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## **The Peasants in Turmoil: Khmer Rouge, state formation and the control of land in northwest Cambodia**

Jean-Christophe Diepart and David Dupuis

Over the past fifteen years northwest Cambodia has seen dramatic agrarian expansion away from the central rice plain into the peripheral uplands fuelled by peasant in-migration. Against this background, we examine the nature of relations between the peasantry and the state. We first show the historical continuities of land control processes and how the use of violence in a post-conflict neoliberal context has legitimised ex-Khmer Rouge in controlling land distribution. Three case studies show the heterogeneity of local level sovereignties, which engage the peasants in different relations with authority. We examine how these processes result in the construction of different rural territories along the agricultural frontier and argue that, in this region of Cambodia, the struggles between Khmer Rouge and neoliberal modes of land control are central to state formation processes.

**Keywords: peasants; agrarian change; Khmer Rouge; land control; Cambodia**

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## Introduction

Over the past fifteen years the Cambodian northwest has been a theatre of dramatic agrarian expansion away from the central rice plain into the peripheral uplands. This shift has led to massive deforestation associated with the creation of a new agrarian system based upon subsistence and commercial crop production (Chheang and Dulioust 2012). In the sixties, the region was the cradle of the Khmer Rouge uprising, a group of revolutionary communists who forcibly imposed the collectivisation of agrarian structures throughout the entire country. The region was also the rear base of their resistance against government forces in the eighties and nineties (Vickery 1984). As ex-Khmer Rouge warlords and soldiers retained substantial power in land management after the post-conflict reintegration processes (Gottesman 2003), they are essential to an understanding of this agricultural colonisation.

Land pioneering into peripheral uplands has been associated with voluntary migrations of a very large population from all across the country. This migrant population comes from the rice plain provinces where the increasing population density has outstripped the capacity of farmers to secure livelihoods solely from rice production. The clearing and cultivation of forest land is mainly carried out by peasant households. It is not the result of agro-industrial economic land concessions granted to companies, as is the case in other parts of Cambodia. This migration can be seen as an expression of peasant households' agency in responding to rural poverty (Pilgrim, Ngin, and Diepart 2012).

The mode of production in these new agricultural systems combines different types of commercial links between agro-industrial groups (provision of agricultural inputs and credit or via a guaranteed purchase of production) and the households who remain the landowners. These agrarian transformations reflect the integration of Cambodia's state and rural economy into supra-national agricultural markets dominated by agro-industrial groups. In a wider economic context, the setting for this transformation is the inclusion of the region in the 'Ho Chi Minh-Bangkok' Greater Mekong Sub-region development corridor (Royal Government of Cambodia 2011).

As in other countries in Southeast Asia this agricultural expansion into marginal areas is built on the political will of the state to exercise its authority over its population and to position itself in regional and global markets vis-à-vis neighbouring nations (Déry 1996, De Koninck 2006).

This research paper is part of a wider endeavour to understand the role and place of the peasantry in the dynamics of agrarian expansion. This paper builds on a previous analyses that looked at agricultural development in this region of Cambodia, and in particular the recent evolution of land tenure regimes in Battambang (Dupuis 2008), as well as the contribution of migrations, displacements and land transfers in the transformation of the agrarian system in the northwest (Pilgrim, Ngin, and Diepart 2012).

In a context where, globally, capital and markets have become the organising principle of the agrarian political economy (McMichael 2008), we are particularly interested here in examining the nature of relations between the peasantry and the Cambodian state. These relations are scrutinised through the processes of land control, which we view as strategies and practices that aim to fix, consolidate and legitimise access to land and its resources (Peluso and Lund 2011).

We suggest that throughout the history of the Cambodian northwest, control over access to land was, and continues to be, an important element in the exercise of power by state institutions at different levels. Given the dialectical relations between access to land, power and authority (Sikor and Lund 2009), the examination of the struggle and strategies of land control in which peasants and the state are engaged reveals a great deal about peasant mobilisation processes and contemporary state formation.

Our analysis articulates two arguments. We first show the continuities in the practices of land control in northwest Cambodia that date back to pre-colonial times, which include the deployment of a cross-

border network between the northwest and Thailand, the commoditisation of resources and labour by political and economic elites, socio-political tensions with Phnom Penh power, and the in-migration flow of peasants to the northwest. Since 1979, in a post-war agrarian political economy largely dominated by re-integrated Khmer Rouge, the use of military, political and economic violence has been systemic in land control. Embedded in this context, the contemporary neoliberalisation of the State of Cambodia offers new and different forms of land control, which lead to other forms of peasant subordination to state and markets. In a micro-level analysis, we argue that local practices of land control have consolidated different types of local land sovereignties in ways that engage different types of relations between peasants and the local authority. This heterogeneity implies different types of peasant mobilisation and the simultaneous construction of different forms of rural territories. What ties these fragments together is the struggle over territorial control between the current neoliberal state and the remnants of that of the Khmer Rouge. This struggle over land control is central to current state formation processes.

### **Shaping the argument**

Social and environmental processes occur over different scales. The study of society–environment relations can be improved by analysing these cross-scale structures and varying scalar configurations of interactions (Engel-Di Mauro 2009). We propose to outline a conceptual framework that allows a better understanding of those processes linking the dynamics of political institutions and their relation to land across temporal/spatial scales. First, a historical perspective is taken to focus on the long-term systemic character of people-environment relations and the organising principles of agrarian political economy (Wallerstein 2006, McMichael 2008, Peemans 2010). Second, we take a more context-sensitive political ecology approach to highlight the diversity of recent local land control processes.

#### ***A genealogy of power systems and land control strategies in the northwest***

Setting agricultural colonisation in a longer time frame is crucial to understanding its origin and to capture the ‘historical personality’ of the actors involved. This will help to describe the evolution of the current socio-economic processes. We address this genealogy at a supranational level in order to describe how northwestern Cambodian peasant trajectories were conditioned by world history.

