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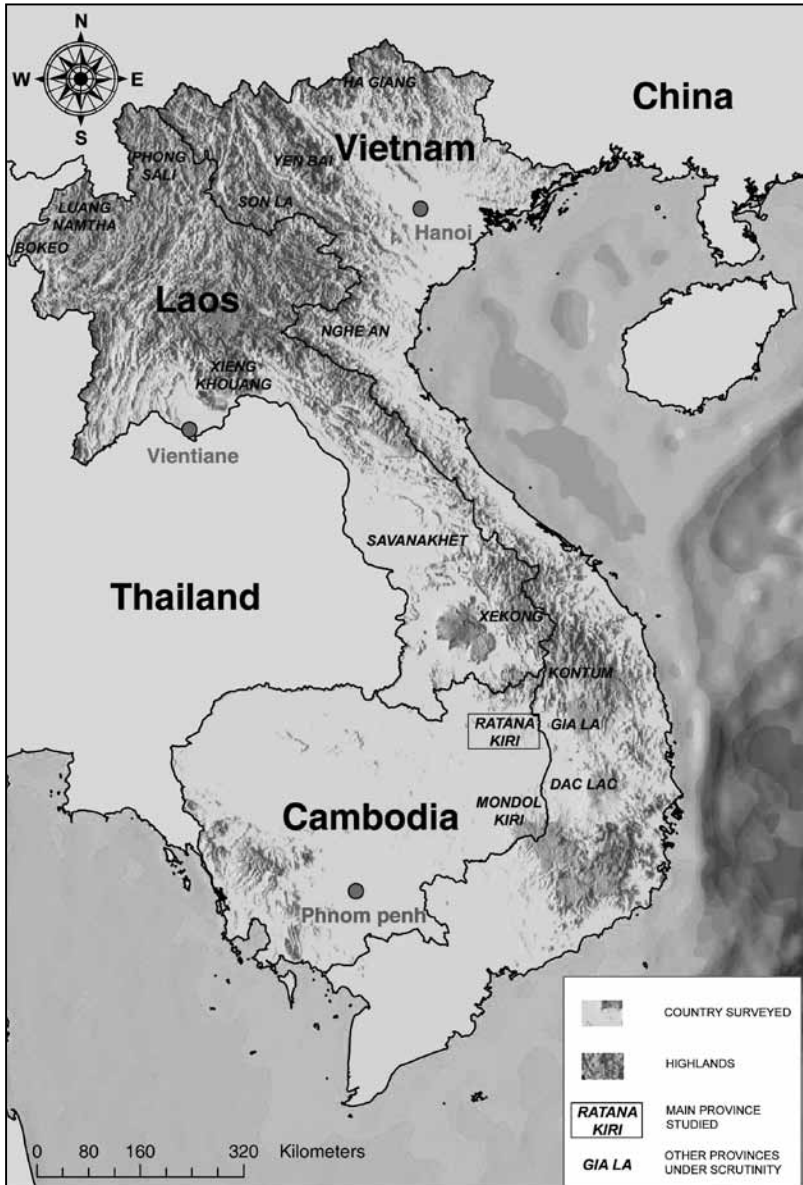
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Preface

Every author, whether an academic or a development professional, has an organizing principle or rationale in mind when collecting the contributions for such a book, reflecting some specific orientation. Usually, the reasons underlying a writer's motivations are not clearly expressed. They are frequently excluded as if considered superficial, irrelevant or an unacceptable intrusion into the private life of the writer, detracting from a more objective and scientific analysis of the issue under investigation. On the contrary, I feel that the articulation of an author's personal rationale can assist the reader in understanding why a particular approach has been taken; in the case of this book, the detrimental and often unseen impacts of development are emphasized, in contrast to the perceived successes that have been enthusiastically extolled in so many other works.

I, along with all the authors contributing to in this book, could have decided to introduce the policies and politics of development as an unavoidable reality, essential to the improvement of human beings and their societies. I could have raised issues about the drawbacks of development associated with faulty implementation and methodologies that nevertheless can be solved. In other words, I could have followed the politically correct version of development analysis. The evidence collected here as to the ramifications of development for the indigenous people of Cambodia, Vietnam and Laos tends to prove the contrary. As an anthropologist, I feel a scientific duty to investigate the process and impacts of development as it is evidently contributing not to an improvement but to a decline in the quality of life for these indigenous peoples. I have therefore decided to reject the more cautious methodological approach that stipulates development, as it is practiced, is nonetheless legitimate and necessary, as this approach would entail that only a constructive analysis of the conditions would be welcome.

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It has been repeated in numerous publications and forums that actions undertaken in the name of development should be understood as an option for native peoples, and as an exchange of knowledge between equal parties. In truth, a real negotiation has rarely occurred. On too many occasions development has proceeded on the basis of subordinating indigenous peoples, creating dependence upon new authorities, unresolved expectations, false hopes and misery. People have been left waiting for the “miracles” of the so-called development process, much as the Melanesian people have elaborated in their mythology of the Cargo cult (the belief that large boats will arrive from distant, unknown places across the ocean, bearing a multitude of gifts).

