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Chapter 8

Controlling the Margins: Nature Conservation and State Power in Northeastern Cambodia

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Nation-building projects are a lot about extending and consolidating centralised forms of bureaucratic control, and the power of nation states as we know them today are largely predicated on their ability to exercise a certain level of central authority over space or territory, or as Thongchai Winachakul (1994) says, a country's 'geo-body'. This process is known as territorialisation. However, nation states are rarely if ever 'finished products'. In fact, they represent circumstances that are constantly shifting, both politically and territorially. Therefore, the margins or peripheries of many nation states remain complex and contested landscapes, and are often just on the edges of central government control.

1. Nature Conservation and National Policy

Nation states make use of various tools for extending their power over the margins, including map-making (see Winachakul, 1994; Peluso & Vandergeest, 2001), developing classification systems for people from different ethnic groups (Oversen & Trankell, 2004), proliferating particular discourses of 'backwardness' that justify centralised control over the margins (Li, 1999), surveying and inventorying biological resources (Peluso & Vandergeest, 2001), imposing land-use strategies (Sturgeon, 2005), promoting the migration of people from the centre to the peripheries (De Koninck, 2000; Hardy, 2003), implementing modernising development projects (Gilligly, 2004) or simply using armed force to control territory and resources (Lambrecht, 2004; Neumann, 2004). Nation states often push for simplified land and resource tenure systems so as to ensure the clear understanding of space by central governments, as this greatly facilitates the maintenance of state control (Scott, 1998). However, it is not easy to totally displace local tenure arrangements (Sturgeon, 2005). One way that states have often extended their authority over the margins—but which has not received sufficient consideration by most mainstream protected area (PA) managers—is the use of national protected area systems (NPAS), or 'National Parks', as a means for extending central government control, either purposefully or incidentally, over areas previously only partially or tenuously under the influence of the centralised state.

In fact, there has been a considerable amount written about conservation, PAs and the extension of coercive state power, particularly by political geographers and anthropologists. For example, many projects claiming to integrate development and conservation have been found to

have actually resulted in forced resettlement, abuses of power by PA managers, and increased unwanted government interference in the lives of local people (Peluso, 1993; Ghimire, 1994; Fairhead & Leach, 1994; Gibson & Marks, 1995; Hitchcock, 1995; Neumann, 1997; 2004; 2005; Colchester & Erni, 1999; Peluso & Vandergeest, 2001). Moreover, many projects attempting to integrate conservation with development have actually extended state power into remote marginal areas (Hill, 1996; Hitchcock, 1995). Neumann (1997) demonstrates how seemingly 'progressive' projects emphasising participation and benefit sharing within the 'buffer zones' of protected areas have actually ended up replicating coercive colonial processes, and have led to the expansion of state power in remote areas. Political ecology is crucial, and as Roderick Neumann (2005: 120) writes, "The processes by which territory is designated as local or global commons and the symbolic and material struggles that result are the central concerns of the political ecology of biodiversity conservation."

It is not uncommon for the peripheral areas that are absorbed into NPAS to be inhabited by peoples from various ethnic minority groups, often referred to as 'indigenous peoples', as it is frequently the marginal areas where these peoples commonly live that are considered the most valuable for biodiversity conservation (Colchester & Erni, 1999; Hitchcock, 1995). Some, such as Colchester & Erni (1999), have suggested that it is no accident that indigenous peoples inhabit some of the best-conserved areas on the planet. These peoples are not only at the physical margins; they are also on the margins of identity politics, and they frequently adopt varied livelihood strategies and have different belief systems from those at the socio-political centre. But these people do not consider themselves to be at the margins; they are living in a landscape that is the centre of their worlds.

This chapter relates to territorialisation and deterritorialisation. Nancy Peluso (2005: 3) writes that "Resource control by territorialisation works by some people or institution of authority determining how people may or may not use resources found within spatial boundaries". Here, the role of Cambodia's NPAS in extending central territorial control over a particular place previously inhabited by indigenous peoples is examined. It is considered how the central Royal Government of Cambodia (RGC) has supported the centralisation of power over a marginal part of the country, with the crucial assistance and urging of various international conservation and development organisations—including the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), IUCN – the World Conservation Union (IUCN), the International Development Research Centre (IDRC), the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), the World Bank, and the Global Environmental Facility. Whether this situation has been intentional, accidental or incidental is open to debate, and is certainly not always evident, but it is clear that discourses have been deployed in support of centralised structures of management. Here, a particular case is considered in which a marginal landscape tucked in the northeastern corner of Cambodia, in an area adjacent to Vietnam in the east, and Laos to the north, represents contested space. The place is presently known as Virachey National Park (VNP), one of Cambodia's largest PAs.

This chapter is not only about a National Park and territorial control over a particular landscape, although those issues are crucial. It fundamentally relates to those who used to live inside the space now called VNP, and whose lives remain intricately linked to the area by geography, livelihood, culture and history. Those are the people from the Brao Uмба and Kavet ethnic groups, both of which can be considered to be ethnic Brao sub-groups. They presently live not only in the margins of Cambodia but also at the margins of the PA that, to them, is a dramatic symbol of state power over what was once—not long ago—recognised as their place, and has been taken from them without any consultation, compensation or recognition of their fundamental rights to live in the area. Taking a geographical and historical approach, it is their contested vision of the landscape that is included within VNP that this chapter is primarily concerned with, as well

as the discursive tools deployed by the state, its agents, and its allies to take and maintain control over the area.

In fact, the discursive tools utilised to justify the takeover of areas for the establishment of PAs are hugely important. Just as Eric Wolf (1983) pointed out in relation to development, one way that people's rights over territory have been undermined is by either de-emphasising or completely ignoring the histories of people associated with PAs (Neumann, 1997). This is a sort of deterritorialisation, and it often goes hand-in-hand with the territorialisation process. To impose a new territorial regime, attempts are often made to remove the previous regime from discourses. Following Said (1994), the colonial conquest of areas did not only take place due to military might and economic domination, but also had a lot to do with the proliferation of ideas, systems, concepts and labels. It is critical that we recognise that images and stereotypes of the 'Other' guide perceptions in relation to biodiversity conservation. For example, by depicting people living in and around PAs as the destroyers of the environment, international aid agencies have often justified their support for heavy-handed treatment of local people that would be unacceptable in other circumstances (Hitchcock, 1995; Neumann, 2004). Those peoples are frequently represented not as weak or disadvantaged ethnic minorities, but as destroyers of the environment who need to be brought into line for their own welfare, and the good of all the wildlife. This is what Torgovnick (1990) calls the 'primitivist discourse'. Neumann (1997) links these ideas about the 'Other' with colonial discourses from the past, and Moore and Vaughan (1994) show how the World Bank, when working in Madagascar, justified its efforts to sedentarise shifting cultivators in the name of soil conservation. They point out that the efforts of the World Bank and the Madagascar government in the 1980s were based on virtually the same ill-conceived rationale as colonial powers previously adopted across Africa. Discourses have immense power to change people's impressions. As Alcorn (1993: 426) has noted, conservationists often act "as gatekeepers to a discussion table that does not have a place set for those whose future hangs in the balance". The need to protect endangered species is used as a justification for not allowing local people to participate in important decision-making processes related to PAs. Their cooperation is only welcomed when they are willing to adopt the types of ideas that fit into conservationist discourses and paradigms.