First, we describe the history of the systems of power within which the projects of structuring and controlling the land of northwestern Cambodian territories are situated. The analysis relies on the concept of governmentality developed by Michel Foucault (2004) who differentiates between three main systems of power with distinct purposes, targets, knowledge bases, strategies and instruments, which are sovereignty, discipline and government. Sovereignty rests on the absolute authority detained and legitimised through juridico-legal techniques on a territory, and consequently on the people who inhabit it. It is circular in that its purpose is the protection of the sovereign authority and its extension over its territory and subjects. Discipline does not necessarily challenge the order imposed by the sovereign, but it aims primarily at intensifying the means of coercion to normalise the functioning of society to that order (i.e. education, army, civilian administration, taxation, etc.). Discipline organises, rationalises and hierarchises territories into components, which can be analysed, coordinated and managed according to specific mechanisms and administrative instruments (Foucault 2004). In contrast, Foucault (2004) argues that the authority exercised by a government is part of a radically different system of power. Its purpose is not merely the domination of the territory of a group of people but the improvement of the living conditions of an entire population via instruments and mechanisms of security. Foucault does not see sovereignty-discipline-government as a series of successive elements with the appearance of government causing the first two to disappear. But, against the background of European state modernisation, Foucault (2004) suggests that the line of force has consistently led towards the pre-eminence of government over sovereignty and discipline. However, as Tania Li (2007) suggests, governmentality allows examination of other geographical and historical conjunctures and shows how these practices of power have articulated elements of government, discipline and sovereignty.

Using the Foucauldian notion of genealogy to frame the present leads us to consider how neoliberalism is at play in contemporary Cambodia. We see neoliberalism as a process of societal modernisation which encourages institutions and individuals to conform to the norms of the market and laissez-faire principles (Springer 2010a, 2010b). We use the term after Springer (2010a) who maintains that neoliberalism is never a pure or finished project, but instead represents a variegated, dynamic, and ongoing process of market-driven socio-spatial transformation, which proceeds as a series of articulations within actually existing context-specific political-economic circumstances and local experimentation.

Second, we aim to scrutinise the evolution of historical practices for controlling access to land and its resources, and how these practices have been affected by the system of power in which they are embedded. We frame the notion of access broadly and view it as all possible means by which a person is able to benefit from things (Ribot and Peluso 2005). It includes direct and indirect channels as well as those which are legal or illicit, and it obviously involves a diversity of state, market, military and corporate actors. To take this plurality into account, we examine three processes of controlling access to land. First, the fixing of land boundaries (control over land *per se*); second, the levy of agricultural taxes (control over production and labour processes); and finally the commoditisation of land and natural resources (control of the market). These processes of land control are not independent of each other; their interaction is captured in the notion of land enclosure, which suggests that the appropriation of a specific space is about more than just land and needs to be more widely situated in the context of social property (Akram-Lodhi 2007).

### ***Land control processes at the local level***

Power and land control practices translate locally into contextualised forms that create social relations of production involving peasantries together with the state and other actors. These practices depend on the historical background and the socio-economic conditions of the communities as well as on the agro-ecology of their environment. This diversity encourages us to take into account the multiplicity of land control strategies at a local level. This research will examine the relationships between peasants and local state authorities, which have evolved within the context of networks of class-based agents. These include government technical departments, market corporates and individuals, NGOs, development organisations, smugglers, poachers, army groups, etc.

In Cambodia, local political power rests upon a small network of elite actors who are closely connected to the state representatives at the local level. Patronage is the norm in the fabric of power and decision making in Khmer villages (Ledgerwood and Vijghen 2002), offering a window onto the political economy of a peasant society (Popkin 1980). In the context of agricultural colonisation, the role of local elites has been decisive in controlling land access for at least two reasons. First, they translate or control the local interpretation of rules that govern the distribution of land. This ability to control the distribution of land is also the capacity to exclude certain individuals or groups, or limit their access to land (Hall, Hirsch, and Li 2011). Social inclusion and exclusion are two sides of the same coin. The struggles between actors associated with this political subjectivity are everyday concerns in these pioneer frontiers. Second, given the significant area of land and the very large number of in-migrant families involved in opening the agricultural frontier, local control over land distribution determines the mobilisation of peasants and the formation of new territories. In order to demonstrate the processes of peasant mobilisation we try to illustrate the spatial dimension of these land control strategies via maps, and describe the context-specific practices of spatial domination associated with these strategies.