I am supporting the idea that development, as defined, may be understood as an act of violation, a forced intrusion and as a fraud; this is not my personal innovation, but an idea that is shared by many people who have shared their direct experience with me during my field research in Cambodia and elsewhere.

To be sure, developmental frameworks and rationales can be packaged in an attractive but empty rhetoric; but in our various roles, as politicians, development professionals and social scientists, we have an obligation to the intended beneficiaries of development to question these conventional concepts. The continuous elaboration and implementation of national and international policies in the name of development requires caution and careful scrutiny in light of the evidence presented in this book. This evidence, however, is not new but tends to be either ignored or marginalized when the time comes for evaluating the real outcomes of development projects. The key direction taken by the present book may be described as reshaping or questioning the notion of development.

At the end of 2000 on the high plateau of Ratanakiri province, Cambodia, I was on my way to meet with indigenous friends of mine from a Tampuan village, surrounded by forest. I had been yearning to come back for a long time, to once more visit the place that I had lived in for two years, in 1994 and 1995. Although I went to live in the village as an anthropologist, I often found that my personal relationships with the Tampuan inhabitants and my academic work blurred into one. After my research had finished and I was no longer living in Cambodia, I returned for brief visits in 1996, 1997 and again in 2000, to keep in touch with the villagers whom I had shared so much with. The decision to return again on these occasions was motivated not by professional interest but only by a desire to spend time with the people who had become my friends.

As was expected, I noticed that palpable social and material changes had occurred in the village during the intervening years but, initially, I had no intention to investigate these changes as an anthropologist. During my return visits a number of the villagers whom I knew well also began to speak to me about the changes that were occurring to their community and way of life. Four years later, in 2004, I returned

to live and work in Cambodia once again, but on my return I felt a great reluctance to see the condition of my friends in the Tampuan village as I had a foreboding that I would be saddened by the dissolution of their traditional way of life. Somewhat selfishly, I preferred to keep my distance for the sake of the fond memories I had had of my time in the village 10 years previously, in spite of a sincere desire to meet again the highland people with whom I had become so familiar. It took me more than a year to summon the resolve to return to the province of Ratanakiri and confront the reality I feared.

En route through Banlung, the small capital of Ratanakiri, I first met with NGO workers, international consultants and Khmers working in the government. Among the various topics we superficially discussed, I still remember the prevailing reaction when they learned that I was about to return to my village. They told me “good luck, take care, courage, patience,” and “not to worry”. I was struck by their response. I had come to Ratanakiri to find peace, to forget the stresses of urban life and, further, considered it a privilege to be welcomed in a village that I used to imagine as my second home. So why, I asked myself, were so many of the development practitioners and civil servants (who are ostensibly devoted to the welfare of the highland people and, I assumed, liable to be curious about their local lifestyles) telling me “good luck” as if I had been going to endure some dangerous and unwelcoming place? Maybe they perceived me as some kind of silly adventurer who was not aware of the discomforts, poor hygiene and basic food that any visitor inevitably encounters in “tribal” or “jungle” villages, as they are often termed by development workers.

I do not have the skills to evaluate the psychology of these well meaning development workers whom I met in Banlung and, besides, it was not the purpose of my visit to do so even if their polite remarks served to shed light upon their perceptions of development and the nature of the peoples it is supposed to benefit. Interestingly, their farewells made me realize how many of them create a distance between themselves and the people they are paradoxically supposed to be in touch with, deliberately or not. In spite of these reservations, I still held a respect and admiration for those persons who, it seemed, were genuinely dedicated to the cause of the increasingly marginalized indigenous groups of Ratanakiri. Nevertheless, my unease with the general tone of their discourse motivated me to leave Banlung as soon as I was able to do so.

I arrived in the village in the late afternoon. The Tampuan people, interestingly, do not show any expression of their joy when an old acquaintance returns to their village. They do not rush at you with affection but instead discretely approach the visitor, step by step, and in the appropriate hierarchical order, as dictated by their cultural protocol. The administrative chief and the traditional leaders of the five clans came at first, followed by those younger persons who had a particular affinity with me. One by one they re-established their relationship with me through the recounting of memories and

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the times that we had spent together in the past. One asked me if I had managed to improve my hunting skills with a crossbow during my absence in memory of my status as the worst hunter in the village! The second reminded me of the pleasure he had had in drinking coffee with me together with the elders while discussing the mythologies and epic stories of the Tampuan people. He went on to describe in detail the last rice wine ceremony we had shared that had turned into an impressive but pleasant mess! And what could I say about my ability to cross small rivers, reminded me another? Did I improve in pathet Brazil? *God, I was ruminating, did they not spare any commentary or criticism as to my ineptitude to adjust to their forest environment?* Another went on to recall that I was hardly able to walk alongside a river on a thin piece of wood without falling down. But they conceded jovially, “it was interesting to see you try and we had good time!” I retorted in a similar spirit by reminding one fellow that he could not use a modern lighter because his fingers were too clumsy to work the tiny gas technology. He laughed, “You won one point, and we are equal”.