2. Research Context

This chapter is based on research that I have conducted in Ratanakiri and Stung Treng provinces since 1995, including work done in collaboration with local non-governmental organisations (NGOs) working with the Brao Uмба and the Kavet, and even as a research consultant looking at 'migration and settlement' patterns of the Brao in relation to VNP for Cambodia's Ministry of Environment (MoE). Most importantly, I conducted my Master's research in Trabok, Bang Geut and Bong villages in Taveng district, Ratanakiri province, between 2001 and 2003, and have continued working with Brao communities near the park as part of my human geography PhD field research between 2004 and 2007. Over the years, I have come into contact with a large number of Brao communities living near VNP, and have interacted with the people under various circumstances and often for significant periods of time. I speak Brao language fluently, and can communicate with the people surrounding VNP in their own language without needing to use a translator.

The following is a brief description of VNP in the context of Cambodia's NPAS, and the people who historically inhabited the area, and are presently living in its margins: the ethnic Brao peoples.

2.1 Virachey National Park

Map 1: Virachey National Park



On November 1, 1993 the NPAS of Cambodia—which includes VNP—was established through a Royal Decree signed by King Norodom Sihanouk. The Royal Decree immediately designated 3.3 million hectares of forestlands and other ecosystems within 23 PAs, including National Parks, Wildlife Sanctuaries, Protected Landscapes, and Multiple Use Areas (Ashwell, 1997). The MoE was mandated to manage these PAs on behalf of the state (Lay, 2000). Ashwell (1997) reported that, the Royal Decree was developed through reviewing designated and proposed PAs from its past. He wrote that, “This process was guided by widely accepted principles as developed and elaborated by IUCN following extensive consultations with various experts and authorities throughout the world” (Ashwell, 1997: 66). Ashwell acknowledged that the review was undertaken during a period when there was little current information available about the areas to be declared as PAs. He claimed that lawlessness in the country at the time prevented serious inspection of any of the sites. In relation to the initial establishment of the NPAS of Cambodia, Ashwell (1997) made no mention of the important ethical implications of

not consulting with the people living within or near of the various PAs that were being established, including VNP. He focused, instead, on biodiversity issues and national scientific concerns, without any mention of the local implications of centralising control over remote parts of the country. Serious efforts to consult with local people were apparently not made.

While some of the territory included within the NPAS of Cambodia in 1993 was already under central state control at the time of the park's designation, much of the space located in remote border regions were under at least the partial control of the Khmer Rouge (Le Billon, 1994). This was the case for VNP, as Khmer Rouge rebels continued to occupy parts of the park right up to 1998 when they finally collapsed and ceased to exist, although in the early 1990s security in much of the VNP area was considered to be better than for many other PAs in the country (Le Billon, 1994). VNP is Cambodia's largest National Park, covering 332,500 hectares in parts of Siam Pang district, Stung Treng province, and Veun Say, Taveng and a small part of Andong Meas districts in Ratanakiri province (BPAMP, 2003). As a National Park, the area was protected for nature conservation, research, education and recreation. According to BPAMP (2003: 9),

“The mission of Virachey National Park is to conserve and sustainably manage the natural and cultural resources of the park in partnership with local communities and other stakeholders for the benefit of the people from local communities and Cambodia as a nation.”

Dense semi-evergreen forests, upland savannah, bamboo thickets and occasional patches of mixed deciduous forests make up the majority of the vegetation in the park (BPAMP, 2003). The elevation of VNP ranges from approximately 100 m above sea level (asl) near the Sesan River to over 1,500 m asl on the high mountain ranges that extend along the Laos-Cambodia border; most of the park is over 400 m asl (BPAMP, 2003; Koy, 1999).

VNP is considered to be one of Cambodia's most important national PAs because of its large size and the important biodiversity values that it possesses. It is, for example, home to many threatened and endangered mammals, such as Asian elephants, tigers, leopards, gaur, banteng, Asiatic black bears, sun bears, douc langurs, gibbons and many others (Ashwell, 1998). It is also internationally significant because it's 'transboundary' links to other PAs in Laos and Vietnam (Westing, 1993a; MacKinnon, 1993; BPAMP, 2003). Approximately half of VNP's 507 km border constitutes parts of Cambodia's national borders with Laos and Vietnam (Ashwell, 1997) (see Figure 1).

2.2 The People of the Park

Koy (1999) reported that there were 11,799 people in 41 villages and nine communes situated adjacent to or inside VNP. The people who previously lived in the area now designated by the state as VNP are largely from the Brao Umba and Kavet ethnic groups. The Kavet previously inhabited the western part of the park in Siam Pang and Veun Say districts, and the Brao Umba inhabited the eastern part of the park, in Veun Say and Taveng districts. They were spread out throughout much of the landscape now inside VNP (Ironsides & Baird, 2003). These peoples speak dialects of a language in the Western Bahnaric group of the Mon-Khmer family (Keller *et al.*, 2008), and they are believed to be the 'first peoples' of the area, having inhabited it for longer than the area's recorded history.

The Brao Umba historically lived north of the Sesan River and south of the border with Laos in present-day Ratanakiri province. The Kavet lived north of the Sesan River in mountainous

areas in present-day Stung Treng and Ratanakiri provinces, as well as neighbouring Attapeu province in southern Laos. The name of the Brao Uмба originates from the Uмба Stream (O Khampha in Khmer), while the name of the Kavet originates from the Kavet Stream, which is located along the Laos-Cambodia border (Ironsides & Baird, 2003). Although the exact number of people who identify themselves as being 'Brao' (or as belonging to associated sub-groups) is uncertain, it is estimated to be about 55,000, with about half in Laos and half in Cambodia, one village in Vietnam, and a small number living in Europe and the USA (Baird, 2007).

The Brao Uмба and Kavet, and peoples from other Brao sub-groups, are largely Animists, with some also respecting certain aspects of Buddhism. In recent years a few hundred Brao in Cambodia have also converted to evangelical forms of Protestant Christianity. Although at present the Brao frequently engage in both lowland wet rice agriculture and upland swidden agriculture, it was only in the latter part of the last century that they began cultivating wet rice. Their livelihoods and cultures are mainly intertwined with shifting cultivation systems that revolve around planting upland rice and a large diversity of other crops mixed together in fields where the forest has been cut and burnt. After growing crops at one location for one or two years, the fields are left to fallow so that they can return to forest cover. After a number of years, depending on the forest-type and various other factors, previously fallowed areas are again cut and burnt for swidden agriculture. Secondary forests are preferred for swidden agriculture over mature forests, but historical circumstances have sometimes forced the Brao to do swidden agriculture in places where they would rather not, if given the choice (Matras-Troubetzkoy, 1983; Baird *et al.*, 1996; Baird, 2000; 2003).

Brao livelihoods are closely linked with natural forests, mountains, rivers and streams, and most continue to rely heavily on nature for small-game hunting and fishing, as well as for various non-timber forest products (NTFPs) that are used for both subsistence and income generating purposes (Ironsides & Baird, 2003; Baird, 1995; 2003). Baird (2000) has shown that the Kavet in Kok Lak commune, Veun Say district, Ratanakiri province, have a considerable amount of what Hugh Raffles calls 'intimate knowledge' (Raffles, 2002) about the natural habitats included within VNP. It has also demonstrated that the Brao Uмба of Taveng district, Ratanakiri province have a detailed tenure and management system for *Dipterocarpus* wood resin trees (Baird, 2003; Baird & Dearden, 2003).

3. Before the Park

The area where the Brao people once lived is presently virtually all included inside the boundaries of VNP (Ironsides & Baird, 2003). To better understand the events that have transformed this contested landscape and have led to the present circumstances, it is useful to review some of the key aspects of local livelihoods in the past, and as well as how history has left us where we are now.