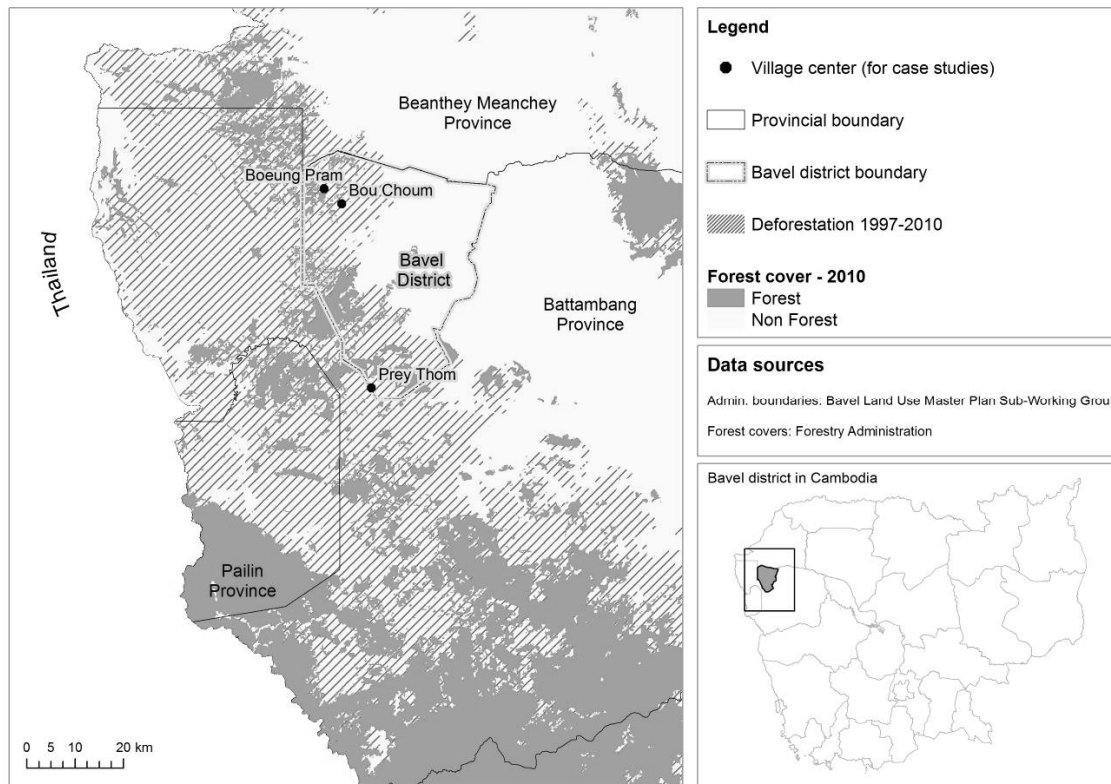
Along these mobilisation processes, the peasants are not politically passive though; they take their stand on local power and land control rules. This can take various forms and comprises a diversity of postures and attitudes, which Kerkvliet (2009) groups under four headings: support, compliance, evasions and resistance. These forms of 'everyday politics' involve two opposing types of relations between the peasants and the authority. The process of supporting or complying with norms and rules regarding the allocation of resources works to legitimise those with the authority to implement the rules (Sikor and Lund 2009). In contrast, the process of evading or resisting these rules tends to

discredit and weaken those with the authority in charge of these rules. We situate the mechanisms of state formation within the confrontation and/or negotiation between both of these contradictory processes.

### **Research methods**

This research draws on two research methods. In addition to the review of a rich literature on Cambodian history, the section on the genealogy of power systems draws on various sources of primary documents such as the forest archives of Cambodia that include a large range of old administrative documents, forest management regulations, old maps and travel stories of French explorers. A range of documents from the French Protectorate (1863-1954), Sangkum Reastr Niyum (1955-1970), People's Republic of Kampuchea (1979-1989) and Royal Government of Cambodia (1993-present) were examined as well as the doctoral dissertations of Khmer Rouge leaders.

The analysis of local land control is based upon fieldwork carried out in Bavel District, located in the province of Battambang near the border with Thailand. It covers an area of 986 km<sup>2</sup> and comprises a population of 100,000 people, according to the 2008 population census (National Institute of Statistics 2009). A preliminary round of field observations and discussions with local authorities was carried out in Bavel by taking part in spatial planning activities conducted in the area by provincial and district spatial planning working groups. We had a chance to join six workshops – one per commune – whose participants all belonged to local authorities at village and commune levels. The workshops consisted of participatory land use change mapping and root-cause analyses of these changes based on as yet uninterpreted high resolution satellite images. The content of these discussions provided valuable background information about the dynamics of land use and land property rights in the area. In a second step, the researchers conducted an independent, qualitative ethnography of land appropriation in three villages in the district (Map 1). These villages were selected because they are located on the deforestation frontier (Map 1) in regions with different agro-ecological and historical backgrounds. Household qualitative surveys (n=26 households), in-depth interviews with village development committees (n=3), and key local actors (n=5 people), and participatory mapping workshops (n=3) were conducted in the three different locations with an interpreter.



**Map 1: Recent deforestation in the northwest and the study area (Bavel district)**

## **A genealogy of power systems and land control strategies**

### ***Sovereignty in the pre-colonial period***

Between the Angkorian period and the arrival of the French in Cambodia, the Sovereign King held absolute political and administrative power. He embodied the state in the name of *deva-raja* (god-king), a cosmological interpretation that elevated the king to guardian of the peace and protector of the land and harmony between people and divinities (Greve 1993). However, the actual exercise of power was closely linked to the *Okyas* (high-ranking officials) who were personally assigned by the king. The most influential amongst these *Okyas* were the five King Ministers and the *chovay srok* – provincial or district governors. The *chovay srok* rarely acted collectively but rather as individuals, responding to local interests and personal arrangements. Their prerogatives were not based on well-defined administrative functions but were exercised in such an expedient fashion as was appropriate to the governance of a particular territory. The territoriality of their power was reinforced by the patrimonial and economic patronage that each minister exercised upon a group of several *srok* (districts), known as *dei* (earth) (Chandler 1998).

Across the country, territories were organised into three zones: the centre (*kampong*), the rice hinterlands (*srae*) and the forest (*prey*) (Chandler 1998). Placed under the control of the *chovay srok*, the *kampong* was the location in the territory where administrative, political and economic powers merged within the patronal elite. The rice hinterlands (*srae*) comprised villages linked to the *kampong* for commercial exchanges, the collection of rice taxes, religious festivals and used by officials looking for military recruits. Rice-growing villages were arranged irregularly with houses scattered randomly, reflecting the loose social structure of Khmer villages at that time. Ebihara (1984) has indeed argued that there were very few collective or communitarian entities organising rural communities in 16th- and 17th-century Cambodia. In pre-colonial times it was not actually possible for a strong local power to develop in the rice-growing villages (Thion 1993). Villages hidden in the

*prey* had little contact with the *kampong*, but were very important in the exploitation of forest resources, grazing and as reserves of agricultural land. They were frequently raided for slaves (Chandler 1998).