Conversations went on and some middle aged women approached as well, more discretely, being less prone to speak openly in front of the men. Slowly the tone of our conversation shifted from shared memories to the exchange of current news and reflections about present life. I came to know who died in the village, how and why. “*The forest was burning*”, they said, meaning that the deaths were attributed to the dissatisfaction of the spirits with the behavior of the living. Then the villagers began to speak about their recent interactions with the outside world. This topic appeared to be a major source of concern for them, but I could not distinguish if it was either an ambiguous feeling mixed with fascination, hope, prudence and rejection, or just a direct appeal to express some of their socio-cultural perceptions of life’s changes. The candor and sincerity of their conversation reflected our long history together and the trust they now had for me. I was in a unique situation to understand their deepest fears and concerns.

Then, stridently, a middle aged man told me:

You know, Prêd, (my local name) before you smoked our tobacco, you joined us in the forest, you always wanted to participate in the ceremonies and you appreciated us. We joked about you and we never understood fully what you were doing but we accepted you. You were living among us to observe and understand what we are doing but we also did the same with you. Many times you have been a distraction for some of us. You were a burden when you became very sick and lost weight... Anyway we were all together. But now you have to realize that it is no more like this. Villagers do not like to join together as before. Fights, jealousy and misunderstandings are so numerous now.

This irrevocable statement took me by surprise. I remembered well their sense of unity when I had lived among them, the strength of their capacity to share and their

incredible desire just to be together. Whatever difficulties and constraints they faced in daily life, their inhering solidarity and capacity for cooperation were undoubtedly social and cultural traits that the villagers were proud of.

I innocently asked what had happened. The man replied abruptly in Khmer, “*Kaplas Bdo Setha Ketch Ning Ka Rik Chamroeun Nay Samphea Reak*”, meaning, “material progress and economic change”. I asked the former chief of the village to explain how he felt about the repeated contacts with outsiders such as Cambodian public servants and NGO development workers, or the others who came, believing in the need to help the highland peoples. The former chief replied ironically:

Prêd, once they arrived and spoke to us, I discovered how we are.... I came to realize that I was poor, ignorant, badly dressed, uneducated, full of superstitions, undernourished, not responsible towards my family, always sick without being aware of it and so on.... How could I ignore all this? Thanks to those clever people, they told me the truth and help me to know that I do not know anything!

The man was obviously irritated and he wanted to express his disappointment about being told by outsiders, the knowledgeable, that he no longer had sufficient knowledge relevant to survival in the modern world. I heard similar sentiments from other people, mainly from the elders and middle-age villagers. Some of the villagers reacted strongly and expressed doubts, sometimes anger, about the outsiders who came to teach them the proper ways. Others remained skeptical while a few expressed that they should wait and see, and be ready to change if we don't want to die by becoming isolated from the larger society.

Even if their reactions were not entirely surprising, I came away with a strong desire to address their concerns—a desire that eventually became the primary motivation for organizing this book and, consequently, for conducting deeper enquiries into the ramification of development programs on the lives of these highland people.

As could have been expected, economic and socio-cultural changes have occurred in the province since I lived in that village ten years ago. But it is the rapid rate of imposed change that is occurring that gives such cause for concern. In addition to the preliminary, powerful remarks given by the Tampuan villagers, it is clear to any observer that the situation in Ratanakiri province is deteriorating from insidious pressures such as uncontrolled migration, the alienation of land, organized logging, new health hazards, the dismantling of village organizations, the proselytizing of foreign religions, and so on.

What is worse is that many of these changes have been encouraged and sanctioned under the fallacious pretext of national development: a difficult but necessary phase, as it is commonly argued, to ensure the future prosperity of Cambodia and all of its

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citizens. In the name of this development it is considered necessary to encourage the migration of educated and entrepreneurial Khmers, Laotians and Chinese from the plains to the fertile but ill-exploited plateaus of north east Cambodia. Trees and forest products are considered first and foremost as important sources of income for the country; thus even deforestation itself can be valorized as enabling the development of productive and commercial mono-cropping. So too, the welfare of rural villagers is said to be improved through access to the market economy and the creation of employment opportunities. Concurrently, Christian churches are supposed to bring light to the stone-age people stuck in the world of the spirits.

In confronting these ill-conceived and dangerous ideas, I now find it imperative to reconsider the real agendas and motivations behind the fraudulent concept of the development project as such, and its activities. The need to question the concept of development and its purported benefits has provided me with the rationale and justification for the preparation of this book along with some of my colleagues. Being social scientists and/or long term advisors, we have attempted to analyze the feedback from village people and our own observations using a scientific approach and methodology. Nevertheless I should confess that I have never been a pro-development missionary nor even an unconditional sympathizer, at least not in the classical tradition that usually accepts development. Subsequently, elements of my personality may influence the way I present scientific enquiries and methodologies. In my twenty years as a professional geographer and anthropologist, I cannot remain incredulous and am sometimes disillusioned and cynical about the purported achievements of development as claimed by the rhetoric of common sense and its legions of scientists, consultants and experts. Undertaking research in this field, therefore, is a way for me to return to the elementary but unsolved questions concerning the real impacts of development that I have had in mind for such a long time. What do we mean by the concept of development, to what questions and objectives should it be held accountable; more importantly, are there any other reasonable visions of the future, or perspectives on life, that can be proposed in contrast to it?