3.1 The Pre-French and French Periods

There is very little documentation about the Brao people from the pre-French era. Baird (2008) has described some important aspects of how they spatially organised during the pre-French period. During the intense slave trading era of the 19th century, the areas where they lived were nominally under the influence of the Lao principality of Champasak, which itself paid tribute to—and was under the thumb of—the King of Siam. Aymonier (1895) reported that taxes were paid in slaves, thus encouraging the slave trade.

At the time that the left bank of the Mekong River was ceded to the French by Siam in 1893, there was little known of the Brao peoples. Stung Treng and Attapeu were still part of Laos when colonial France gained control over the region, but in 1904 the French conceded to requests from the King of Cambodia for Stung Treng (including much of the area where Brao people lived) to be 'returned' to Cambodia (Breazeale, 2002). Khmers occupied the area during the Angkor period and up to the 18th or early 19th century, before losing it to the Lao later in the same century (Aymonier, 1895; Rathie, 2001; Ironside & Baird, 2003; Guérin, 2003).

The Brao have a long history of refusing to recognise the authority of others. While some villages that were nearer to the lowlands paid tribute during the pre-French period (Maitre, 1912), others considered themselves to be 'independent' and did not. One of the main concerns of the Brao would have been to locate themselves in areas where they could defend themselves, or easily flee, from slave raiding lowlanders, and attacks by other groups of highlanders. During that period people were sometimes forced to live in large heavily defended villages so as to protect themselves (Aymonier, 1895; Cupet, 1998).

While the Khmer empire exchanged tribute with the ethnic Jarai peoples up until 1859, when King Norodom came to power and stopped sending gifts (Maitre, 1912), the Khmers probably had very limited, if any, relations with the Brao north of the Sesan River. In addition, Hickey (1982) does not mention there being any contact between the Brao and coastal Vietnamese or Cham communities during pre-French times, although there are historical records indicating that coastal towns and highlanders in present-day Vietnam had trade relations at least as far back as the 4th century.

Etienne Aymonier (1895) was one of the first French explorers to mention the Keuet (Kavet) and Brao peoples. He did not actually meet them, but during his journey to the region in 1883-84 he heard that they lived inland between the Sekong and the Se Risan (Sesan) Rivers. He claimed that the villages of these ethnic groups were sparsely populated, with each village having about 20-30 houses, which were defended by small sharp bamboo lances in the ground that could inflict great pain and were considered very dangerous.

It was not until the early 20th century that the French began to come into direct contact with the Brao. Maitre (1912) described the Brao as people who live in the mountainous region between the middle Sesan, the Sekaman (in southern Laos) and the middle Sekong River. He observed that the Brao divided themselves into numerous sub-groups which took the names of streams, mountains, or other nearby natural features near where they lived. Each of these sub-groups included 2-6 villages, whose populations spoke the same dialect. What is clear from the reports of the likes of Captain Cupet of the Pavie Mission [1891](1998), Etienne Aymonier (1895), and Henri Maitre (1912)—as well as from recent reports from Brao elders—is that during pre-French times the Brao's main livelihood strategy was to distribute themselves in low population densities over large extended areas, mainly along the edges of large streams and their tributaries, including the Heulay (Lalay in Khmer), Umba and Trabok (Tabok in Khmer). Aerial photographs of these watersheds from 1953 and 1958-59 confirm this hypothesis (Ironside & Baird, 2003). It made perfect sense for them, as the spatial orientation helped make fishing, hunting and NTFP collecting more successful, and it also reduced the negative impacts on forests from swidden agriculture, thus both protecting the environment and ensuring that swidden agriculture was quite successful (Ironside & Baird, 2003; Baird, 2000).

In September 1895, after the French took control of Laos, there was an attempt to collect taxes from the uplanders in parts of the hinterlands near present-day VNP, as well as ten days of corvée labour a year from each male adult. But apart from that, the French authorities apparently did not

try to penetrate Brao territory much during the early French period. When the French attempted to enter, they quickly found that they were not welcome. Some refused even to recognise French authority (Maitre, 1912). Crucially, the people were often keen for their independence.

Maitre (1912) was frustrated by what he found in the region, and he commented that it was time to end this anarchic situation, and to give the people the new management system that he thought they needed; and the unity of organisation that he said they had never had.

Throughout the French colonial period, and the short period of Japanese dominance and later occupation during World War II, authorities made few efforts to control the people or the territory inside present-day VNP. As French Indochina still existed, the borders between Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam (Cochinchine, Annam and Tonkin) were not particularly important, as all these places were ultimately under the same French or Japanese authority (Prescott, 1975). More importantly, the French had limited resources and other priorities apart from bringing the highlanders and their territory under their direct control, and the Japanese did not have enough time to implement any major changes.

3.2 Cambodia Gains Independence from France

While the French were not particularly concerned about the diverse ethnic make-up of the northeast of Cambodia, including the linguistic and cultural preferences of the people there, the situation was quite different for the Cambodian government directly following independence from France in 1954. In fact, Khmer officials who visited northeastern Cambodia in the 1950s were shocked to find that most of the people there spoke either Lao or various ethnic minority languages. Khmer language and culture were not well known. This led to an intensive nation-building effort in the northeastern margins of newly independent Cambodia, beginning in 1958 (Meyers, 1979).

The Cambodian government sent Khmer officials to the northeast to secure Cambodia's sovereignty, and implement a 'Khmerisation' campaign amongst the local population. A year later, in 1959, Ratanakiri province was created, carved from the eastern part of Stung Treng province, and the government also began strongly encouraging Khmer migration from the southern lowlands to the northeast (Meyers, 1979).

In 1960 the Brao were told to come down from the mountains and establish settlements in the lowlands where they could study Khmer language and culture. While some of the Kavet in present-day Kok Lak commune, Veun Say district, Ratanakiri province managed to negotiate their continued stay in the mountains—in return for agreeing to maintain a good path from the Sesan River to their communities—some came down to study, sometimes voluntarily but mainly due to being coerced or forced (Ironsides & Baird, 2003). Khmer language education was a key part of the government's strategy for gaining control over what it considered to be its margins (Meyers, 1979). Many Kavet in Siam Pang district, Stung Treng province, were, in the same way, brought down to the lowlands near the Sekong River in 1962. Probably the largest settlement in the lowlands of people from the uplands was the two kilometre-long Brao Umba 'village' that was established along the Sesan River between 1960 and 1962. A school was built next to the Sesan, and all the people from the villages in mountains were lined up in a row along the river on either side of the school.

The Khmers did not, however, adequately consider how the Brao would adapt to their new cramped circumstances and drastically altered livelihoods, and soon the Khmerisation programme

began running into serious problems, particularly because many relocatees did not have enough to eat in the lowlands. Resentment at being forcibly resettled, and with the government's Khmerisation efforts, was soon evident, and the campaign had virtually ended by 1962, and most of the people decided to return to their lives in the mountains (Ironsides & Baird, 2003).

