the French Development Agency (AFD) has visited the place. They might be interested to support family rubber plantations around the Socfin KCD concession, and they are going to ask for a social, economic and environmental impact assessment of the concession project. None of such assessments has been done before granting the concession.” - WRM (2009)

“AFD is a financial institution and is France’s main agency responsible for official development assistance to developing countries. Socfin KCD contemplated obtaining a 2,5 million euros loan for a project of rubber family plantation and garden wood in Bousraa, which subsequently triggered the conduct of an environmental and social impact assessment to comply with AFD’s requirements. Socfin KCD finalized the ESIA in September 2010 and without providing reasons to AFD or FIDH, abandoned the project in 2011.” FIDH (2011)

““It [development] is inevitable.... If we were not here, it would be the Vietnamese, and then for the Phnong it would be the end,” he said.” - PPP (2009), quoting Phillippe Monnin (then General Manager at Socfin KCD).

The above quotes illustrate the span in meaning connected to the term development, and how it is presented. The villager in the first quote is disillusioned, finding that development does not benefit his community, but rather benefits a large company that has encroached on the land him and his family have been farming for as long as he can remember. The second quote illustrates that local authorities have adapted a view on the Bunong as poor people that need to “develop” to get out of the rut they are in. The two quotes regarding AFD are interesting in terms of being related to one of the larger international “development agencies”. The AFD approach to family-scale rubber operations was abandoned, and the report written with the aim to investigate the feasibility of such a model is, to my knowledge, not publicly available. In the last quote, the stance of Socfin KCD itself is documented: “development” is inevitable.

Let us see, then, what the villagers themselves, the subject of this development, have to say about it. First and foremost, in the aftermath of clearing forests without discussing this with villagers, after bulldozing a graveyard site, and after cutting down sacred forests, all the villagers interviewed for this study agreed on one thing: this is not development. The attitudes towards the project vary quite significantly, but the general idea that development is supposed to be something positive, is a notion shared by all. When interviewed about development, villagers stated that there were several things they would like to improve in their community. Infrastructure, education and health were always the main issues in these discussions, and, indeed, some of these things have been somewhat improved after Socfin KCD came to town. However, this is not worth much when the price to pay is the loss of independent food production, the disturbance and angering of spirits, and having to work as day laborers on a plantation that is situated on land they would have chosen to keep, had they been given a choice in the first place.

When it comes to the choices, they are in fact not real choices, as shown above. The relocation plan is not yet functional, and people were left without land to farm, which is not acceptable by any standards. As one Bunong woman put it:

“They asked us, “Do you want schools? A hospital? A new road to Sen Monorom?” Of course we do! But now they come here with their bulldozers, saying that this is progress, this is development, this is how we have to do

it if you want all these new things. I don't believe them! We have to find a different way, or they have to start respecting us. They treat us like we are lower than dogs, like our opinions do not matter, like we don't deserve a say in what happens to *our* land, because we are not intelligent enough to know our own good. What I know is this: we used to be able to feed our family with what we grew on our *mirrs*, and we could make extra money by collecting resin and honey from the forest. Now we only have two *mirrs* left, and we have used one of them for two years already. We have to leave it now, or it will never regrow. How is this development? If i cannot eat, I don't care about roads and schools!" - Informant in village 1.

A lot of emphasis was put on the feeling of having been used or conned by the people asking them if they wanted development. Villagers perceived it as completely unfair that they should have known what would happen if they answered "yes" to wanting development. While none of my informants reported having been tricked into selling land via thumb-printing³⁶ a blank document, other reports mention this taking place (CHRAC 2010), which has surely increased the skepticism towards the company.

When it comes to taking work at the plantation, the villagers are also quite uniform in their condemnation of the methods used by the company, speaking of difficult conditions, of unbearable hours, and of the difficulty of keeping a job there should you want to:

"I've been working at the plantation for a while, but it's not easy. I have to get up very early to get ready to work, as the company trucks pick us up at 4am, even if we don't start work until 7am. If I'm not ready at that time, I'm not allowed into work that day, and will not get paid. If you miss a day of work, maybe you cannot work for a while, because they will find someone else." - Informant in village 2.

The trucks pick the workers up at 4am, and transport them to the plantation area for registration, before work commences at 7am. The trucks are huge, and the flatbeds are

³⁶A thumbprint is a common form of signature in Cambodia, as there are still many illiterates. Most official documents, including those that verify the sale of a piece of land, have to be thumb-printed to be legally acceptable.

literally crammed full of people. The workdays are long and heavy, and are described as “very different” from farming on the *mirrs*, especially in terms of workload. There are daily goals to be met if workers want to ensure their continued engagement to the company.

What villagers have suggested be done otherwise in this process is of some significance. First and foremost, the massive lack of communication is always a topic. The villagers are used to managing their own affairs, and are having trouble accepting that they should not be allowed involvement in something as crucial as the restructuring of their entire livelihood system. The Socfin KCD representatives are seen as disrespectful, as they did not at any point try to engage villagers in discussion, or even attempt to explain what the implementation of Varanasi would mean for them. This is also often the explanation that comes up first when discussing the outrage towards the plantation (discussed in the next chapter). Villagers see the land as theirs (rightly so from a purely legislative standpoint), and are not going to let it go without a fight. In addition to wanting involvement in the crucial stages of planning for the projects that will affect them, villagers wanted the company to respect their traditions. While many reported that it was mainly the Khmer staff that were cutting down sacred forests and burial grounds, an interesting example is mentioned in FIDH (2011):

“However, since the land clearing is done by a subcontractor who is apparently unaware of the demarcation process, incidents occurring in spiritual and burial forests continued to be reported even after numerous complaints by the communities and CSOs. When asked by FIDH why this was still occurring, the company responded that the subcontractor, a Cambodian company, did not take into consideration the map indicating the areas to avoid since they “didn’t care”.”

As the communication within the different branches of the operation seem to be as lacking as the external communication, it is perhaps no surprise that forest that should be saved, is cut. It is, however, obvious that villagers will hold responsibility for this on the company as a whole - the fact that a subcontractor is doing it because the subcontractor “doesn’t care” is not much of an excuse.