Frédéric Bourdier, November 24th, 2008
Phnom Penh.

Introduction

Frédéric Bourdier

Much has been written about indigenous development, either in Africa and Southeast Asia or in South and Central America. However, barring a few remarkable exceptions, the concept of development, with its explicitly privileged economic component, continues to be taken for granted. Even if the discourse is susceptible to different orientations (sustainable, endogenous, etc.) strengthened by splendid rhetoric, it is generally perceived as a self-evident necessity: a unique solution for adapting and surviving in the modern, global, social environment. Inhabitants of the world, and very often indigenous populations, are requested to comply with this unilateral assertion of change, which is supposed to enhance their standing as good citizens. Unconditional promoters of various development politics and policies argue that indigenous people, among others, should be considered the first direct beneficiaries of this innovative process of transformation. Paradoxically, these forced changes, encouraged under the banner of democracy, deny populations the right to control their own futures and exclude the possibility, should they wish it, to preserve their own ways of life, and their unique identities, against unwanted interference and the unforeseen ramifications of such interventions.

Options pertaining to local social and cultural values are invariably mentioned in the documents supporting these multifarious development projects, but any attentive observer may doubt the ability of most programmes, at least in the sub-region under consideration, to adequately take them into account. Development, in practice, is hardly a process of negotiation. There is no need to wonder who has the decision-making authority to orient and direct the other, if not dictating the format outright, for this is widely known. It reminds me of one of the metaphors used by a Brazilian social worker, a follower of liberation theology, who remarked that, “the arms of the poor remain poor arms”.

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The theoretical and concrete drawbacks of *developmentalism*, as an ideology and practice, can be observed over the last fifty years of successive program implementations; it seems that the norms imposed by national and international aid agencies, generally promoted by politicians and justified by a majority of academics, are poorly discussed and rarely questioned. To remain politically correct, one must not conceive of those norms as a fraud; it would be inconceivable to admit that their implicit aim is, de facto, to subordinate anyone among the indigenous population (already, in general, marginalized) who does not share the aspirations and expectations of the project, who does not envision their own well-being in the same terms as the outside specialists.

A few social scientists, like Wolfgang Sachs, Gustavo Esteva and Kalpana Das, among others, opened new categories of scientific thinking in the 1980s; they are, ironically, called “research activists” by some of their counterparts. These were the minority who decided to reject common preconceptions of development as a matter of cognitive subversion. This rejection is a prerequisite condition for any real social, cultural and political change; to borrow the words of a Maori activist from Aoteroa (i.e. New Zealand), it is the “decolonization” of the terms employed, necessary to describing the matter impartially. Above all, these new perspectives began by tracing the history and evolution of the so-called development process from its beginnings, in various contexts. They provided more evidence of disastrous effects than of constructive impacts in the societies to which they refer, disastrous in the physical, material, social, cultural or spiritual dimensions.

In this context, it is worth calling to mind the evolution of the terminology that has been employed to define the allegedly necessary transformation of indigenous societies. Until the dawn of the twentieth century, colonial administrators, along with missionaries, characterized themselves as servants in the *pacification* of belligerent or rebellious indigenous people. The main objective was to subdue the isolated populations, expressly described as insubordinate elements. The concept of *underdevelopment* appeared later, in the 1950s, justifying the dualistic engagement presently categorized under the banner of *development*. In the course of time, however, some authors began to wonder if the development process was not a subterfuge that could be objectively re-baptized with the term domestication. A book edited by Don McCaskill and Ken Kampe, entitled *Development or Domestication? Indigenous Peoples of South-East Asia* (1997) pursued this direction. These arguments are rooted neither in philosophical assumptions nor in intellectual speculations: the authors rely on a methodology of understanding the social dynamics of interactions as a potential source of power exacerbation, to borrow Michel Foucault’s expression. Such a hierarchical scheme, depicting the control of power, can be traced out by any ethnographer or field researcher, observing, interpreting and analyzing the orientation of his host society in these terms.