As the 1960s proceeded, unrest amongst highlanders who lost their land to a large rubber plantation in Ratanakiri also led to increased support for the Khmer Rouge (Colm, 1996). Forcing highlanders from throughout Ratanakiri province to work on the plantations also increased resistance. Moreover, by the mid-1960s large numbers of North Vietnamese troops and supplies were crossing the Ho Chi Minh Trail in southern Laos into northeast Cambodia via its extension—the Sihanouk Trail—before entering Vietnam (Van Staaveren, 1993). The US military began secretly sending elite commando units into Laos and Cambodia (Harclerode, 2001), and by the late 1960s the US also started bombing parts of northeast Cambodia to stop North Vietnamese supply and troop movements (Burchett, 1970; Shawcross, 1979). These former units were a part of a top-secret force called the 'Studies and Observations Group' (MACV-SOG). They included Americans as well as many ethnic minority (Montagnards) forces from Vietnam, especially from the Nung ethnic group from North Vietnam (Harclerode, 2001). As the North Vietnamese increasingly used Cambodian territory, Prince Sihanouk became increasingly agitated, and he stated publicly that in the provinces of Mondolkiri and Ratanakiri "a vast part of our territory has been occupied by the North Vietnamese" (Shawcross, 1979: 114). During the late 1960s, as tensions rose, some Brao Uмба people who were supportive of the Americans resettled into the US Central Intelligence Agency's paramilitary base at Kong My in Attapeu province, after being airlifted from just inside of Laos.

In March 1970 the American-supported Prime Minister and former Minister of Defense of Cambodia, General Lon Nol, overthrew Norodom Sihanouk in a coup d'état while Sihanouk was away in Moscow (Burchett, 1970). On April 30, US and South Vietnamese forces abruptly invaded the eastern border regions of Cambodia from South Vietnam (Shawcross, 1979: 149). Henry Kissinger, the US Secretary of State, stated that there were hardly any civilians in the area. The Brao had been conveniently forgotten. However, things got worse for the Cambodian government, and in June 1970 the Lon Nol regime decided to completely withdraw from the northeast, conceding the area to complete Khmer Rouge and North Vietnamese control. However, this move also made it possible for the US Air Force to designate the whole area as a 'free fire' bombing zone until 1973 (Shawcross, 1979).

As the Khmer Rouge became increasingly powerful, and took over more and more of Cambodia, the rules it applied on the people under its influence became increasingly draconian. Many ethnic minorities supported the Khmer Rouge (Colm, 1996), but as time passed some highlanders began to become disillusioned with the orders being issued by the higher-ups, especially instructions associated with communal eating and living. The Khmer Rouge had also grown increasingly close to Maoist China, and began to purge its ranks of 'Vietnamese influences'. People began being killed and 'disappearing' in the forest (Colm, 1996). These events culminated in a mass exodus of thousands of mainly Brao Uмба people from present-day Taveng and Veun Say districts in 1975. However, few Kavet fled, as they were situated too close to the Khmer Rouge base near Veun Say to escape. Some Kavet also continued to support the Khmer Rouge and became important local Khmer Rouge leaders in Veun Say and Siam Pang (Colm, 1996).

In late 1978 the Vietnamese military invaded Cambodia and ousted the Khmer Rouge from power. When the Khmer Rouge fled to the western border with Thailand to escape from the advancing Vietnamese army, many Kavet fled with them; others escaped to Laos. Some later

regrouped with Khmer Rouge forces along the border with Laos, in deeply forested areas, including parts of present-day VNP, where they battled Vietnamese and Cambodian troops in the 1980s.

While the Kavet largely continued to fight as Khmer Rouge, the Brao Umba were rewarded for their loyalty to Vietnam, and since people who lived in Cambodia during the Khmer Rouge period were not trusted by the Vietnamese, many Brao Umba who had spent years in Laos and Vietnam as refugees were appointed to key government positions in the new Vietnam-backed Cambodian government (Colm, 1996). For example, Brao Umba people who previously lived north of the Sesan River in Ratanakiri province occupied all the governorships of Stung Treng, Ratanakiri, Preah Vihear and Mondolkiri provinces. The Kavet living in the forest with the Khmer Rouge in Ratanakiri and Stung Treng provinces suffered immensely during the 1980s, both as a direct result of Vietnamese and Cambodia government military attacks, and also due to malnutrition, starvation and various illnesses. Large numbers died. Most of those who survived gradually gave up in 1987. The Kavet from Siam Pang, who fled to Laos in 1979, also largely returned to Cambodia in 1984.

While Brao Umba soldiers with the Vietnamese re-entered Cambodia in 1978 and 1979 and continued working with the new government after the Khmer Rouge were routed, it was not until 1982 and 1983 that most of the civilian refugee population in Laos and Vietnam were able to return to Cambodia. But because of continued military insecurity, returnees were forced to temporarily locate themselves near Ban Lung, the capital of Ratanakiri province. However, in 1984 many moved to near the Sesan River with government permission. This was followed, in 1985, with a decision to establish Taveng district. However, because of continued insecurity in some of the forests and mountains north of the Sesan River (the area presently included in VNP), and due to the fear that human populations in remote areas might attract the Khmer Rouge from other areas, everyone was forced to live on the south side of the Sesan River, including those whose ancestral homelands were all north of the Sesan (Ironsides & Baird, 2003).

In the early 1990s—at the time that Cambodia was preparing to establish the country's first NPAS— areas north of the Sesan River were still considered insecure. Since the people could not return to where they came from, it is not surprising that NPAS planners considered that the area was “sparsely populated” (Mok, 1993) and had “few people” (MacKinnon, 1993). There was little consideration of the tragic circumstances that had forced the previous inhabitants of the area to leave their homelands, and which had prevented them from returning sooner (see, also, section below).

However, in the mid-1990s, as the security situation improved, many Brao Umba and Kavet peoples from Taveng, Siam Pang and Veun Say districts became braver as Khmer Rouge strength diminished. Many began to gradually move back to their homelands in the mountains, even though local governments were either strongly opposed, or at least reticent about approving these movements. The Kavet in Stung Treng province were moving east, and the Brao Umba and Kavet from Ratanakiri province were moving north (Page, 1999; Baird, 2000; Ironsides & Baird, 2003).

The Brao considered that their land had been taken from them without any consultation (Ironsides & Baird, 2003). One Kavet man from Kok Lak once told me, “Nobody ever asked us for our land. They just took it.” But park staff were quick to claim that King Sihanouk had issued a Royal Decree establishing VNP, and that the whole area was now under the control of the central state, through its agent, the MoE. The Brao were trying to maintain discourses that justified their territorial claims, while park staff were attempting to deterritorialise former Brao claims by either denying or more commonly ignoring history.

4. Consolidating Central Control over the Margins through Protected Area Management

This section briefly considers the history of PA management in Cambodia, and the roles of various international conservation and development agencies in establishing and supporting Cambodia's NPAS and specifically the management of VNP. In particular, the direct and indirect roles that they have played in promoting the centralised spatial control or territorialisation of VNP are explained.

4.1 The Early History of Protected Areas in Cambodia

Although there is no history of PAs for nature conservation from the Angkor period, Philippe Le Billon (1994: 6) claims that, "Cambodia has had a long history of development of protected areas." As early as 1913, the flooded forest surrounding the Tonle Sap Lake was reportedly protected against being cut, and in 1924 Cambodia was the first country in the region to establish a National Park: Angkor Vat, with an area of 10,700 hectares. In 1927, the National Committee for Protection of Fauna in the French Colonies proposed that a series of National Parks be established in French Indochina, but the recommendations were not adopted. In 1935, 16 landscapes were preserved, mainly hills and waterfalls, with the majority being located in Kampot province. In 1960, following the adoption of the Kouprey (a wild cattle) as 'Cambodia's National Animal', six national Wildlife Reserves were established, covering 2.2 million hectares. Virachey was not one of them (Le Billon, 1994). In 1966, there were plans to declare the Wildlife Reserves as National Parks. However, war prevented the implementation of the plan (Ashwell, 1997).