Furthermore, the villagers interviewed are disappointed that replacement land has not

materialized, leaving many without any source of food for themselves. This was another reason many villagers gave for the increased mistrust towards the company over time. As many of the inhabitants of Bousraa would like to keep their subsistence model as it is (even if it means travel further from Bousraa to the fields), this is unacceptable, and is seen as trying to force them into working on the plantations. Another important point villagers mentioned was that since the company started clearing forest without consulting villagers, they had cleared forest which should not have been cleared. This included graveyard and sacred forest, and has put the community at mercy of the spirits' wrath. Many villagers reported feeling sick as they could not make amends to the spirits, and they feared that they would now be so angered that they could never make amends. This is problematic in several ways, as the appeasing of the spirits costs a great deal of money in terms of livestock and wine. Informants reported that they did not have any opportunity to make the appropriate sacrifices for such massive insults, and so were left in a state of peril. The discussions with Socfin KCD went on for some time about this, and the outcome was that Socfin KCD agreed to pay for some ceremonies related to the clearing of burial forest. In April 2010 the first of these ceremonies (as reported by informants) took place, with Socfin KCD representatives present. The village chief at that point expressed relief that the situation was resolved, even if the terms were not as good as he had hoped for. In the end he seemed happy that at least the villagers had made a large company with massive amounts of money bow down to their tradition, and he was pleased that two foreigners representing the company took part in the ceremony, even if they were "very shy and stood far away". Like the others, he took what he could get.

All in all, there is a distinct feeling that things have not in any way been *fair*. Villagers that see themselves as capable decision-makers are reduced to pawns in a game of agrobusiness, and this has led to the situation in Bousraa being as it is now, with a deep distrust between original population, the development company, and the local authorities. As one woman expressed it: "We will be poor, and we will lose our culture. Bousraa is turning into a Khmer village now" (Informant in Village 1).

3.4 "Development" and the Bunong

Judging by the previous sections, it becomes clear that development is not something that the villagers in Bousraa, the local authorities and Socfin KCD agree upon. While villagers see it as something that they should be actively involved in, and something that will expand upon what they already have while improving conditions, the local authorities (and, by proxy, the Cambodian government) see villagers as poor, savage, and in need of incorporation into the market economy of the country. As in the quote by the Agricultural Department's Deputy Director, the Bunong are asked to change their traditions to move out of poverty. For the state, it seems, development and tradition are incompatible. Villagers do not feel this way. In the case of Socfin KCD, development is "inevitable", and if it does not happen at the hand of Socfin KCD, someone else will "develop" the Bunong. The problem with this sort of argument is, of course, that the means are not justified by the existence of another, perceived worse, alternative³⁷. Socfin KCD are reported to have described the working conditions as something the villagers will have to "get used to" (FIDH 2011), and have complained about "discipline issues" (FIDH 2011). The discipline issues are most likely related to the fact that plantation work is not something villagers asked for, wanted, or even want now that it's there - the majority of people interviewed in Bousraa still report that they ideally want their land back, or another piece of land to farm the way they used to.

What we see, then, is that the development project in Bousraa is, in many respects, an attempt at conforming subsistence farmers to a linear material idea of development, where waged labor is the norm and the ideal, while subsistence farming over large amounts of land is seen as a prehistoric practice that has no place in modern society. The villagers, having their basis in the subsistence ethic, are not interested in this change, as it penetrates deep into their societal structure. As described in the chapter about moral economy, the relationship between the Bunong and their land is not simply one of means of production, it is a social good which the society relies upon for a variety of important functions.

³⁷It is interesting to note at this point that many villagers had more positive views on the Vietnamese companies that Mr. Monnin refers to in his quote. The Vietnamese have made some effort to spare the sacred and burial forests, and have, as such, not experienced the same outrage towards their operations as Socfin KCD. This being said, the issue of villagers having to change their subsistence basis is very much the same in the areas developed by the Vietnamese company.

By developing the control if this good away from the Bunong, one is not offering them opportunity, but deprivation. What this means in practice is that the Bunong are left with less than what they had before being “developed” - contrary to any general idea of development, which would entail increasing opportunity, infrastructure and (the potential for) material wealth. “Development” loses it’s meaning as a concept when one tries to apply it to the situation in Bousraa, simply because the main three actors involved in it have different meanings of what it should constitute. What we see from the villagers is an idea of development that is probably the closest to what we would like it to be, looking from north to south. And if we view the concept from the angle of company and state, we see nothing but profit-maximizing, with very little concern for the subjects to be developed. It is a paradox, then, that the group of people that are to be developed, and that supposedly need development, are the very same people that rigorously resist development in the form it has taken in Bousraa. What we see is that capitalism is being sold as development - the real benefactors of the agroindustrialization of Bousraa are the shareholders of Socfin and KCD. There is a need to rethink development in light of this if any meaning is going to be placed on the term development - if not it is not meaningful for either group, and results in development for company and state, but not for the recipients of these policies, that are used as an excuse for implementation.

It seems relevant at this point to return to Ferguson’s “farmers” in Lesotho, as the parallel is striking:

“When a project is sent out to “develop the farmers” and finds that “the farmers” are not much interested in farming, and, in fact, do not even consider themselves to be “farmers”, it is thus easy for it to arrive at the conclusion that “the people” are mistaken, that they really are farmers and that they need only to be convinced that this is so for it to be so.” (1994:178)

The inhabitants of Bousraa are in this case being treated as something they are not, and do not want to be: wage laborers. Contrasting ideas of development and what it constitutes leads the government and developers to label them as “wrong”: that they do not know their own good, and need to become wage laborers so as to “get out of poverty”. They need only to be convinced that this is so.