The traditional land tenure code (*kram*) stipulated that the king was the owner of the land and that possession rights of land (*paukeas*) were given to peasants according to an acquisition-by-the-plough principle (Guillou 2006). The limited population pressure on agricultural land, combined with limited social cohesion and the absence of fixed territories, allowed for free access to land and conferred to the peasant considerable freedom of movement over the territory (Aymonier 1904, Greve 1993).

In order to place rice production and labour under the effective control of the state, a royal tax of 10% was levied on rice production. The *chovay srok* were authorised to collect taxes from their *srok*; they could also mobilise labour for warfare or public works. Access to manpower and rice meant that in practice the *chovay srok* controlled the balance of power in the kingdom (Rungswasdisab 1995, Chandler 1998).

### ***Pre-colonial sovereignty in the context of Southeast Asian world-economy***

In the post-Angkorian era, the king's sovereignty and *chovay srok* patronage were not the only references to power in Cambodia. Well before the arrival of the French, Cambodia was under foreign economic influence. The relocation in the 14th century of the kingdom's capital from Siem Reap to the confluence between the Mekong and Tonle Sap rivers was, above all, associated with the expansion of Chinese maritime trade in the whole Southeast Asian region (Vickery 1977, Delaporte and Garnier 1998).

In full reconstruction after the war with the Burmese, the Kingdom of Siam developed a political and economic hegemony over the resources in the region (Rungswasdisab 1995). This resulted in the development of large commercial trade routes across the Lower Mekong Basin, and in the recruitment of labour in neighbouring countries to reinforce the army and enhance the development of commercial export-oriented cash crops. The intervention of Siam in Cambodia at the time was part of this dynamic. Commercial routes in Cambodia allowed access to a large diversity of export products such as cardamom (*Amomum krervanh*), high-value timber, the resin of *Dipterocarpacea* trees, wax, ivory, etc. that Siam then sold to China and Europe.

However, Siamese expansionism alone did not fully account for Siam's domination in the Cambodian northwest during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. Indeed, economic and territorial control over the northwestern regions of Cambodia was possible due to two internal weaknesses in the prevailing system of power. Given the power they obtained through rice taxation, certain *chovay srok* became very powerful and relatively independent of Phnom Penh power (Chandler 1998), particularly in regions with high economic development potential, such as the northwest. Taking advantage of these rivalries, Siamese power reinforced the antagonisms between northwestern provinces and the central power in Phnom Penh. In 1771 and 1772, the entire northwest (Battambang - Siem Reap - Pursat - Kampong Svay) was placed under the control and protection of Siam. Northwestern *chovay srok* granted to Siam the right to exploit forest resources in the northwest and the labour force to work on agro-industrial plantations in Siam in return for military protection (Rungswasdisab 1995). Rungswasdisab (1995) argues that, since the 18th century, northwestern territories have become a refuge zone for political dissidents opposed to Phnom Penh power.

### ***The discipline of the colonial power***

French intervention in Cambodia materialised in a gradual modernisation of administrative mechanisms, particularly in the forestry and rice sectors, the centre of its colonial project.

In 1899, the French army provided Cambodia with a rudimentary forest administration, placed under the forest service of Cochinchina (Kampuchea Krom, currently South Vietnam). The French army

corps, a large consumer of timber at that time, organised the first exploitation of teak (*Tectona grandis*). The colony wanted to enrich its treasury by granting logging licences and levying sales taxes (Thomas 1999). The very liberal model of forest management was not well controlled and very quickly resulted in massive forest degradation (Gouvernement Général d'Indochine 1905). In a move to sustain colonial forest rents, the French administration put in place a system of forest reserves, which was completely at odds with the rules of traditional land access. Forest reserves were state enclosures where logging activities were regulated according to agreements signed between companies and the forest administration. Access to these forests was denied to people and their grazing herds (Gouvernement Général d'Indochine 1910).

The rules and coercive measures that accompanied the organisation of these reserves had two sides. First, they gave responsibilities to peasants and local authorities for the control and patrol of forests; second, they also made any person or group who engaged in illegal logging personally accountable (and not the person holding the licence). Peasants chose passive resistance to these rules and tried to evade them by turning to smuggling routes controlled by village authorities and Thai traders (Thomas 1999).

In order to stimulate rice production, the French introduced land titles (Guillou 2006). In liberalising land markets and favouring access to land for French and urban investors from the *kampong*, the administration tried to increase the exchange value of land in order to transfer it to the most productive farmers. A new tax system was instituted, which obliged the peasant to pay a certain percentage of their production in cash. Henceforth, peasants were obliged to engage the market economy by selling part of their production. This cash economy created usury credit systems (users got preferential conditions at a very low interest rate with the bank of the *kampong*) and resulted in widespread indebtedness among peasants (Thion 1993). Combined with the development of land markets, indebtedness led to land dispossession by mortgage or sale and the emergence of landlessness, land lease and the creation of agricultural wage labour (Kiernan and Boua 1982).

The establishment of forest reserves and the expansion of large land enclosures by urban investors who secured their land through the cadastral system established by the French had considerably reduced the possibility of land expansion. In fact, land access and land concentration associated with agrarian class formation were already serious issues in Battambang in the early 20th century. These agrarian dynamics were central in the analyses made by future Khmer Rouge leaders in their doctoral dissertations (Hou 1955, Khieu 1959, Hu 1965).

In 1907, the restitution of Battambang to Cambodia by Thailand initiated waves of migration from *Kampuchea Krom* (region also named Cochinchina and from southwest Cambodia where demographic pressure on land was already very important (Ministère de l'Information 1965)). From the early 20th century, immigration to the northwest exacerbated the pressure on land and reinforced land inequality. The northwestern countryside was gripped by a strong feeling of injustice and insecurity and neither the French nor the royal administrations were able to remedy it. Banditry and looting of resources were rampant, investment in education and medical services was nonexistent and any agricultural modernisation only benefited the elite. The situation eventually reinforced the patronage power of the *chovaysroks* and their connections with Thailand.