4.2 Initial Ideas for Virachey National Park

None of the area presently included within VNP was proposed for PA status until 1975 when Jeffrey McNeely, as a consultant for the Mekong Secretariat, suggested that a small part of present-day VNP (the northeastern corner) be established as a PA that he called Hondrai-Sou Reserve (McNeely, 1993). Then, in 1986, John MacKinnon proposed that the area be expanded to the west (MacKinnon, 1993). However, the idea for establishing VNP was only being promoted by a few foreign PA experts.

4.2.1 The United Nations Environment Programme

The initial vision for establishing a PA in the present area of VNP in 1975 involved creating a transfrontier reserve on the Indochinese peninsula involving Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam (McNeely, 1993; MacKinnon, 1993). Later, in the early 1990s, the idea was developed further by the UNEP, becoming a proposal for an 'Indochina Tri-state Reserve for Peace and Nature', which was envisioned to straddle the three countries and cover about 500,000 hectares. This had a lot to do with efforts to find and protect any remaining populations of Kouprey in the region. There have been no confirmed sightings of this animal anywhere in the region recently, and the species may already be extinct. VNP was supposed to be Cambodia's contribution to the regional PA (Mok, 1993), while the 101,400-hectare Mom Ray Nature Reserve was expected to be Vietnam's (Hoang, 1993), and Laos could potentially provide Dong Ampham PA with 162,500 hectares or the Nam Kong proposed PA with 122,100 hectares (MacKinnon, 1993). The UNEP pushed the implementation of this tri-state peace park, even to the point of producing a book dealing largely with the issue, and including draft agreements for its implementation (Westing, 1993a). MacKinnon (1993) thought it would be sufficient to simply establish separate PAs adjacent to each other in the three countries without trying to implement any regional management for the

areas, anticipating various communication and administrative problems if the tri-state park was managed jointly by all three countries. However, Westing (1993b) thought that the tri-state park would only contribute to building regional confidence in terms of human security issues if it were managed jointly. In any case, despite some continued interest by international agencies through the 1990s, the tri-park idea seemed to die away after UNEP funding for the initiative ended.

4.2.2 IUCN and IDRC

IUCN was one of the early international organisations to become interested in establishing a large PA in the general area now called VNP. In 1989, before the UN-brokered Cambodian peace process had begun, IUCN was already promoting the establishment of the 'Hondrai Sou' PA (IUCN, 1990; Collins *et al.*, 1991). In 1992 IUCN undertook a general assessment of the situation in Cambodia, and in 1993 they established a liaison office in Phnom Penh, and provided technical assistance to the MoE for developing the country's NPAS (Ashwell, 1997). They too were apparently unaware that the proposed park was previously populated by thousands of ethnic Brao people, who were forced from the area due to political circumstances. Nor were they aware of many of the historical events already described above, which clearly suggest the contested nature of the geography and peoples who would be affected. Security concerns and time constraints had prevented anybody working for the organisations that were proposing the establishment of the tri-border PA to actually visit the area (McNeely, 1993; MacKinnon, 1993; Le Billon, 1994).

The UN-backed peace process led to the Paris peace agreements in October 1991, and on September 24, 1993 a new constitution was promulgated by an elected Constituent Assembly, which proclaimed King Norodom Sihanouk as Head of State and established the RGC within the framework of a parliamentary democracy.

Another international Canadian government-funded organisation, IDRC, also supported the NPAS development process in 1993, focusing on developing government institutions, related legislation and building up basic research capacity (Le Billon, 1994). IUCN and IDRC both feared that if a NPAS was not set up quickly, much of the country would be divided up amongst logging concessions that were being considered at the time (Le Billon, 1994; David Ashwell, Director of IUCN - Cambodia, *pers. comm.*, 1997). There was also considered to be a window of opportunity available due to the support given by Dr. Mok Mareth, the Minister of Environment in Phnom Penh, and Sihanouk (Philippe Le Billon, *pers. comm.*, 2006). Therefore, IUCN and the MoE did not conduct detailed consultations with local governments and people to determine where the country's PAs should be located, and what forms they should take. Instead, they relied largely on previous proposals for protected areas in Cambodia, bits and pieces of information from various parts of the country, and satellite images of forest types and cover to determine appropriate places for proposing the establishment of PAs. This top-down PA site selection process was conducted largely in Phnom Penh. Just a little over a month after Sihanouk came to power, the legislation for the NPAS of Cambodia was approved, initially leading to speculation regarding its validity (Le Billon, 1994).

While IUCN, IDRC or even the MoE may not have had any nefarious agenda to strengthen the central government at the expense of the local, or exclude villagers from participating in the planning process for VNP or other PAs, they certainly provided the central RGC with the justification and institutional support, not to mention the funding, necessary to give them control over an area that had long been, as clearly illustrated above, a contested space far from the control of Phnom Penh. The MoE was vying, as a new and weak Ministry, for power, and it recognised that its influence would increase through the establishment of a NPAS, especially considering the

challenges it faced from the stronger Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (MAFF) and also, to a lesser extent, the Ministry of Tourism (Le Billon, 1994).

Yet in the background of the above, right up to the establishment of VNP, there were no consultations with the Brao people regarding plans for the PA. The urgent need for conservation and the security situation justified a total lack of local participation. Because the conservation discourse was employed, there was minimal criticism.

4.2.3 World Wide Fund for Nature

The World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) was one of the first international organisations to support the management of VNP through the Ratanakiri provincial Environment Department and MoE. Although they conducted an assessment of opportunities for doing conservation work in Cambodia in 1991 (Le Billon, 1994), their work in VNP did not begin until early 1998, and largely ended in mid-2000 (Lay, 2000). Although WWF did support some socio-economic studies, community resource-use mapping, and participatory PA management training during its period of intense involvement in VNP (O'Brien *et al.*, 2000), “[I]ts efforts were focused on strengthening capacity of the park rangers through training and supplying equipment for ranger patrols and park management” (Lay, 2000: 31). Basically, the main focus of WWF was on helping the central RGC, and the MoE, gain control over the territory designated as VNP. They helped recruit and pay for park rangers, and provided training, most of which related to patrolling and working to stop regulation violations. Koy Sokka (1999: 146), former Director of VNP, commented on the first training supported by WWF in VNP in February 1998, stating that, “This training was an important first step in controlling legal violations within the Park.” Symbolising the power of the central MoE during these WWF organised trainings, all the ‘team leaders’ selected were from the central government level in Phnom Penh (O'Brien *et al.*, 2000). The RGC was able to do what they would probably have never had been able to achieve without international funding, and they did it in the name of biodiversity and wildlife conservation, a discourse that clearly legitimised their control over the area, and the provision of international funding support.

It was during the period of WWF support that the idea for creating a 300,000-hectare VNP buffer zone outside of the park was developed (Ashwell, 1998), although the idea was envisioned earlier (Le Billon, 1994). Koy Sokka was quoted by Colchester & Erni (1999: 151) as saying, “People live in the buffer zone, but are not allowed to live in the core zone. Before the park was defined, we had to decide where to put the park boundaries. A study was conducted that divided the park into core and buffer zones depending on where people lived. The core zone is very strict and no farming is allowed in the core zone.” Again, the denial of history in discourse had a deterritorialising effect that legitimised the territorialisation process of establishing VNP.