To close this section off, a quote from Bourdier is appropriate:

“It is not difficult to assume that if peoples of the highlands continue to protect their trees and their physical environment, this is not merely because the forest is perceived as having magical and charming qualities and values, but because it provides them with something important and meaningful. Any development intervention that is not based on the comprehension of this sensitive interaction between the population and their immediate environment is, ultimately, misled and farcical.” (2009:46)

As have been demonstrated, the “development intervention” in Bousraa has been, in Bourdier’s words “misled and farcical”. As a result of this, villagers have, throughout the process, resisted the implementation of the project, and on one occasion even taken violent action against the company. As demonstrated, this is linked to the subsistence ethic, and to land as a social good in Bunong community. The incorporation into market economy and wage labor is not compatible with these factors, and so the moral indignation rose to a climax in the period after the commencement of clearing trees around Bousraa, while also being escalated by continuous “mishaps” by the company. In the next chapter the resistance towards the plantation is examined.



Figure 7: Playing the gongs and tapping jar wine. Wedding in Village 1.

4 Resistance



Figure 8: "NO ENTRY" (in Khmer) carved into a tree - the forest has been privatized.



Figure 9: The clearing continues. "Varanasi", February 2010.

Having seen from the two preceding chapters that the Bunong have their subsistence ethic challenged by a large-scale economic development project on what used to be their farmlands, their sacred forests and their burial sites, it is time to move on to their resistance to this project. It becomes clear that the collision between market and subsistence economies, coupled with the moral indignation from the removal of access to a social good is what causes the outrage that will be described here. The first part of the chapter regards Scott's (1990) idea of *public* and *hidden transcripts*. I'll show what these transcripts consist of, what differentiates them, and what actions are planned in the communication. Resistance met by myself while doing fieldwork is also discussed. Furthermore, the chapter looks into the different types of violations that have taken place in the case of the establishment of Varanasi, and how these actions constitute the basis for resistance. In the next section, acts of sabotage are discussed, both physical and spiritual, and how they are planned, instigated and carried out. The revolt against the company, resulting in destroyed equipment and saplings is discussed after this, and the aftermath of the incident is considered. The two final sections deal with what these acts of resistance mean, what made them come about, and linking this to the other focal points of this thesis, moral economy and development.

4.1 Public and Hidden Transcripts

Remembering Scott's definition of public transcripts ("open interaction between subordinate and those who dominate" (1990:2)), we can establish a public transcript for the context of Bousraa. The subordinates in this case are, of course, the Bunong of Bousraa that have had a rubber plantation implemented on their farmlands. Those who dominate, conversely, are the representatives of the Cambodian government and of the company and its interests. The interaction between the two groups is manifold, and has evolved over time.

In the first instance of public transcript, there is the preliminary survey villagers mentioned in interviews, where they were asked if they wanted development. While this can not be asserted for certain, it is reasonable to assume that this is the 2006 Suitability Survey conducted by KCD, as mentioned in FIDH (2011). It is included here as part of the public transcript, as even though the relationships between subordinate and those who

dominate were not established at this point, villagers still refer to it as part of the communication between them and the company and government. After the clearing started, the public transcript proper is established. The first instance is the protest taking place in May of 2008, where approximately 100 community representatives protested the clearing by rallying at the Provincial Governors Office. At this point the villagers are promised that land will be given back to them (FIDH 2011). As there is no progress, the villagers filed a complaint in October of 2008, which still has not been formally answered. A dialogue meeting is held in December of 2008 (on the day before villagers violently protested the plantation), but it does not present any solution. There were more meeting throughout the following year, but no solution was reached. The dialogue in these meetings, according to informants, revolved more around trying to explain that the plantation is necessary and a good thing for the community rather than taking the concerns of villagers seriously, and so they do not lead anywhere. After Socfin takes over operational management of the plantation, the meetings are more frequent, but do not lead to meaningful discussions, according to villagers. When a sacred forest is razed in February of 2009, the attitudes towards the company are significantly hardened. In an attempt to make communication more efficient and meaningful, Socfin established a “Tripartite Committee” in December 2009, consisting of three representatives from the company, three representatives from the local authorities, and three representatives from the local community. Land clearing is halted for three months, but resumes immediately after this time, and there is still no solution to villagers’ grievances. The incidents concerning burial sites and sacred forests continue to happen, and the communication is not improved - villagers reported that the company seemed if not indifferent, then at least as not having any “will to agreement”. As the Sethikula concession is finalized, Socfin KCD initiates a meeting with villagers to ensure “Free and Prior Consent”. As the interviews for this study were done before the implementation of Sethikula, there is no definite data on how the communication process for this project was experienced by villagers - there were rumors that sacred forest and burial sites would be spared once clearing was undertaken, but remembering the example of subcontractors who “don’t care”, it seems unlikely that the situation will be much different.

According to villagers, the most common topics for discussion in the meetings were the

same things that were described in complaints and protests: compensation, disputes regarding the clearing of burial and sacred sites, the accusations toward the Khmer middlemen in the company, the demarcation of fallow land and the conflicts that result from the company clearing land without first consulting with villagers. Regarding compensation, many villagers voiced frustration openly about not being given real choice as to what they wanted to do with their land. The people who took the money offered had few choices left but to try to find work at the plantation, while those that agreed to resettlement plans did not see the new plots materialize, and so stood without land to farm and had to look elsewhere for securing subsistence. These discussions are still very much alive in Bousraa - there does not seem to be a lasting solution for the problems until the process is tidied up significantly. When it comes to the clearing of sacred and burial sites in the forest, villagers voiced anger openly towards the company and its representatives for not managing to prevent “accidental” clearings of these sites to happen again and again. The company representatives have repeatedly stated to villagers that this should not happen, yet it does. Villagers have also complained, both verbally and in writing, that the Khmer employees of Socfin KCD do not accurately report what villagers are saying to the top-level staff of Socfin. These issues particularly revolve around the amount of land each villager thinks him- or herself entitled to. Accusations of corruption and conscious manipulation of numbers were rife and in the open. Villagers also complained that they were not believed when they claimed their fallow land for compensation, and also that the demarcation of fallow land is made difficult if not impossible when the company clears large tracts of land without first letting villagers discuss and agree upon the demarcation and the demarcation process.