Peasant protests were crystallised in agricultural development and forest management issues. These protests were first organised by progressive members of the Buddhist clergy (Kiernan 2004) and were later echoed by the *Khmer Issarak* (Free Khmers), an anti-colonialist movement managed by Son Ngoc Thanh, and largely supported by Thailand during the Indochina wars. In the northwest, the *Issarak* maintained strong economic and political patronage networks and brought the Thai into the heart of the power system in the region<sup>1</sup>. In the thirties, the emergence of the Indochinese Communist

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<sup>1</sup> A man named Keo, a Sino-Khmer assigned by the Thai to the position of *Samraong* district chief (in the northwest), was an important trade figure between Cambodia, Thailand and China in the 19th century. His grandchild, Kao Tak, a trader between Cambodia and Thailand and also an ally of the Thai, would become a



Party influenced a large part of the *Khmer Issarak* (Kiernan 2004) and crystallised a leftist political movement that carried a message of contestation and the premises of a political alternative to what Khieu Samphan (1959), former KR leader of Democratic Kampuchea, called the prevailing pre-capitalist feudalism.

### ***From the emergence to the re-integration of Khmer Rouge sovereignty***

King Norodom Sihanouk, the father of independence in 1953, abdicated in 1955 to take the post of prime minister of the young kingdom. His politics did not challenge land and forest tenure arrangements previously established by the French. Concession remained the principal forest management instrument and the land titling of settlement and agricultural land was pursued. Land markets were still promoted and investment in the agricultural sector by urban dwellers was encouraged. In the fifties, the support provided by the royal government to develop the fertile land of Battambang was an important incentive for the migration of a large number of families moving from the southwest region (Ministère de l'Information 1965). These migrations provided the continuity of the migratory movements initiated in the early 20th century between both regions.

In the 1960s, the indebtedness of peasants and their dependency to usurers became the norm (Kiernan 2004). In reality the socio-economic conditions of peasants at the end of the 1960s were not essentially any different from those that prevailed in the 1920s and 1930s, as described by Prud'homme (1969).

From 1966, the *Sangkum* established a new form of agricultural tax (*le ramassage du paddy*); a mandatory contribution, which required peasants to sell a part of their harvest to the government. To ensure production did not escape on smuggling routes, the collection of this new tax was supervised and enforced by the army, especially in regions with high agricultural potential like Battambang. Social unrest was sparked by the arrival of new settlers and especially by the acquisition of land already in use. By manipulating local officials and army officers, the newcomers assigned themselves land titles which had recently been cleared by local peasants. They claimed their titles invalidated customary possession by occupation (Thion 1993). In 1967, a peasant uprising took place in the district of *Samlaut* (Battambang) against government officials and the military. The *Samlaut* episode strongly reinforced peasant support of the anti-establishment movement against local government corruption (Kiernan 1982). It was in this context that the Khmer Rouge (KR) revolutionary and political movement came to power.

### ***Democratic Kampuchea (1975-1979)***

The modernisation project of Democratic Kampuchea was based on the construction of a nation-state and its implementation between 1975 and 1979 was radical. The national priority was the development of the rice sector. The *Angkar* abolished the right of individual possession of land, nationalised the entire agricultural domain and collectivised all means of production. Labour was organised within the collective production groups in which individuals were recruited. The urban population living in the *kampong* was forced out to the countryside. Forest concessions were cancelled and the access to forests was forbidden for the population, which was now engaged in collective farming. These new forms of appropriations of space and the underlying social relations radically transformed rural territories (Tyner 2008).

The KR cadres in the northwest were more like members of a guerrilla movement involved in the timber trade with Thailand rather than skilled and disciplined administrators of a revolutionary administration (Vickery 1984). Out of the control of central KR authority, they quickly came to be viewed by the *Angkar* as dissidents against the KR establishment. Between 1975 and 1978, migration campaigns aiming to 'purify' the northwest were undertaken to replace the northwestern KR cadres and military by those of the southwest region who demonstrated greater obedience to Pol Pot (Vickery 1984, Kiernan 1996). Though justified for political reasons, these migrations reinforced the already existing links between both regions.

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close collaborator of Son Ngoc Thanh, working across the entire northwest (Kiernan 2004).

### *Khmer Rouge resistance and re-integration (1979-1999)*

In 1979, the country was liberated but the Khmer Rouge were entrenched in the northwest and had become a resistance movement against government troops and their Vietnamese allies. Massive and uncontrolled migratory movements took place across the entire country in the chaos that followed the arrival of Vietnamese army and the Khmer Rouge rush to the northwest (Vickery 1984). In the northwest, an important group of migrants gathered in refugee camps (along the Thai border) from where international aid would be organised. These camps had key geopolitical influence in the region as they provided support (food aid, civil and military logistics) to political bodies opposed to the Hanoi-backed Phnom Penh power (i.e. the Khmer Rouge). This support was significant and contributed to giving legitimacy to KR power. Vickery points out that KR leaders were even encouraged by the UNTAC to present candidates for the 1993 general elections as part of a multipartite peace agreement for Cambodia (Vickery 2007).

As early as 1979, agreements on forest exploitation were made between Khmer Rouge leaders and the Thai military in the northwest. The deal was clear; in exchange for forest exploitation rights, the Thai military gave the Khmer Rouge access to food aid in the camps and protected their refugees (Le Billon 2000, Hibou 2004). Approximately fifteen Thai companies that were subject to a logging ban in Thailand were granted access to large forest areas in the northwestern territories controlled by the Khmer Rouge (Gottesman 2003). The profits derived from these agreements were tremendous and allowed the KR to finance their resistance war against government and Vietnamese troops. But these concessions also provided benefit to the government via taxes and royalties. A paradoxical logic of cooperation between the KR and the national army led these players to maintain a minimum level of conflict and instability in order to maintain access to forest rent (Le Billon and Springer 2007). This deal considerably reinforced relations between Khmer Rouge leaders, some political factions within the government, the Thai military, and businesses and politicians on both sides of the border (Hibou 2004). It further reinforced the legitimacy of Khmer Rouge power in the northwest.