4.2.4 The World Bank and the Global Environment Facility

The World Bank became interested in supporting the management of VNP, and the Cambodian NPAS generally, at least as early as 1998, when WWF was still working in VNP, and in February and March 1998 the World Bank sent a mission to Cambodia to develop a proposal for the ‘Biodiversity Protected Areas Management Project’ (BPAMP) (Ashwell, 1998; Page, 1999). The World Bank’s decision to proceed was apparently in response to needs identified in the RGC’s ‘National Environmental Action Plan’ (Page, 1999). BPAMP was designed to focus on capacity and management support for VNP, but also to work towards various national level objectives in support of the overall NPAS of Cambodia (World Bank, 2000). It was also during this planning period that the international significance of VNP was emphasised, with its possible

designation under the World Heritage Convention being highlighted (Ashwell, 1998). It became recognised that there was a need to clarify the division of power over VNP between central and local government agencies (Ashwell, 1998), but there was no mention of how the strengthening of the NPAS and VNP through the MoE was ultimately supporting more centralised control over the area, or the disempowerment of the Brao.

It took the World Bank much longer to actually begin BPAMP than originally anticipated, due to the MoE wanting to implement the project directly, as opposed to contracting its management out to an international organisation or company, as the World Bank originally proposed. Eventually, after stonewalling the process for months, the MoE finally got its way, and the World Bank agreed for them to directly implement the project, with a MoE-appointed project director based at the MoE in Phnom Penh. The MoE was increasing its control over the margins in northeast Cambodia with the direct encouragement from international donors.

During the preparation of BPAMP it also became increasingly clear that the idea of having an official VNP buffer zone was not going to be realised, largely because MAFF controlled the area officially outside of VNP, and was not about to concede any of its territory to its central government rival, the MoE. As with most of the discussions surrounding the PA up that point, it was the national or regional perspective that dominated, rather than local views, which remained invisible. For example, David Ashwell (1998) argued that the buffer zone idea for VNP should not be pushed, as he felt that it could negatively impact on other conservation area decisions in the country.

The BPAMP began in 2001 as a World Bank loan project with Global Environment Facility grant support and local counterpart funding from the RGC. The project was originally conceived as being for four-years, and finishing at the end of 2005, but due to there still being remaining project funds, the project is now scheduled to end in the latter part of 2006. BPAMP (2003: 26) states that,

“Virachey National Park has been designated a “National Park” under the Royal Decree 1993. In giving this designation, the Government of Cambodia has made the overriding land use decision that the primary management objective of the area within the VNP boundary is for its conservation, scientific, educational and recreation values. Virachey National Park should include its partners and, most importantly, the local communities in the management of the PA in order to ensure the achievement of this primary management objective but also to ensure the welfare of the local communities living adjacent to the park.”

Although the above position might seem positive in terms of the prospects for local involvement in PA management, past experiences did not indicate the prospects for local people were as promising as the BPAMP rhetoric indicated. It is also clear from the above quote that BPAMP fully accepted the justification for central establishment and control of the PA, without considering any other motivations for controlling PAs. Since the project began, it has also become increasingly clear that BPAMP has increased the MoE’s power over the park, rather than supporting meaningful community participation. Certainly, the MoE has made some concessions to communities as a result of World Bank pressure, and have sometimes gone through the motions of providing villagers with opportunities to consult with the park about its management, but on the other hand, they have often been very slow and sometimes unwilling to give significant management decision-making powers over to local communities with historical claims to the parts of the park. Furthermore, many BPAMP staff, both foreigner and Cambodian, have expressed frustration about localised plans that reflect the ideas of local people and government being frequently overruled by the central government. For them, it has become very clear that the

central government has no intention of devolving much real power over to local communities, beyond what is necessary to keep the World Bank from withdrawing funding.

5. Recent Circumstances

This section considers the recent circumstances in relation to the Brao and VNP. In recent years the situation within and adjacent to VNP has been mixed. On the positive side, the park has employed a large number of Kavet and especially Brao Uмба people as park rangers (reversing the trend of hiring mainly ethnic Khmer and Lao people to work for the park during the WWF period and the early BPAMP period), and the MoE—despite a difficult and frustratingly long process—has approved the establishment of five ‘Community Protected Areas’ (CPAs) inside VNP for ethnic Brao people living adjacent to the park to use. The project has also implemented small-scale community development and ‘eco-tourism’ projects in some of the villages adjacent to the park, which have sometimes been quite problematic but have also realised some positive results.

However, VNP and its international donors have so far failed to address the fundamental rights-based issues facing local people, including the rights provided for in international law and various UN treaties. There has been no discussion about compensation for local people who have lost land and resources, or recognition of their inalienable rights to occupy parts of the park. One serious problem has been that the newly established CPAs are supposed to be open for community members to use for fishing, NTFP extraction and other subsistence-oriented activities, but the RGC continues to cling to the Royal Decree of 1993, which gives them almost complete power over the area and says nothing about the rights of local people.

Most importantly, even though BPAMP’s own management plan opens the door for local people with historical rights over parts of the park to conduct swidden agriculture inside VNP, park management and the MoE continue to steadfastly veto possibilities for local people to conduct any types of swidden agriculture inside the park, even inside CPAs. Discourses that have problematised Brao swidden agriculture, and unfairly blamed the Brao for environmental degradation have dominated (Kim, 2000; 2001; Lay, 2000; World Bank, 2000; BPAMP, 2003). The MoE is also continuing to refuse local rights to re-inhabit the park in any permanent or semi-permanent ways, even though that is the wish of many.

The fundamental problem for many of the Brao communities is that they are being forced to concentrate themselves in relatively high population densities. For example, in Taveng Leu commune, Taveng district, Ratanakiri province there are six villages situated on the territory that only Phleu Thom once inhabited. This has led to the gradual degradation of the forests in this area, as there is not enough forest outside the park to allow for sustainable fallowing of swidden farms, and there is insufficient suitable land for everyone to adopt lowland wet-rice agriculture, even if that was possible from socio-cultural and economic perspectives. Denser human populations have similarly had negative impacts on fishing, hunting and NTFP collection (Ironsides & Baird, 2003). One Brao Uмба elder commented, “In the past each village had its own area, and the areas were large enough to support swidden agriculture. Now, however, we are forced to live next to the Sesan River. There is not enough land for everyone.”

One of the major problems is that the MoE controls VNP, while MAFF controls forest areas outside the park. Therefore, the MoE has only been able to have power over territory inside the park, and has not considered the negative impacts of its decisions on areas outside of the park. The struggle over territorial control is both between local and central governments, and also

between the central MoE and MAFF at the central level. In Kok Lak commune, Veun Say district, the Kavet are facing similar problems related to high population densities. The four villages of Rok, Lalay, La Meuay and 'Ntrak are situated quite close to each other, and Kong Nok and Kaleum villages are situated nearby (Ironsides & Baird, 2003). Whereas the peoples who once lived inside the area now included within VNP used to frequently produce excess rice harvests, resulting in many uplanders selling rice to lowlanders during shortages (Guérin, 2001), people living on the edges of VNP are now faced with frequent grain shortages, decreased livelihood security, and increased poverty. The token livelihood support provided by BPAMP has not come close to compensating for what has been lost.

Furthermore, in both Kok Lak and Siam Pang, Kavet people also talk about their desire to return to their lands inside VNP; not only for livelihood reasons—although that is certainly a huge part of their reasoning—but also because they believe that their cultural traditions can only be protected if they live in their traditional homelands, far away from the ethnic Lao and Khmer influences in the lowlands that they believe are degrading their cultures (Ironsides & Baird, 2003). It is not that they do not want to have contact with the lowlands, but they want contact to be on their terms. A Kavet deputy commune chief from Siam Pang district told me, in 2004, that, “The only way for us to protect our culture is to return to our own lands in the mountains.”