A complaint that surfaced several times in interviews and conversations was that the Khmer employees of Socfin KCD and the “foreigners” working for the same company were communicating “differently”. While the reputations of the different foreign employees varied widely, the villagers often had the impression that they were easier to communicate with than the Khmers. The foreigners (after Socfin took operational management) were rumored to spend time in the community trying to resolve conflicts regarding the above issues, and several informants claimed that this was working quite well - until the agreed-upon solution to a given problem was not in accordance with the dialogue between

company and community representatives. The Khmer staff was largely blamed for this, as villagers saw them as the ones that implemented orders from the foreigners, and accused them of under-reporting land to take money for themselves and such. What we see the contours of here is a sort of *fragmented public transcript*, the fact that there is a public and open communication between company, government and community, but that significant information is either lost in translation or consciously mis- or under-reported, so that the public transcript becomes a tangle of information where it is difficult to know what is true and genuine, and what is being “sold” as the same. This created a great deal of mistrust in the community, and is frequently discussed in the hidden transcript between villagers, as shown below.

In assessing this public transcript, a few points are important. First and foremost, the public transcript is somewhat confusing. The information, and the exchange of information, while attempted organized, is not very consistent or constructive. The parties seem to have taken their stance, and effective and meaningful dialogue has not yet taken place in any significant way. While the villagers are concerned with being heard and being involved in the process, the company is more interested in selling them the idea of the plantation as opportunity. Furthermore, the public transcript seems to revolve around data that is often erroneous, or claimed erroneous by one of the parties. This is often the case with fallow land, as villagers claim compensation, then the company accuses them of “doubling up” on certain pieces of land, or of reporting the same piece of land for monetary compensation twice, etc. The conflicts in the community also escalate via this, as inhabitants in different villages accuse each other of “stealing” land by reporting and receiving compensation for land that is not rightfully theirs. An important thing to note here is that Socfin KCD has insisted that compensation claims be made individually, a system of tenure that is not directly compatible with more communal notions of land ownership in Bunong villages. Finally, it is significant that much of the hidden transcript revolves around how the public transcript is not meaningful.

When it comes to the hidden transcript, Scott describes them as “tak[ing] place “off-stage”, beyond direct observation by power holders”. In the context of Bousraa, this constitutes conversations between villagers, unofficial and official meetings between them,

in short any form of communication in which villagers are involved and topics regarding the plantation are being discussed. Another issue that can be considered part of the hidden transcript is the alleged threats against villagers by company employees in connection to the first discussions concerning compensation. Several villagers reported company employees saying they should take what they could get, or they would just take the land without giving them anything, for instance. Threats and accusations, from both parties, then, constitute a significant part of the hidden transcript, as well as the planning of acts of resistance, as will be shown below. I have had no formal dealings with company employees save for a few encounters with the Khmer staff, and have as such not been privy to the company representatives' hidden transcript. When it comes to the villagers and their hidden transcript, it is hard to go beyond what has been said to me personally in conversation with inhabitants of Bousraa, as I have no definite way to establish how this transcript has taken place in the past or how it has evolved. It should also be noted that it has been difficult for me to assert how deep into the hidden transcript I ever managed to dive (see below).

What is obvious is that the tone and the accusations take on a much harsher form in the conversations where officials or company representatives are not present. Conversations about the company and their operations were often fueled by open anger and contempt for their actions:

“Would they get away with this in France? What if a Bunong development company were to bulldoze a graveyard in Paris? Would they let us continue if we paid a few hundred dollars? They will not even take on the expense of our sacrifices! They have no respect for who we are and what we believe in, they come here thinking they can do what they want, and in addition they say they are here to help us? Their behavior is unacceptable!” Informant in village 2.

In addition to the (frequent) outbursts against the company such as the two quoted above, compensation and the distribution of compensation, like in the public transcript, was much discussed between villagers. Not only in relation to the company, but also in relation to the other villages of Bousraa. For instance, villagers of village four accused villagers of village one of trying to “steal” their land by reporting it as theirs to claim com-

compensation for it. When it comes to the compensation issued by the company, there was talk about demanding more than the company could manage to pay in order to halt their operations, for instance. One village chief said he was going to demand one elephant³⁸ for each burial site that was desecrated, and, giggling, concluded that Socfin KCD would never be able to get a hold of elephants. Furthermore, acts of sabotage were discussed in these contexts, especially plans to go to the plantation and pull out newly sown rubber saplings. This was something villagers were surprisingly open about, and as far as I could tell it was a commonplace that it was done from time to time. The act was presented as somewhat symbolic, and it was planned and agreed upon beforehand who and when would undertake it. This is discussed in greater depth later in this chapter. Another common theme of these discussions were accusations about corruption in the company structure and in the local administration, especially authorities that were “on the side of the company”, and the Khmer middlemen that were “stealing land”.

When it comes to the assessment of the hidden transcripts, one point becomes obvious: the overlap between the public and hidden transcript is significant. With the exception of specific sabotage actions, who does what and the planning of these actions, a lot of discussion revolves around topics that the company has made an effort to discuss with villagers, but with no degree of success. The public transcript as such fuels the hidden transcript, which escalates the discussions to a level of more pronounced rage and frustration, and again to the planning of direct actions against the company and its staff and property. The public transcript thus acts as a form of frustration, not as a room of negotiation and mutual will to compromise. Instead, it becomes an illustration of how locked the situation has become, and how little room and willingness there is to make the situation work in a way that is meaningful for both parties.

Having examined the public and hidden transcripts in Bousraa, a note should be made of the flip side of this situation; my access to the hidden transcripts. There were a few incidents during my fieldwork that indicate that I was, on occasion, efficiently blocked off from the hidden transcripts of some informants, and even blocked off from the public tran-

³⁸The Bunong have domesticated elephants for farming and forest work for centuries, a practice that is now coming to an end due to the near-extinct status of the wild elephants in Cambodia.

script on at least one occasion (the May 2010 meeting between Socfin KCD and villagers). Following are three examples of disinformation and denial of access to information during my fieldwork:

First there is the meeting I had with a village chief. As we had chatted for a while about me and my project and whatnot, I mentioned the much-discussed riots that had taken place a while back. This made him extremely uneasy, his eyes started drifting and he shifted in his chair. He then proceeded to claim that none of the villagers in village three were involved in the riots, as they had all agreed that the development was for the greater good, and should be encouraged - something which didn't add up with what other informants had said. He also told me there would be a ceremony at the nearby waterfall, where the entire village would participate, something which also didn't check out. His fellow villagers were also reluctant to talk, but some of them had no problems admitting that they were present during the riots. I still do not understand what his worries were all about, and I was unable to get a reasonable answer to this from any other source. I crosschecked the information from the interview several times with other informants, and concluded that the man had doctored almost everything he told me. He was unwilling to speak to me again. Perhaps he had been involved in something similar before and had been reprimanded, perhaps he was just protecting his own from a potential threat.