It is on the basis of these first 'joint-ventures' that forest concessions were [re]established in the mid-1980s, one hundred years after they were first introduced in Cambodia by the French (Le Billon 2000, Hibou 2004). Without much consideration to the implications, the international community encouraged the rationalisation of forest concessions with the objective to promote public-private partnerships between state and private enterprises, to generate revenues, and to finance post-war reconstruction efforts (Hibou 2004). But in the northwest, these public-private partnerships were integrated in the prevailing post-war political economy and so contributed to reinforcing KR power.

The 1993 elections brought to power a coalition of two parties: the Cambodian People's Party (politically opposed to the Khmer Rouge) and the FUNCINPEC, led by Norodom Rannaridh who attempted to integrate the Khmer Rouge into the government as a manoeuvre to weaken the CPP within their coalition (Vickery 2007). The reconstruction of patronage networks to control the country generated violent political struggles between both parties. The need for both parties to generate revenue intensified the recourse to forest concessions. In just a few years, the public-private partnership ideal imagined by the international community to assist reconstruction resulted in a generalised and uncontrolled privatisation of state forests to serve the interests of political and military leaders (Global Witness 2007).

The development of a concessionary economy served to support two important processes in the northwest. First, in a move to offer alternative livelihood solutions for demobilised soldiers, both co-prime ministers allocated land to the army. In seven provinces, in July 1994, five percent of the Cambodian territory was allocated to the military (Hibou 2004, Global Witness 2007). This strengthened the militarisation of natural resources management. Second, the power progressively became centralised and controlled by Hun Sen at the expense of opposition leaders and even rivals within the CPP. The army and police were progressively placed under his control. This resulted in a fusion between economic, political, military, judicial and even religious power at all levels (Marchal 2004).

After the 1998 general election that strengthened Hun Sen's hold on power, the question of the demobilisation of government and KR soldiers in the northwest was tackled. The strategy was a political and territorial reintegration (*Samaharenkam*). Khmer Rouge leaders obtained key positions within provincial and district administrations. The share of the territory between the royal army and the Khmer Rouge allowed them, in a region still under KR control, to control land distribution and management. The *carte blanche* given to military forces in the northwest not only ended conflicts but also renewed the legitimacy of KR power and political economy. In remote areas with low population density, KR warlords (leaders of the KR army) retained large land holdings (spoils of war) in their possession and sold [some of] them to agricultural entrepreneurs. In more accessible areas, KR warlords initiated the creation of new villages where lower-grade KR representatives were assigned responsibility for organising land distribution to demobilised soldiers. Given the considerable tracts of land suitable for cultivation, this reintegration marked the opening of the agricultural frontier and further created incentives for migration. In the wake of demobilised soldiers - through extended family networks - peasants in need of land settled in the area and also benefited from land distribution. They arrived from all parts of the country and in particular from neighbouring districts and the southwest, where KR cadres are originally from (Diepart and Dupuis 2012).

### ***Neoliberalism and the pervasiveness of sovereign power***

In early 2000, the forest concession system was at an impasse (Independent Forest Sector Review 2004). In 2002, under pressure from the international organisations that promoted it, the system was progressively reformed; a moratorium on timber exploitation was declared and many forest concession contracts were suspended (e.g. *Yurisako* forest concession in the northwest). However, this decision did not mark the end of the concession system. Led by the government and the forestry administration in particular, the forest concession system was gradually transformed into an agro-industrial land concession system. The regional context of these transformations changed; the emergence of the Greater Mekong Sub-region development corridors and increased global interest in large-scale investment in land and in agriculture took on greater significance (Deininger et al. 2011). Yet, the extractive agrarian political economy, based on historical networks developed by KR and Thai actors, remained intact as the socio-political framework for these new forms of agricultural production.

The rapid advance of the pioneer frontier has been stimulated by international agro-industrial markets based in neighbouring countries (Thailand and Vietnam, but also China and South Korea). In Thailand, the spearhead of this development is the agro-industrial group CP (*Charoen Pokhaphand*), a world leader in the production of livestock feed. Its control over agricultural commodity chains is operated upstream and downstream of production, by providing credit for seeds, fertilisers and pesticides, and through the purchase of agricultural production. While primarily in charge of land distribution, the local elite (village chiefs and members of village development committees) took advantage of their position and authority to become the interlocutors of agri-business in the villages (retail sellers of agricultural inputs and coordinators of the commercialisation of agricultural outputs).

The neoliberal modernisation of state institutions that provide a framework for agricultural colonisation comprised a plethora of new legal instruments. The 2001 land law envisaged the establishment of private land title and the development of markets towards pro-poor objectives. The recent land titling process (the so-called Prime Minister titling), which followed Directive 01 in a move to secure land rights for the poor, upholds the same logic (Müller and Zültdorf 2013). The forest concession system is gradually being replaced by economic land concession for agro-industrial development to bring growth and employment to rural areas. Land reform also aims to bring more responsibilities to rural communities in forest management through community-based schemes. Social land concessions (co-managed by the state and communities) have been established to address the need for land of the rural poor.

This supposedly new institutional context, in reality, maintains the French jurisdiction and land tenure regimes introduced during the protectorate. Springer (2013b) pushed this analysis by arguing that contemporary state-making practices are closely associated with colonial patterns. These new

neoliberal governance instruments carry a message of laissez-faire, political decentralisation, administrative de-concentration and resources co-management; they are undoubtedly instruments of a 'government' in the sense of Foucault (2004). But, given the history and practice of the agrarian political economy in the region, this devolution of power serves the interests of central power, the agro-industrial lobby, and the elite within rural communities (Diepart 2011). Our assertion that decentralised control over land responds to a centralised logic of power is aligned with Springer's argument that in the context of neoliberalisation, the interpretation of laws by elites has become the main element in the perpetuation of sovereign power (2013b). Along the same line of thought, it echoes his argument that the 2001 land law has become an imperative mechanism in the realisation of authority vis-à-vis state formation, sovereign rule and the processes involved in controlling access to land and its commoditisation (Springer 2013a).