The decision of the authors of the present book is not to adopt an extreme and rigid ideological position reinforced by selected theories. Most of the contributors are more interested in questioning the universal meaning of development as it is generally perceived and applied. The various chapters intend to focus on territories inhabited by indigenous populations in the ex-Indochina region. Particular attention has been given to Ratanakiri, Cambodia, but a number of chapters consider comparable issues in neighboring provinces of the country (e.g., Mondolkiri and Stung Treng) as well as among the indigenous societies of neighboring states (northern and southern Laos, western Vietnam). One should not forget, however, that spatial and administrative boundaries as well as ethnic terminologies remain arbitrary. They do not reflect any particularity (at least in terms of socio-cultural determinism) of the indigenous persons there, confronted with similar development pressures. Social groups with equivalent names, claiming the same identity pattern, and wanting to retain their cultural values in spite of different historical backgrounds, cross borders and their territory is coextensive with two or three countries of Southeast Asia

The purpose of the reflections compiled in this volume is not to be selectively inquisitive, ideologically biased or systematically critical. Significantly, no claim is advanced in these pages for the extreme alternative to development, of making artificial reserves to isolate selected peoples. Even if the latter course has been pursued with a certain degree of success in Brazil through an elaborate policy of protection in favor of the native South Amerindians, this is not posed here as a simple answer to the complex questions of development. Nor do we want to commit the error of refusing the right of every social group to encourage change and to welcome external cooperation: exchanges between nations and populations are increasing beyond the control of the nation state or its monopolies.

The main idea of this book is to understand how development is decided, implemented and perceived by a number of indigenous groups. What are the reactions of these groups, and what are the unexpected drawbacks that may have eventuated, decreasing their quality of life, once they came in contact with the outside world? Far from wishing to posit abstract generalities, every author's contribution hopes to provide what can be called illustrative case studies through particular events and development processes that have been observed, understood and, subsequently, critically analyzed.

Scientific arguments revealing unexpected facts and social dynamics that have been previously misunderstood, neglected or denied by developers, must be recognized by all sides as constructive criticism. The reflections collected from the participating authors will contribute toward a scientifically superior understanding of the complex interactions between societies and developers, interactions that should be taken into account to a greater degree than has commonly been the case.

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Our primary purpose, therefore, will be to reveal the complexity of the prevalent, ambiguous situations created by interventions in the name of development, with a special priority given to understanding the local socio-cultural and economic context, as the latter is, unintentionally or deliberately, so often forgotten in the implementation of economic policy. The subsequent interpretations, elaborated with classical tools borrowed from agro-economic, historical, anthropological, sociological and geographical disciplines, as according to the background of each author, are presented for the consideration of those developers who are interested in, and open to, a more comprehensive approach.

The scope of the study is confined to a particular kind of development that is supposedly in favor of indigenous populations, and descriptions and analyses of social phenomena that occur in the name of that development. The intention is nonetheless to avoid recommendations, rash statements and judgements without proper argumentation and discussion. Even if the ambiguous concept of indigenous development will be called into question, the book aims to provide the public with a balanced perspective. The question of symmetry, as is conceptually vital to contemporary sociology, will therefore be respected. For these reasons it was imperative, indeed essential, to give voice to decision-makers, professional actors and developers who have been working in aid projects focussed on indigenous societies. Their contribution to this book is significant and fundamental in so far as they are in a position to make clear why, how and under what circumstances and constraints they had to adjust and negotiate their work with their aid agencies. More concretely, we learn how they evaluate both the material and immaterial effects of the projects they have been associated with. Finally, it will be instructive to understand how they perceive themselves as a link in the chain of actors who are involved in socio-economic transformation.

This book is divided into four parts. Commencing with what is usually perceived as self-evident and tacitly normal, the first section inquires into the very notion of development, its dominant orientations, a few of its theoretical and conceptual foundations. The practical significance of the abstractions soon becomes clear: interventions to recast the fate of indigenous populations have been avowedly governed by a proliferation of principles, under ruling ideologies of varying duration. Whether in Laos, Vietnam or indeed in Cambodia, one common point emerges from the first three chapters: notwithstanding the most recent and fashionable watchwords (participation, sustainability, gender, etc.) now portraying the array of good intentions declared by the majority of aid agencies, one is amazed at the absence of any real negotiation with the indigenous populations. We must also observe that very few development professionals seem to be sincerely concerned as to whether or not the so-called beneficiaries will be able to exercise any degree of control over their own futures. The mode of engagement would seem to be one of *taking interest in them*,

but *working without them*. Development projects that might have been, initially, presented as an option, seem to become a formal notice or ultimatum soon thereafter. The imposition of such outsiders' plans, however, is phrased and accomplished in a style deemed requisite to receive the approbation of the international community. The approval of such projects' harshest critics is solicited through the conventional assertion that all this is only a matter of an ineluctable stage of progress: fleeting, even if distressing.

Opening the first section, Frédéric Bourdier demonstrates that the concept of development has been overused, and is no longer acceptable as commonly defined, due to its implicit ideological connotations, and its highly subjective application. Few development specialists or scientists are genuinely convinced that the brave new world has much to learn from materially minor cultures: the idea of learning from the Other appears outdated and is, at any rate, seldom founded on a notion of mutual exchange. The nature of the interaction between societies, irrespective of their technological inequality, needs to be re-evaluated. The chapter proposes a new direction for development, according to which projects and interventions have to be adjusted by taking local contexts into account.