Secondly, there were several incidents with local authorities that took place mainly after I moved permanently to Bousraa. The first morning in the house, I was awoken by a loud banging on my door. The police were there, asking for my papers. As I only had an ID card, and not my passport, I was "apprehended" and driven to Sen Monorom, where I had to produce a passport with a valid visa. This was repeated three times over the course of a month. In the end even the provincial police in Sen Monorom were embarrassed, as they could not really produce a valid reason for forcing me to come to the station, but they still managed to keep me from doing my work on several occasions. I would be in the middle of an interview or a conversation, and some guy would sit down and start staring. All of a sudden we are talking about the weather. I was invited to see the site of the graveyard that had been bulldozed, but conveniently I have to meet some mid-level police officer and explain my presence in the village. I never got a full explanation for

why I had to do this, even after asking time and time again - perhaps I was being “kept an eye on” in case I was instigating action against the plantation. In the end, I came to accept police interference as a small annoyance, an annoyance that kept me from going to the village meetings, of which there were several during my stay. The meetings have been described to me in detail by informants, but sadly that must be considered second-rate information in the village context.

Lastly, the example of my landlady should be mentioned, as she kept me from an important village meeting. During my final week in Bousraa, there was to be a collective meeting between the company and villagers to discuss compensation for both a destroyed graveyard and for the hectares of disputed land that had already been cleared. This seemed to be my last chance of participating in one of the meetings. I met my landlady before going for breakfast, and we agreed I would come back with my interpreter, and that we would go to the meeting together. After coming back, she said we had to wait a while, while she borrowed our motorcycle and went to a small farm of hers nearby, to deliver the daily rations to some workers there. She took her time, and came back after about an hour. She then told us to wait a bit longer, as the meeting wouldn’t begin for a while. After waiting another hour I asked if we shouldn’t leave, to which she replied that she now had a headache and would not be going after all. We asked her where the meeting was, she told us O’Cher (the plantation offices outside the village), so we drove out, to find the place deserted. A bit puzzled, we phoned her up, and she told us the villagers had left for O’Cher, and would join us shortly. Surprisingly, they never showed up. She told us she had spoken to them and knew they were coming. They didn’t come. We later learned that the meeting had taken place on a different location. It was over when we arrived. I had no reason not to trust my landlady before this event, but it would seem she had been misinforming me when I asked for her advice on something. Sadly I did not manage to see this until it became blatant. I do not know why she would do such a thing. Perhaps she was afraid that having this nosy foreigner in her house could reflect badly on her and her family.

What becomes clear from the above examples is that I was actively being lied to and presented with disinformation on some occasions, and that I was actively being kept from

participating in the interaction between villagers, authorities and company. There can be many possible explanations for this, but I choose to see it as a sign of the tension in Bousraa at the time of fieldwork, when the distrust in the community had grown significantly due to the many incidents regarding the plantation. That being said, I was fortunate enough to meet many informants who did not behave in this way, and as such have enough data that is truthful to describe the situation accurately. Having dealt with that, it's time to move on to describing particular actions performed by the company to fuel the moral indignation in the community.

4.2 Violations and Consequences

“So, they think they can come here and do what they want? I'll go out there and pull out the trees! If they put me in jail, fine! I will tell my children to do the same, and they can arrest them too! They will have to treat us properly if they want to stay here, they will have to listen!” Informant in village 1.

The aim of this section is to give examples of the actions performed by Socfin KCD that served to infuriate the community to such an extent that they started planning sabotage and even rose to a violent confrontation at one point. The section focuses on two main topics: the restriction of access to forest and farmland, and the destruction of burial sites and sacred forests.

The restriction of access to forest, as mentioned in chapter three, is the restriction of access to an important social good in any Bunong society. This restriction started first when company bulldozers started clearing the farmland of the inhabitants of Bousraa, before the contract for the concession was even finalized (FIDH 2011). Escalating the conflict, NGO and community representatives were restricted access to the areas in and beyond the plantation (FIDH 2011, PPP 23.06 2009). The road that goes through the plantation is considered a public road, and some inhabitants claimed to reporters that their children was not able to attend school due to the restricted access enforced along it (KPN 2009). By restricting access, and by detaching land from the community, the plantation is effectively removing the means of production from the community, the very same means that are the basis for the subsistence ethic. In addition, this also detaches the inhabitants from many of their sacred sites, including their graveyards, which are an

important part of their cosmology and their perceived welfare. This restriction, happening without the consent of villagers, without them being included in the decision-making process on any level, and without proper mechanisms to prevent it from happening where it shouldn't, in addition to the fact that no compensation was given in a satisfactory, systematic manner that included the villagers, is the main reason that the Bunong of Bousraa violently oppose the plantation, and will go to extremes to stop its implementation. The acts of sabotage are also fueled by this, as they attempt to, in some small way, stop the transformation of the landscape, or at least stall it. The fact that no functioning public transcript is in place to allow for meaningful dialogue, and no shared idea of "development" exists between authorities, company and population, made the decision to resort to these acts of resistance unavoidable.