### **A diversity of land control strategies at the local level**

At the local level, land control strategies that confront power and authority are embedded in a long history. The genealogy of power has identified a diversity of actors with different historical backgrounds and levels of control over land. These actors and their interactions are quite specific to the northwest where, unlike other regions in Cambodia, the rules of post-conflict land distribution were mostly determined by KR warlords. This was a result of the reintegration policy, initiated in 1998, that provided these KR warlords with power to plan and supervise the distribution of land to demobilised soldiers and in-migrant peasants.

But, given the highly opportunistic nature of the current agricultural colonisation, attention should be paid to the multiplicity of situations on the ground. Based on field work in Bavel district we set forth three case studies that highlight a number of local land control practices. Each case accounts for a specific process of peasant mobilisation reflecting different socio-economic structures within rural societies.

### ***Land access, migration and social differentiation in Prey Thom***

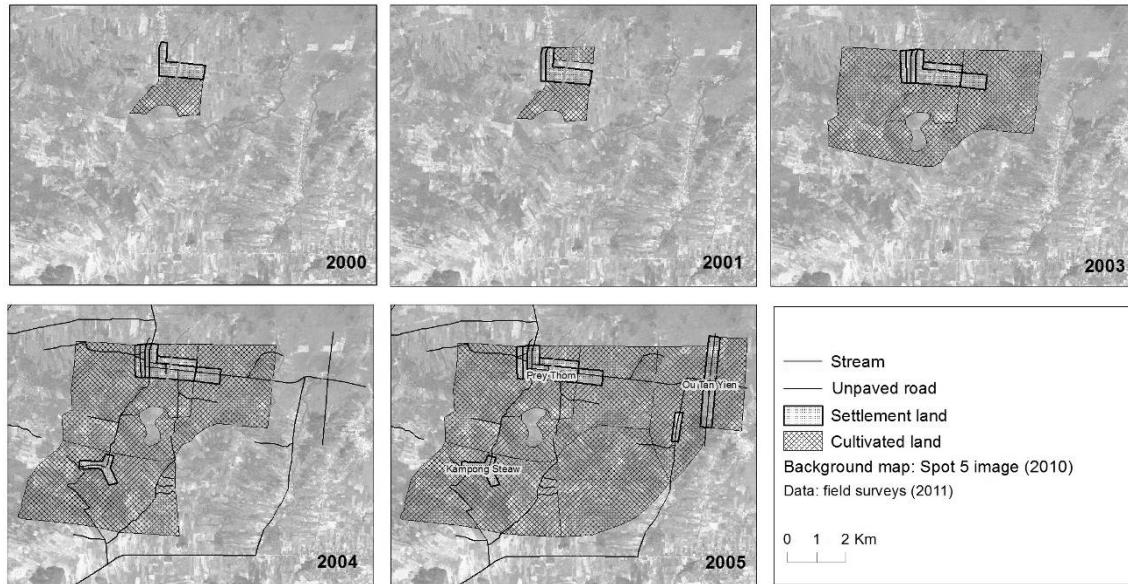
In 1998, the southern part of Bavel was under the direct control of three KR warlords who created a number of new villages in conjunction with district authorities. Prey Thom was one of those villages. KR warlords assigned a lower-grade KR officer to the position of village authority with responsibility for land distribution. In the early phase of the distribution, the rule enforced was to allocate five hectares of forested land to each family. The first migrants who arrived after the war (circa 1999) were a mix of demobilised soldiers (from both the Khmer Rouge army and regular army) and natives of the area who had fled the fighting.

The first group of migrants who were closely related to the KR village chief received the highest quality land from the village (with the best soil fertility and access to water). The upfront capture of the land rent allowed them to engage in profitable cash crop production activities (maize, soy, cassava, sesame and mung bean) and become the local commercial agents of *Charoen Pokhaphand (CP)* and other agro-business companies. Further down the line, they would accumulate important agricultural capital (mostly mechanical equipment) and play a key role in determining the relations of production of peasant communities. The current authority and economic elite of Prey Thom emerged from this pioneer group of migrants.

Subsequently, groups of migrant farmers, who were usually related to pioneer migrants through family or acquaintance networks, settled in the village and received land according to the same distribution rules. These new migrants colonised land increasingly located at the periphery of earlier settler landholdings. They also brought an important labour force, as the labour demand for forest clearing and removing tree stumps quickly increased. In fact, agricultural colonisation and migration are two processes that are mutually reinforcing.

In 2004, agricultural expansion and the progressive saturation of land led to the creation of two satellite villages (Ou Tan Yien and Kampo Steaw) where a family could receive no more than three

hectares of poorer quality lowland. Towards the outer edges of the expanding village the quality of land decreases and rice becomes the main cultivated crop. This situation denies peasants of the opportunity to achieve the profits of cash crop production. Map 2 illustrates the evolution of land occupation in the area and the progressive acquisition of land from centre to periphery with the creation of satellite villages.



**Map 2: The evolution of land occupation in Prey Thom**

Market-driven land acquisition was legitimised by the 2001 Land Law. Given the value of land and the important profit derived from cash crop production, a land market developed rapidly and reinforced land concentration within the village. Land concentration occurred due to the casualisation of indebted peasants, forced to sell or rent out land, and the growth of accumulating farmers. In response to this concentration, agricultural wage labour developed in the village and led to the formation of a class of land-poor peasants who rely on agricultural wage labour as a necessary source of income.