The following chapter validates this idea in a specific setting: presenting their ethnographic research in Northern Laos, the second article, written by Vanina Bouté and Steve Daviau, illustrates the distortions arising between two development actors at cross-purposes. The harmful effects of this contradiction, from the indigenous population's perspective, are demonstrated in the French development agency's misinterpretation of state policies and local conditions. Communities found themselves facing contradictory messages, as government actions conflicted with project activities. This resulted in increasing pressure for change from public interventions, while at the same time a large part of the district's remote population remained "forgotten" by those development policies, accentuating internal conflicts.

The third paper, by Jeremy Ironside, briefly reviews Cambodia's economic development and poverty reduction policies, revealing the impact of these on some indigenous communities in Ratanakiri province. As his research demonstrates, it can be said with some certainty that the present process of development in Ratanakiri is resulting in a widening gap between indigenous and non-indigenous groups, between villages with and without land, and increasing inequality within individual villages, concomitant with the widening socio-economic gap between urban and rural areas throughout Cambodia.

The second part retraces the moments in which the very notion of development was still unsettled, either because the priority at that time was the restructuring and unification of a society seeking to assimilate the indigenous populations, formerly regarded as rebellious, or because the concept was recast in the lethal madness of an

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extreme ideological fervor, *viz.*, the perverted faith that Cambodian Marxism was to become. Evaluating the situation in plain humanitarian terms, one must recognize that the indigenous peoples' mode of receiving aid evolved in a period of serious political and material instability. Strategies were variously adopted and imposed merely to guarantee short-term survival in a crisis situation. In this period, one sees the people's negotiation of their immediate survival, but also their re-envisioning of their own futures as a veritable development of its own, based on the alternatives manifest before them.

Mathieu Guérin's contribution is chronologically the earliest in its focus: it explains how French colonial domination was justified in terms of France's *grandeur*, its civilizing mission, and the need for economic development. The colonial pact worked relatively well in the northeast, and when Cambodia gained Independence, the government maintained a development discourse toward the Highlands and their inhabitants that was directly influenced by French colonial policy, strongly rooted in objectives of control and assimilation.

Sara Colm's chapter focuses on the next decade thereafter: she examines the impact of the Khmer Rouge agenda (for political, social and economic development) on the culture of the indigenous minorities in north-eastern Cambodia, where the rebel group built their first base of popular support in the 1960s. Despite the rhetoric of Pol Pot and other Khmer Rouge leaders about their solidarity with the highland minorities, whom they perceived as practicing a kind of primitive communism, their policies and practices ultimately resulted not only in the deaths of thousands of people in the northeast from purges, lack of food, and disease, but in serious blows to the highlanders' customary belief systems and traditional ways of life. The Khmer Rouge strategy for political and economic development in the northeast, which promised to improve conditions in an idealized primitive society by converting it to a classless society, failed to a large extent because it neither incorporated nor respected traditional, indigenous belief systems.

The next paper, written by Christel Thibault, shows the peculiar situation of one ethnic group from Ratanakiri, and their repeated displacement from the time of their incorporation into Khmer Rouge forces in the 1970s until their return home to Cambodia in the late 1990s, after a period passed in the Thai border camps. Following the end of the cold war, about 400,000 refugees were assisted by the United Nations, but the fate of the highlanders turned out to be narrowly linked to the political and military weight of their respective Khmer Rouge factions. Nevertheless, freedom fighters from these ethnic minorities kept their traditional autonomy—insofar as was possible—both under Khmer Rouge command and at the different border camps, run under humanitarian auspices, by protagonists acting in the name of development.

In the last chapter of this section, bringing us up to more recent history, Tram Lam takes an alternate course, departing from the preceding chapters' direction,

to eventually rejoin their general argument in the pursuit of a past wherein cultural heritage is assiduously sought, but nowhere to be found. In the instance of these socio-political changes taking place in Vietnam's northern, mountainous regions over the last 150 years, notions of ethnically distinctive traditions have been hastily introduced as part of a rescue package to fulfill the hopes (which are, in their own way, legitimate) of an international aid agency. The latter is aware of the inconsistencies in its terms of reference in this context, but nevertheless rushes headlong into action with deep misconceptions as to what practices can be sustained by the indigenous society. The instrumentality of this illusion indicates the extent to which the agency is projecting what it wishes to see and hear onto the populations in question. This has become culturally thinkable because migration, shaped by wars and ensuing policies, strongly influenced people's reactions to change, including their perceptions of economic development and cultural heritage. While memories cannot be fully erased, they nonetheless remain conditioned by such selective processes.

The third section debates the conservation of nature, environmental protection, and economic development, in the context of indigenous peoples of Southeast Asia. Faced with the exponential degradation of forest resources, aid agencies that address environmental questions occupy an increasingly prominent place. This is, in any event, the case in Cambodia, where the agencies are accepted by the government, if not for what they intend to realize, at least in view of the veneer of respectability they share with the host country and the money they bring into it. The latter is appropriated, for the most part, by a small number of privileged persons, as has been the case with money flowing into the management of eastern Cambodia's national parks. The chapters presented here bring out a number of major points such as the recurrent distrust of practices and "beliefs" that are deemed to be dangerous, without any scientific evaluation, and the presumed non-existence of populations that nevertheless inhabit the land. While there are supposed discussions with the local communities, it seems that none of the indigenous population's knowledge, logic, or practices for the management of nature are ever conveyed to those in power. There is a socio-cultural and economic non-existence, entailing a lack of awareness of their very physical presence in the space by those in power, and a heedlessness or disregard for their ancestral territory, access to which is prohibited here and there in partitioned-off sanctuaries.