Still more, the central MoE has shifted its position in relation to eco-tourism. Whereas local BPAMP staff and Kavet people from Kok Lak originally agreed to build tourist accommodations that the Kavet would retain control over, and which would be located at the location desired by the Kavet, the MoE has decided to overrule this decision in order to maintain control over eco-tourism in the park. They only want to allocate minor decision-making powers and control to communities in relation to tourism, and this has frustrated local people, Khmer staff based in northeast Cambodia, and foreign advisors working for the project. One Kavet Commune Councilor said, “First we were told that we would be able to manage tourism in the park, but now they do not want to give us more than minimal power.”

In addition, the Kavet in Kok Lak have frequently found themselves in conflict with park officials, especially rangers who have shot their dogs and confiscated their bush knives and flashlights, and even their rice, after encountering locals in the forest. This happened at least three times in 2005-2006, even though the rangers met the Kavet inside Kok Lak's approved CPA, and the Kavet were only entering to fish or cut bamboo for house building, activities that the Kavet believe are allowed within their CPAs. This has upset the Kavet, and has caused them to distrust park officials. Illustrative of this, Kavet in 2007 villagers knocked down a sign that park officials had put up to mark the boundary of the park. The Kavet who encountered the sign immediately expected that the park was rescinding on their agreement to provide villagers with CPA rights, believing that the sign was intended to prohibit them from entering their CPA. This indicates both the level of mistrust that has developed between park managers and local people, and that the park is not yet communicating well with local people. One Kavet man said, “We don't trust the park anymore. Even when we try to follow their rules they still cause us so much trouble.”

While the relationship between the park and local people is somewhat better in Taveng district (although serious communication problems remain there too), in Veun Say and Siam Pang districts the Kavet have frequently had misunderstandings and conflicts with park staff, who have long seen them as being backwards, and more generally as being a threat to the park and their power. For example, in 2001 Siam Pang VNP officials, using funds provided by BPAMP, went to Kavet settlements just inside the park and coerced and threatened them to resettle outside of the park. This was done without considering the World Bank's Indigenous People's or Involuntary Resettlement Policies, which require that the rights of indigenous peoples be respected, and that

no involuntary resettlement be done using World Bank funding without certain steps being taken, including appropriate participatory and informed consultations with affected peoples. Furthermore, the development of a proper resettlement plan is required to ensure that the rights of local people are respected and that they receive appropriate compensation when resettlement is deemed necessary by the government. In fact, the first draft of Ironside & Baird (2003) made reference to this problem, but BPAMP, out of fear that the World Bank would close down the project because their policies were not being adhered to, put pressure to have mention of violations of World Bank policies by BPAMP removed from the final version of the report. World Bank officials were aware of the policy violations but had little to say on the matter. There has also been a denial of the ethnocentrism that has also contributed to the central government of Cambodia wanting to take control of minority areas at its edge.

It is clear that the MoE expects that all major decisions regarding the park should be made in Phnom Penh, and while the World Bank might deny supporting such a centralised management structure, the reality is that they have continued to bank roll the MoE, and are providing the institutional justification and backing for a centralised NPAS. Even in relation to the increased ethnic minority representation amongst VNP ranger staff, one Khmer official working for the MoE claimed that none of the ethnic minorities working for the park would be retained once the project ends. Ethnic Khmers were clearly preferred.

6. Central Control over the Margins

In this section the processes that have led to the present situation, including the pervading discourses that have brought us to where we are now are discussed. Some examples of how these discourses have been employed are also presented.

The process of gaining control of territory in the margins seems to have been a key motivating factor of the MoE with regards to their willingness to establish and develop the country's NPAS, and consolidate its power over VNP. The MoE needed to control more territory in order to compete with the more powerful MAFF, and they also required this territory to attract international funding. For international conservation and development agencies the motivation for supporting VNP has been to support biodiversity conservation, but both the MoE and donors have been willing to accommodate the agendas of one another. But the NPAS that has been promoted continues to resemble a sort of 'fortress' model (see Neumann, 2005).

All the international organisations mentioned so far have failed to consider or even mention the implications of increased central control over the area included in VNP, and nobody has pointed out the contradiction that projects that have occasionally claimed to support full local participation in the park have also inherently built up the centre, thus removing power from locals. These organisations have failed to assess the ultimate power implications of supporting the MoE's NPAS. Also, some international organisations have promoted the status quo because they prefer dealing with centralised systems, as they are more legible to them, and central government officials are more likely to speak English or French than local officials and especially villagers. The paradox is striking: on the one hand rhetoric about decentralisation and participatory management is ubiquitous, but on the other hand the international agencies are actually supporting increased central control, sometimes quite intentionally.

This will not surprise many, as the World Bank has often found itself in similar circumstances, and since its partners are almost always central governments, it would be surprising if central entities were not the main beneficiaries of their support. The UNEP, IUCN, IDRC, WWF, the

World Bank and the Global Environment Facility have also, of course, provided financial resources necessary to allow the central MoE the means to make its presence felt, and it is presently clear that the MoE have a very significant influence over what happens in the vicinity of VNP. In fact, BPAMP claims to be supporting both greater central RGC capacity, but how realistic is it to consider that a strengthened central RGC will willingly devolve significant power to local government or people? It could be argued that international agencies are attempting to work through the central RGC in order to support the creation of structures that will increase community participation in national PA management, but so far there is little indication that any of these agencies have achieved much in that regard, and they have apparently not sufficiently influenced the MoE to adjust policies and practices in that direction, although there have recently been a few positive signs of improvement. But for the most part, the opposite appears to be occurring. It is common in Southeast Asia for national governments to establish forest reserves as a means for extending state power over territory (Peluso & Vandergeest, 2001), and VNP is not an exception.

Another problem is that many organisations involved in formal PA management claim to be ‘non-political’, and thus feel that it is inappropriate for them to challenge existing PA organisational structures that have been approved by central governments. International agencies often see this type of advocacy as being outside of their mandate. Instead, they prefer to focus on issues associated with biology and immediate conservation concerns, rather than other factors with their origins in power, race and history. Essentially, aspects of political ecology and discourse analysis have been left largely unconsidered.

James Ferguson (1990), who was heavily influenced by the ideas of Michel Foucault, helps us recognise that the discourses surrounding ‘development’ often make it difficult to see beyond the limits set by discourses, which constructs situations based on a particular kinds of objects of knowledge, and create structures of knowledge around those objects. Michel Foucault’s (1979) *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* presents a genealogy of a jail, and serves as an excellent example of the type of thing that I am talking about. Foucault shows that prisons do not reduce criminality, but make ‘reform’ much more difficult. The prison ends up serving as part of a system of social control, but in a very different way than its planners had envisioned. Following Foucault’s lead, part of the aim of this chapter is to illustrate the discursive power of particular forms of centralised resource management approaches, while also adding the critical centralising territorial aspects of the PA project to the equation.

Biodiversity conservation and PA management institutions also generate their own forms of discourse, and as with development, these discourses intervene on the basis of this structured knowledge. The discursive element in PA management and political ecology is clearly crucial (Neumann, 2004). As with development, conservation oriented discourse often leads to the expansion and entrenchment of bureaucratic state power, side by side with the projection of a representation of economic and social life that denies ‘politics’ and, to the extent that it is successful, suspends its effects. It has a deterritorialising effect.