Furthering, and indeed cementing, the distrust between company and population, is the cases of grave desecration and the distortion of what Nikles (2006) calls "angry spirit places". As demonstrated in chapter two, the spirits are considered a force that has real effect on villagers' health and well-being, and as such should be respected and appeased to protect the community from harm. With the bulldozing of graveyards, the spirits of the ancestors are disturbed, and must be appeased, which involves ceremonies that are costly in terms of livestock and wine for sacrifices. In addition, the spirits that live in the "angry spirit places" are not to be tampered with in any way, as demonstrated in Nikles (2006). No produce is to be harvested from these areas, no trees are to be felled, and nothing is to be planted (Nikles 2006). Contrasting this to the "flattening" that is happening on the concession grounds in Bousraa, the community is put in another tight spot if they want to ensure their own well-being. This leads to generating a need for many and costly ceremonies, effectively driving people bankrupt if they want to be able to appease the spirits in any significant way. Many informants reported that even if they had ceremonies, it was not enough, as the spirits had been upset so dramatically that they didn't have enough animals and wine to comfort them. This, coupled with the fact that there is no more land for farming, makes the economic situation of many inhabitants of Bousraa one not of development, but of underdevelopment. Regarding this situation as the basis on which the villagers choose to act, the idea of trying to get rid of the plantation gives significant meaning in trying to explain why acts of resistance have become commonplace

in Bousraa. The specific acts of resistance are described in the next section.

4.3 Sabotage, Curses, Slander and Revolt

The specific acts of resistance towards the rubber plantation in Bousraa are manifold. I have chosen here to focus on four types of actions. First, there is the sabotage actions, which normally take the form of going to the plantation area and pulling out rubber plants. Secondly, there is the spiritual resistance that takes the shape of placing curses on the company. Thirdly, the slandering of officials, staff and authorities are commonplace when talking to villagers. The last part of this section deals with the violent outburst in December of 2008, when 400 villagers rallied in protest and destroyed equipment and rubber seedlings at the Socfin KCD headquarters outside Bousraa.

Acts of sabotage became a topic after having spent some time with a group of my main informants. They described getting some people together, going out to parts of the rubber plantation that are not very well-guarded, and pulling out rubber trees in the hope of killing them, thus incurring loss and extra labor on the company. I was present during the planning of several of these actions, but never participated in one³⁹. There are a few people in the villages that are more prone to setting these things into life than others, often going from house to house to “recruit” people to join them. The actions were more openly planned than I had imagined - several people reported having said no, even that they were not agreeing with the approach, but had no problem with others doing it. These activists then form small groups, do what they plan, and repeat after a while. An interesting point to note is that the topic was often accompanied by smiles and giggles - a sort of basking in the frustration of employees and authorities that would have to spend time, money and effort on rectifying the destroyed rows of trees. Even if just a few trees were pulled out (which was most often the case, villagers reported pulling 10-15 trees as the most common number), the satisfaction seemed to be great. Having lost their own forest to the destruction of the developer, it seems only fair that the destruction of the re-shaped forest gives a feeling of revenge.

³⁹Had I been caught and reported, I would not have been allowed to continue my studies in Bousraa, as the authorities would have had a legitimate reason for throwing me out by pinning the actions on me.

A mention should be made here of spiritual resistance as well. Specifically, villagers from Bousraa held a ceremony on the 20th of July 2010, cursing the company for taking their land, hoping that this would put a stop to their operations. The villagers offered pigs and jars of wine for the spirits, hoping that they would make the company “vanish like a dead pig”, according to the Phnom Penh Post (21.07 2010). This was not something I discussed with villagers, as, indeed, nobody mentioned it (the reported ceremony took place after I returned from fieldwork). It can perhaps be seen as the villagers seeking any last resort to win things in their favor, having seen that sabotage is not sufficient to stop a project of this magnitude, and having seen that there seems to be no genuine wish for the villagers’ involvement in the matters concerning them.

When it comes to slander, it is very much the same actions that were described in the section about the hidden transcript of Bousraa. Allegations against company leaders were common, but also apologetic at times, as the villagers assumed that the foreigners did not understand what the Khmer staff was doing. Still, specific members of the foreign staff at Socfin KCD offices were being singled out for their appearance, their manner of speech and their general behavior. Anything from comic remarks about big noses to more serious accusations of being rude and aggressive was common to hear when discussing foreign staff with villagers. When it comes to the Khmer employees, the slander takes a different tone - there is no excuse for the behavior of these individuals, according to villagers. They are “corrupt”, “greedy”, “cheeky” and even “evil” or “out to destroy the Bunong”. The villagers are convinced that the Khmers do not feel they should have anything, that they do not deserve anything, and that they are not entitled to anything, and so the Khmers treat them in an extremely derogatory manner, even when face-to-face. In addition, the accusations of corruption seemed to have basis in specific examples of under-reporting, uncovered by villagers that had taken their accusation to one of the foreigners working for the company. While the foreigner had agreed to rectify this, nothing had been done when fieldwork was finished, and so no positive outcome was to be seen. If anything, it worsened relations. Local authorities are also the target of much slander. In addition to also being accused of being corrupt, they are seen as the force that “lets” the company keep clearing land, even if it is contested. This is interesting, as it shows that villagers are aware that laws are being broken, but are powerless to change this as the authorities allegedly are

“in the pocket of the company”. Furthermore, the general accusation against them is that they are also out to destroy the Bunong, like the other Khmers, and that they are effectively doing it by not intervening in a situation that the villagers feel need addressing.

When it comes to outright revolt, this is not something that has been symptomatic for villagers’ actions against the company in Bousraa. It has, to my knowledge, only happened once, on the 20th of December of 2008. Villagers reported that they were so angry about the company coming to Bousraa and “stealing their land” that they rallied at the plantation offices, set fire to trucks and destroyed rubber saplings. Villagers say that several hundred people were there, and that three tractors and many rubber seedlings were completely destroyed. This is in concurrence with FIDH (2011)⁴⁰. Villagers also told of Khmer staff standing by watching, and reported that the staff encouraged them, saying that if they kept at it, they would lose everything, something which further angered the villagers. If we remember Scott, “the outright violent, “revolutionary” uprisings are rare, and in general an expression of great desperation” (1985) - something which makes sense in the case of Bousraa. The atmosphere of David pitted against Goliath comes to mind, and villagers saw this as a desperate last resort to prevent what for them would constitute, as we have seen, a disaster of significant proportions. Having failed to achieve much by it, the acts of resistance have been reduced to the more commonplace sabotage and slander described above. The aftermath of the incident saw the arrest of six community representatives the following month, all of which were released the same day but told not to talk to anyone, or they would be arrested and put in jail (CHRAC/HRVC/ADHOC 2009). The revolt, then, was successfully repressed, and served mainly to legitimize the presence of armed guards around the plantation gates.