The four essays presented in this section reflect a tendency not yet discussed in the papers outlined above: the attribution of innocence and purity to the local populations, enthroning them as irreplaceable masters of the place and immunizing them against any attack. Nothing is more deleterious than to deify a social entity for the simple reason that it has roots, in distinction to its neighbor, newly arrived, who must expect to bear the brunt of all wrongs. The puerile notion, with its Manichean

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prejudices, dividing the world between the good and the bad, runs counter to all attempts to envision human relations, and therewith development, as an enterprise of negotiation.

Ian Baird's paper opens with an assertion that the discourses that justify centralized control over the land and resources within present park boundaries are of critical importance. His intent here is not to reject the idea of conservation outright, nor even protected area management, but to question the appropriateness of centralized management as is inherently promoted through 'National Park' systems.

The second analysis in this section, undertaken by Ashish John, an international consultant long established in the country, examines a project linked with indigenous communities and natural resource management in northern Cambodia. His paper describes the practical difficulties of trying to induce change in governance from within the Cambodian government. The country is still formulating its laws and legal instruments, making the framework fluid and unpredictable. He shows how projects trying to help the government protect and manage natural resources do so more through collusion than negotiation.

Ruth Bottomley's article examines the relationship of the global to the local in the case of Ratanakiri Province during the late 1990s. Modern state power in Cambodia, based on Western concepts of nation-building, including territorialization, assimilation, and economic development as well as the commercial exploitation of resources, has led to the incorporation of the remote forested areas of the periphery into the net of the state. Since the 1993 national election, the plunder of the forests in northeast Cambodia has been justified in the name of development. However, the response of the forest-dependent highlanders to this outside intervention cannot be understood as either simple opposition or acquiescence. Rather, as the author demonstrates, it has been a contradictory and fragmentary response, emerging from the conflicting desires for autonomy over land and forests and for the perceived benefits to be gained from development and inclusion within the hypothesized nation-state.

The last chapter of this section, written by Megan MacInnes, broaches an essential theme, rarely discussed scientifically. After reminding us that the harnessing of natural fire by humankind has been one of the greatest influences on landscape and ecology, also providing the fundamental technological basis of human society, she describes the changing perceptions of insiders and outsiders about indigenous uses of fire as a tool for managing natural resources in northeast Cambodia. An official anti-fire narrative has emerged, and now dominates state policies. This discourse criminalizes traditional practices, but at the level of implementation the authorities and people cross-over in a slippery grey area, recognizing the local legitimacy of some traditional fire regimes, despite their illegality. The result is an informal policy of non-implementation of the law. In other words, fire has become symbolic of the

contested definitions of the aesthetic and utilitarian values of the environment, as part of a highly politicized struggle for resource management. In this instance, an important element of agriculture and ecological development simply cannot be officially recognized.

The last section of this book inquires into a number of specific examples demonstrating that the priorities of the state put a violent strain on the local, indigenous populations, expecting them to suddenly abandon all their expectations in life, including their land claims, to suit the convenience of economic development. The planned collectivization connected with the development of coffee plantations on the upper Pleiku highlands in Vietnam had dramatic repercussions for the local population, who only became poorer thereby. The forced displacement of indigenous peoples in Laos, constrained to settle along the major communication axes, has had a different set of unforeseen consequences. Unfortunately, there is nothing unique in either scenario: on the contrary, these are recognizable patterns, carried out in the name of development, as it appears on an agenda determined from above. Such large-scale initiatives are always embellished with claims that they are *sustainable, reasonable, viable, and combining micro- and macro-economic* benefits. The willingness to be attuned to the needs of local populations, who, according to developers, refuse to understand what is taking place in their own interest, progressively diminishes as the projects proceed.

Jonathan Padwe opens this fourth section of the text with a study of efforts to resolve the incommensurability of national governments' legal systems and the customary practices of ethnic minority and indigenous groups (through the formal recognition of the latter as customary law). Principal among the set of problems that have been raised is the notion that the establishment of alternative sets of rights for different ethnicities is not merely a governmental response to the real differences that exist in norms and customs between groups, but rather is part of a process whereby those identities are constructed. Furthermore, efforts to recognize traditional authority figures and to provide them with official sanction reduce their legitimacy in the eyes of villagers by removing the locus of their authority from the village to the state.