David Harvey (1996: 80) has pointed out that, “Discourses express human thought, fantasy and desire. They are also institutionally based, materially constrained, experientially grounded manifestations of social power relations.” In the case of VNP, the discourses created by the international conservation community are worth considering.

John McKinnon presented an excellent example of a situation with many elements relevant to this chapter. Looking at the landslide in Southern Thailand that led to the logging ban in 1988, he found that “those who fix on single issues and fail to consider the wider picture place themselves

in a difficult situation in which the economic and political consequences of their advocacy are likely to be forgotten or ignored” (McKinnon 1997: 117). He also demonstrates how discourses surrounding “noble causes”, such as environmental conservation, can often lead to obfuscation. This is exactly what has taken place in relation to VNP. The cause of establishing and protecting VNP appeared so noble that few people dared question or look beyond the prevailing discourse.

Some lip service has been given to villager consultation and local participation, but these have generally been in passing, without providing any details or making any meaningful commitments to local welfare and rights. It is interesting to consider some specific examples of how discourses have been developed to justify central level control over VNP and the exclusion of local people. For one, swidden agriculture has been problematised as a threat to the environment of the park (Ashwell, 1998; Hou *et al.*, 1999; O’Brien *et al.*, 2000; World Bank, 2000). For example, it is highly symbolic that during local level trainings near VNP it was reported that natural resources were in good condition during the Sihanouk period, whereas destructive swidden agriculture was associated with the hated Khmer Rouge era (O’Brien *et al.*, 2000), even though in reality swidden cultivators were actually largely forced to abandon swidden agriculture and take up lowland wet rice agriculture during the Khmer Rouge period (Colm, 1996; Ironside & Baird, 2003).

Colchester & Erni (1999) have pointed out that swidden agriculture is commonly prohibited in PAs in Asia, and that discourses against shifting cultivation are frequently used to vilify indigenous peoples and justify parks. In fact, these contradictions in discourses are frequent in conservation (Neumann, 2004). Central government officials also frequently refer to the Royal Decree that established VNP, in order to emphasise the central control given to the central government by that decree (Kim, 2000; 2001; Lay, 2000; Chay *et al.*, 1995), a practice that is common internationally (Neumann, 2005).

Some officials have presented the people living near VNP in terms of strong modernising development discourses, referring to them, for example, as ‘poor’ and ‘undeveloped’, rather than as being very knowledgeable about the environment of VNP (see, for example, Hou *et al.*, 1999; Lay, 2000). Even referring to the area as a ‘National Park’ clearly puts the landscape in the realm of being under central government control, while it might as easily be called a ‘Local People’s Park’, if a truly decentralised approach was adopted.

Furthermore, there has been little recognition of the historical presence of the Brao people throughout much of present-day VNP, and when it has been mentioned, this fact has always been played down and has only been briefly considered in passing, without elaborating on the rights-based implications of the area’s history. By vilifying locals and denying their history, it has become easy for international agencies to justify the park and the centralised management structure associated with it, ignore or deny discourses that result in different conclusions, and deterritorialise and reterritorialise the landscape.

7. Conclusions

Most people see PA management as positive. Surely, nobody wants to see all the threatened and endangered species disappear! I certainly support the concept of sustainable resource management, and I also recognise—as conservation biologists do—that large PAs are needed to ensure the survival of some species with large and particular habitat requirements, and the ecological processes required to conserve biodiversity at both the species and ecosystem levels. A certain level of national and international PA planning is also justified to ensure the inclusion of rare habitats in PAs. But PA management development is not just about protecting biodiversity.

PA establishment has a long history as leading to central control over landscapes and people through what is frequently known as ‘coercive conservation’ (see, for example, Bodley, 1988; Peluso, 1993; Hitchcock, 1995; Neuman, 1997; 2004; 2005). As this chapter has demonstrated, the establishment of PAs and the proliferation of justifying discourses can lead to results that go far beyond ‘nature conservation’.

There are important human and ‘political’ questions associated with PA management that we need to recognise and address with more in-depth analysis. Whether we like it or not, PA management is inherently about politics, despite the efforts by some large conservation organisations to deny this reality. Even providing basic support for PA systems is already a small “p” political decision.

All of the above lead to the following questions. Do centralised PA management systems, where most of the key decision-making authority is anchored with central governments, really always represent the best ways for ensuring effective nature conservation? Are there other possible more decentralised models of PA management that would help ensure that more real decision-making powers are invested in the hands of the communities whose lives are the most affected by PA management? Is it possible to integrate questions associated with PA management with other historical factors and socio-cultural questions? Is it feasible for PA systems to both benefit communities and ensure that biodiversity is protected? The discourses surrounding PA management would suggest that meaningful and participatory community involvement in PA management is both possible and desirable, but what is the reality on the ground? Are we really practicing what we preach? Are nationally-controlled PA systems really the structure needed to ensure real participatory and community-based natural resource management?

Due to our general support for biodiversity conservation and PA management, we have often failed to critically assess the types of governance systems that we are inherently supporting when we promote centralised PA management systems; we have also failed to adequately consider the long-term implications of our actions in terms of territoriality, and various political and socio-cultural questions. My hope is that this chapter will help coax more people involved in PA management, both in Cambodia and other countries, to broaden their focus and ‘look outside of the box’ for new ways of structuring PAs. We need to recognise that politics and power are important, and supporting more decentralised and locally sensitive models of PA management does not necessarily imply decreasing the number or sizes of PAs, or reducing protection levels for threatened and endangered species inside PAs. In fact, my discussions with Brao people indicate that many of them are quite supportive of protecting biodiversity within PAs, often more so than those hired from outside areas to work for the central government on PA management. If only they were given the chance and the authority to help protect the natural resources that they know best. To borrow a statement provided by John McKinnon (1997: 130), “What is required is a broad, inclusive and humanitarian view not because it is ideologically more acceptable, but because it is the only one that will work.”

In some cases decentralised management structures may result in reduced protection of some species or habitats over short periods, but gaining local support for PA activities may, in the medium and long terms, result in better overall protection, and at a much lower cost to the state. It will, however, require more determined efforts to effectively engage communities in meaningful two-way communication. Full community participation in PA management is also necessary, because, as Poulsen & Luanglath (2005) have recently made clear, in relation to PA management in southern Laos, international donor funded projects come and go, and when there is too much dependence on outside inputs, things can go down hill quickly when the funding is no longer available. This could well be the case once BPAMP is over, although a phase two is envisioned,

with an even greater emphasis on strengthening the central MoE. However, NGOs have also initiated the Co-Management Learning Network (CMLN), which includes VNP and hopes to encourage dialogue that will help empower indigenous peoples in the contexts of PA management.

It is not enough for projects like BPAMP to simply espouse the idea of community participation in PA management. We need to look beyond the rhetoric, and consider the broader implications of the types of PA management structures that are being either directly or indirectly supported. This includes examining issues surrounding power, governance, race, history and the deterritorialising and territorialising effects of discourses. Are the centralised models and top down processes surrounding the establishment of PAs and their management really conducive to the type of world that will also take conservation seriously? I suspect not. That does not, however, mean that central governments should not be involved in PA management. In fact, their involvement at certain levels is probably both desirable and necessary (Baird & Dearden, 2003), but their roles might be more appropriately shifted to monitoring and ensuring that PA systems are accountable and transparent, rather than acting as powerful decision-makers regarding issues that can probably better be addressed at local levels, by people who understand the local context. Various types of collaborative and joint management of resources may be the best suited for addressing important natural resource management issues.

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