4.4 Resistance and the Bunong

Having seen how the development of the rubber plantation has led to a set of reactions in the community, and having examined those actions in the context of the village, a few points can be made. First of all, the resistance towards the project seems to be motivated

⁴⁰“400 Bunong demonstrate and destroy 43 rubber seedlings, burn three earth excavators and damage a fourth. Socfin KCD then declines to intervene and refers the matter to the Government.” (FIDH 2011)

not only by the massive injustice done to the communities⁴¹ but also by the malfunctioning of any form of meaningful public transcript. The communication has been a source of gradually escalating mistrust, up to the point where it is difficult to find any meaningful form of communication likely. As shown above, the revolt was part of the beginning of the situation - an outburst of sorts. After the revolt was suppressed, the resistance took on more subtle and nuanced forms. What we can conclude from this is that villagers saw early on what was going to happen, in concurrence with what was stated above. They foresaw the disaster and attempted to stop it in its tracks, violently, before it got out of hand, something which, had it happened, would have allowed for the meaningful involvement of the villagers in the dialogue concerning the project, rather than them being totally shut out from it, and villagers gradually losing trust in it. What the villagers revolted against has now become a reality in Bousraa. The “moral bankruptcy” in relations to the desecration of “angry spirit places” and burial land, and, in continuation, the bankruptcy of villagers as they try to rectify the situation with any means they have, all the while having lost their farmlands, their subsistence basis and their flexibility. While the resistance goes on, NGO involvement is on the rise, and the company keeps making promises, it may now be a case of too little, too late. The majority of the population will have to make do with the situation as it is, and make the switch from self-reliant farmers to wage laborers. The acts of resistance in Bousraa are, collectively speaking, an expression of the wish to not have had this happen. The project is at odds with any form of idea the Bunong might have about their “development”, and is, as such, a failure for all but those that gain on it, that is Khmer migrant workers, foreign shareholders, and the Bunong that manage to get more high-ranking jobs in the community management section of the project.

The triangularity of the case thus materializes: as the notions of right and wrong in the community that are based on the subsistence ethic become clear by examining the moral economy of the Bunong, we see that a development project that is not in any way rooted in these notions will be resisted by any means available, even if resistance, ultimately, is futile - at least in this case.

⁴¹This is perhaps a bombastic statement, but it is in accordance with what all other reports on the specific case conclude.



Figure 10: People gathering at a ceremony in Village 4.



Figure 11: The road through "Varanasi". Rubber saplings to the right.

5 Conclusions

Before moving on to some concluding thoughts regarding moral economy, development and resistance, as well as presenting some thoughts relating to Scott's work, a brief recap of the main points so far is in order.

The chapter on moral economy showed that by way of their relationship to land, the Bunong's sense of economy is based largely on morality, not profit. The main idea is that due to the existence of a subsistence claim, their exchange of labor, their redistribution mechanics etc., they can not be incorporated into a strictly profit-based economy based on commodity production and wage labor, as this would unsettle the internal mechanisms in the community.

The economic development project "Varanasi" implemented in Bousraa has affected this relationship between the Bunong and their land dramatically. Thousands of hectares of farmland has been cleared, land that the Bunong have been using for generations, and the process for compensating them for this loss has been riddled with irregularities. What is established in the chapter on development is that the concept "development" carries different sets of meanings, depending on who uses it. The villagers can't see how cutting down their forest and taking the access to their land away can be development, while Socfin KCD and the government argue that this is a necessity for the Bunong to "get out of poverty", and that the process is "inevitable". The process is one of attempting to incorporate a population whose sense of economy rests mainly within the realm of morality, not of profit, and as such the project is not perceived as meaningful in any way to its subjects.

As the chapter on resistance shows, the Bunong are resisting the implementation of the rubber plantation on their lands with what means they have. Through sabotage, curses, slander and revolt, they attempt to regain what little footing they can. The distrust between villagers and company has gone from bad to worse due to the continuous violations of the company - the bulldozing of graveyard sites, clearing of trees from "angry spirit places" and so on. This resistance can be seen as grounded in their moral economy - their shared perceptions on such concepts as land, value, work and nature. The establishment

of the plantation is in stark contrast to these perceptions, as it is forcing them into a material economy, where production for the market, not consumption, is the norm and goal.

5.1 In Conclusion: Moral Economy, Development and Resistance

Some concluding notes should be made on the choice of using the moral economy concept as analytical tool in regards to the situation in Bousraa. First of all, by investigating the Bunong's production, distribution and relationship to their land, their subsistence ethic can be shown. This provides the basis for the contrasting analysis between a system of production and distribution geared towards subsistence security, and that of the market; a system that relies on the mechanics of supply and demand, wage labor and the distinction between producer and consumer. Furthermore, connecting these points to the idea of land as a social good in Bunong society, a social good in which much of Bunong culture is grounded, additional differences emerge: land has value both as and beyond that of being the object of production for the Bunong, or the means of production for Socfin KCD. Having established that the two systems are vastly different, especially in their handling of inequality and insecurity, the moral economy of the Bunong can be discussed. What can be argued, then, is that as contrast to the material, monetarized idea of economics inherent in both development discourse and market economy, the moral economy offers a way to see the economy not as driven only by monetary value, but as being part of a larger cultural system, where not everything can be treated with money as a mediating factor. The focus on security rather than profit, for instance, and also the distribution mechanics and subsistence ethic, shows the economy as based primarily in morality, not in material value. These moral values are inherent in the Bunong's perception of land and resource management - and so: material economics are not sufficient as explanatory models for how the Bunong of Bousraa have reacted to their land being transformed from forests and *miirs* into a monoculture - these economics would cement the Bunong as a backward group that do not know or understand their own good. Moral economy, however, has provided a more nuanced way of considering their reactions as sensible and reasonable responses to unwanted change - change that is unwanted because it is not for the greater good of the community.