Bruce Shoemaker and Ian Baird highlight another sensitive issue now becoming more and more prominent in Southeast Asia: focusing on Laos, they confirm that a number of programs and policies are promoting the internal resettlement of (primarily) indigenous ethnic minorities from remote highlands to lowland areas and along roads. The original causes for this internal resettlement were the rapid eradication of opium cultivation, the reduction of swidden agriculture, security concerns, and the objectives of improving road access and service delivery, as part of an over-arching project of cultural integration and nation building. There is, however, compelling evidence that these resettlements are having a devastating impact on local livelihoods

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and cultures, and that international aid agencies are playing important but varied roles, sometimes conflicting, with regard to internal resettlement in Laos. While some international aid agencies claim that they are willing to support internal resettlement if it is voluntary, it is not easy to separate voluntary from involuntary resettlement in the Lao context, although both state and non-state players often find it convenient to discursively frame non-villager initiated resettlement as voluntary.

On the other hand, civil protests are mushrooming: Frédéric Fortunel reminds the lector that social unrest has repeatedly disrupted the Vietnamese Highlands with thousands of Montagnards demanding the return of their ancestral lands. These demonstrations, also associated with demands for religious freedoms, first took place in the Highlands' major townships and were severely repressed by authorities. These claims are linked to the State policy of land redistribution at a time of economic transition from a collective to a private property system. Political and social movements are slowly emerging.

The incomprehension on both sides of the wall separating development professionals from the communities they would develop is demonstrated in the course of the last chapter, where we see the positions that women of different ethnic groups take in the face of a very particular form of imposed modernity, apprehensive about their future and that of their children. Margheritha Maffii's contribution brings us the voices to indigenous women in Cambodia. Although they have yet to reach levels of organization comparable to those seen in northern Thailand, as of late 2008, at least a certain awareness and a desire to join together in a common cause is not absent, and we can assume in an optimistic way that the future remains open.



With some uneasiness, we all must face up to the discrepancy between the intellectual and organizational wealth of the agencies implementing aid, or even those investigating it, and, on the other side of the equation, the blatantly mediocre results that ensue: the outcomes. There is an encounter with the Other presupposed in the enterprise of projects aimed at improving living conditions, and it is precisely therein that one of the greatest complexities of the notion of “aid” itself can be found, a source of perplexity, doubt and incomprehension. The occupation of developer, which can be an honorable vocation, should not be considered as a pastime left to dilettantes. The presumption of all-purpose ideas, applied by all-purpose professionals, is especially ill-suited to problems of development: nobody can expect the aid worker to arrive as a locksmith, to blast away the hinges of what have been trivially referred to as obstacles to development. Modern geometry teaches us that the shortest distance between two points is not necessarily a straight line. The logic of aid agencies, despite their

conventional equivocations, tends to essentialize and abstract from the real, human complexity of these situations. The arbitrariness of their decision-making is one result of this universalizing mindset. Decades of experience, informed by recurrent failures, show that developers can no longer avoid encountering the local population, getting to know them and having continued discussions with them. The importance of this dialogue, even if scarcely equitable, must be realized from planning stage on, yet it is scarcely evident at any stage of these projects under present scrutiny. One of the distressing affirmations of the importance of this book is the absence of that most fundamental, potentially serene relation, of the exchange of knowledge: of observing, hearing and learning from the indigenous people.

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We thank again the highlanders in the name of all the contributors: some of the indigenous people took the risk to adopt a vehement position against the officials and development processes that they perceive to be counter to their interests. They are aware, that in the name of development, everything is supposed to change without their consent and to their detriment. Their voices which have been documented in this book should encourage us to be confident in their declarations. We particularly show gratitude to each of the authors who accepted to contribute by adopting a scientific and critical analysis of what they have observed and, in the case of consultants and long term advisors, what they have done. We appreciate those who received the criticisms and suggestions of their peer reviewers with equanimity and scientific rigor.

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Vanina Bouté completed her Ph.D. in Anthropology at the Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes (Paris, France) and is currently associate Lecturer at the Ethnology Department, University of Provence. She's conducting anthropological researches on ethnicity in Laos since 2000. Her dissertation entitled "En miroir du pouvoir: les Phounoy du Nord Laos: ethnogenèse et dynamiques d'intégrations" (Mirroring the power: The Phounoy of Northern Laos, ethnogenesis and dynamics of integration, 2005) concentrates on the social changes among a highlander border-guard group in Northern Laos, from the colonial context to the post-colonial period. She also authored several articles published in international scientific journals. Her current research is focused on migration and dynamic of change among ethnic groups in the borders of Northern Laos.

Sara Colm graduated in psychology from the University of California in 1979. Her post-graduate work at Cornell University included Southeast Asian studies and the Cambodian language. She has been working as a journalist, researcher, and human rights monitor in Cambodia since 1992. She helped establish the Phnom Penh Post newspaper in 1992, and served as its first managing editor. Since 1998 she has worked as senior researcher for Human Rights Watch. Her research in Cambodia has included studies on indigenous land rights and community forestry initiatives, and the effects of logging concessions and industrial plantations on indigenous cultures, religions, and livelihoods. She is author of "Repression of Montagnards: Conflicts over Land and Religion in Vietnam's Central Highlands," which was published by Human Rights Watch in 2002. She is currently writing a book documenting the history of Cambodia's indigenous minorities under the Khmer Rouge regime in Northeastern Cambodia from 1968–1979.