When it comes to the moral economy, a note should be made about complexity and totality. While Scott's argument was expanded upon here by way of Arnold (2001) and the idea of *social goods*, there is in this example a basis for further elaborating the theory. The Bunong have had market relations for some time, something which is not accounted for in Scott (1976), while Arnold (2001) is based on communities in America, safely situated in the heart of capitalism. The case of Bousraa is situated somewhere between these examples: there is a small degree of market interaction, and has been for some time, which has not resulted in notable moral outrage. This has happened, however, when a large-scale, forceful attempt is being made to incorporate the Bunong more fully into the market as wage laborers. The idea, then, is that while the approach of social goods can be applied here, and the market incorporation outrage of Scott can be applied as well, the most fruitful application of the concept is when it defines a "total" - in this case relationship to land. The relationship to land, in the case of the Bunong, permeate their culture completely: from agriculture and production to spirituality and redistribution, from subsistence ethic to moral economy. This totality is what structures the moral economy in the case of the Bunong: it is, if you will, the moral equivalent of money.

In the case of Bousraa, we see that development and the agenda behind it is solidly grounded in the idea of development as connected to material monetary economics. The idea is to turn the "unproductive" (from the market economy perspective) forests of Mondulkiri (even the wildlife sanctuaries) into profitable monocultures that produce for external markets. This production, and the methods and power relations inherent in it, starkly contrasts those of the Bunong - from self-subsistence to wage labor, from crop diversification to monoculture, from redistribution mechanics to monetary economy - the incompatibilities and misunderstandings are rife. The contrast becomes most obvious when considering values. The Bunong have a "total" relationship to land, a relationship that is complex and multilayered, that is the basis for their moral economy. As such it holds a value that is not measurable in material terms - and not in a material economy, as the application of the moral economy concept to their culture has shown. The transformation of the forest into monoculture represents the transition from this morally grounded value into a value that is purely economical in the material sense: monetarized

profit potential.

Development, then, loses its meaning when being applied to an already existing economy that is based largely on morals, not markets. If development is seen as part of the Cambodian state-formation project of “domesticating the margins”, we see that these projects are not aimed at generating opportunities for the underprivileged, but for disciplining and assimilating an unruly and remote part of the demography. The result of this development project can be seen in the case at hand: the original population of an entire set of villages are alienated from their lands, their subsistence security, their decision-making capabilities and, by proxy, from their own culture that is deeply rooted in these things. As shown, the estimated results in Bousraa of large-scale economic development is the assimilation of a culture of self-subsistence and self-governance into the power relations of state and subject, of employer and employee, of producer and consumer. As the Bunong are not (yet) complying to the demands put on them by these new structures, it becomes plausible to estimate that the project will turn the Bunong of Bousraa into a new subclass in their own villages. Migration of lowland Khmers may very well result in the Bunong being excluded from the plantation more or less altogether, as the Khmers do not have the same “disciplining issues” as the Bunong, and are willing to work on the terms set up by the company. The restructuring of Bousraa into a set of villages dominated by economic developers and Khmer workers, with the Bunong as the ultimate “losers” makes a strong case for the rethinking of what “development” really is and should be - as the villagers themselves express, there must be another way. Indeed, in this case, no development at all would have been perceived as much preferable to what is happening now.

The fact that the grave desecration, the clearing of “angry spirit places”, the compensation process and the dialogue regarding the project have all been carried out and decided upon without consulting the Bunong, have also fueled the resistance to the project. “Development”, then, becomes not only the generation of difference in the community, but also the generation of resistance to the project itself. Through the strategies employed by the villagers for halting, slowing or disrupting the implementation, it becomes obvious once again that “development” is not achieving what the implementers allegedly want. Instead of opportunity and economic progress, villagers find themselves spending time and

resources on actively fighting the project. These actions, and the attitudes of the villagers towards proposed and actual change can be used as a basis for rethinking development.

Finally, it seems appropriate to mention that the responsibility for a new and more constructive approach to this kind of conflict must rest on the companies and on the Cambodian government. A sort of circular argument seems to be inherent in the system in its current representation: the company claims ignorance of the land being used as farmland, referring to a concession granted by the government, and proceeds with implementation. The government, when protests or resistance surfaces, blames the company for not respecting local villagers and customs. In a reality where, as has been shown, models based on “North-Atlantic capitalism” (in Scott’s words) are being transferred to the south, and even to the margins of the south, the responsibility must be on those that infer their models on others to make the process meaningful, not the other way around.

5.2 In Conclusion: Thoughts on Evasion, Inclusion and State Formation

A concluding note should be made here on the topic of state formation and evasion. James Scott (2009) argues that the upland peoples of Southeast-Asia have willfully evaded state formation and taxation through history, in part by their way of agriculture. A note should be made here on this idea. Scott (2009) also concludes that this era is coming to an end as states are furthering their grasp from their power centers - just what is happening in Bousraa, by way of a development project. This will to evasion, and the communities (Bousraa included) that have been evading the final incorporation into state-encouraged market economies, are indeed disappearing. However, in light of “development projects” such as the one undertaken in Bousraa, there is now a will to inclusion in the state-formation - not a will to further attempt to evade it. The reason for this can be argued to be the wish to preserve the relationship to land upon which the moral economy of these communities is based. The wish is for the state to be able to stop this process of assimilation. This is telling of how the Bunong inscribe meaning into the term “development”: the government must be able to see that what is going on is wrong. As the era of evasion is coming to an end, the need for fundamental rights when included in the state become apparent: while capitalist, profit-oriented commodity production is not going to go away

anytime soon, the populations that are forcibly being driven into this mode of production wish for the state to enable them to preserve their land, and, by proxy, their culture. This would concur with the ideas of Escobar (1992), in his discussion of the discourse of anti-development: the “regeneration of people’s spaces”.

The tragic realities seem to insinuate that the outcome will be different, though: the state and its extension to the more remote areas of Cambodia has been a driving force in “developing” the Bunong. The project seems to be one of assimilation, disciplining and incorporation, which, ultimately, leads to alienation.

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