The steady influx of new migrants increased the pressure on land and reinforced the wage labour pool. When the wage labour opportunities in the village decreased, the more precarious peasant families were forced to migrate to the border districts or to Thailand, where demand for labour remains high. The social differentiation briefly sketched at Prey Thom draws on the idea of centre-periphery dynamics involving the control of rent by the first migrants, the progressive peripherisation of immigrants and, later, the marginalisation of landless agricultural labourers. This process reflects the polarisation of households in relation to the control of means of agricultural production.

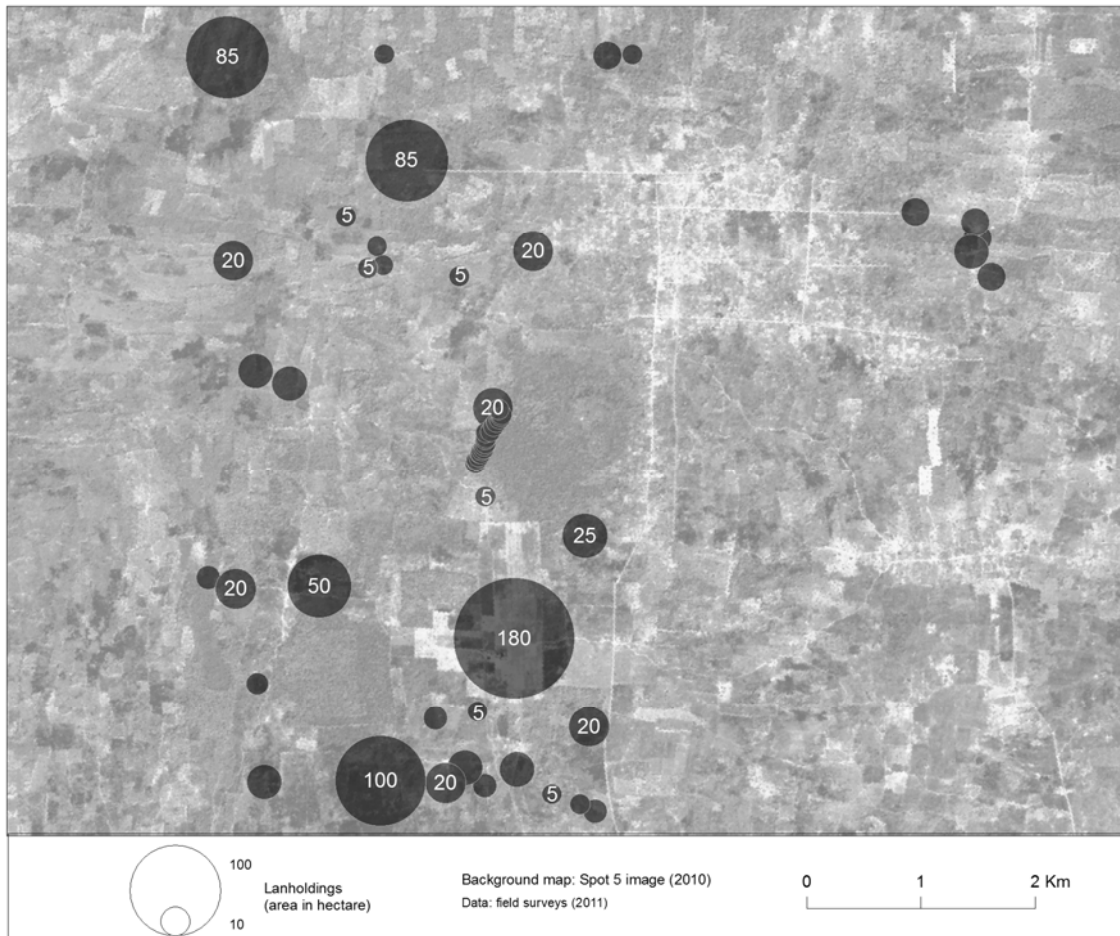
These different modes of access to land are derived from power directly inherited from the Khmer Rouge reintegration process. The designation of the village chief by the KR warlords before the first communal elections of 2002 brought to power a man convinced of the redistribution model imposed by these Khmer Rouge warlords. This election led to the institutionalisation of Khmer Rouge power in the new institutions of governance; KR rules of land redistribution have now become legitimate in the eyes of the elite who benefited from them and who now have the authority to implement the new land law. This is key, as the village chief has the authority to determine whether a piece of land has been occupied peacefully and continuously for five years. According to the 2001 Land Law, this is the basis upon which the land administration will confer land ownership rights (Royal Government of Cambodia 2001).

Here, all stakeholders accept the relationship between the local authority and the land access rules imposed by the Khmer Rouge elite. Even if this situation is a source of frustration and tension, there do not appear to be questions asked regarding privileges of reintegration. In fact, the very young rural community of Prey Thom is poorly equipped to mount a challenge to them. The acceptance of this special relationship between power and land access has guided the construction of the Prey Thom territory. It also deeply influences the socio-economics of the rural society through the institutionalisation of agricultural wage labour and out-migration resulting from the control of land and agricultural capital by KR local elite.

***Land domains and domination of the peasantry at Boeung Pram***

Boeung Pram is a village in the northwest of Bavel district with a very complex land history. It is located in a region recently cleared for rain-fed food crop production. This area was administered as a military Khmer Rouge camp by four senior officers who together controlled an area of 80,000 hectares in the northwest. According to many discussions we have had with demobilised soldiers, the area was divided by the KR warlords who marshalled these territories into large land domains held directly under their control. The land under KR military warlords' control was either kept for private benefit or redistributed to obedient KR soldiers (who may have later sold their land to private individuals) or distributed to demobilised soldiers of the state army.

In areas where a member of the military becomes a landlord (sometimes with landholdings of up to 180 ha), a particular form of land control has emerged. At the periphery of these large landholdings they allocated five hectares of land to migrant peasant families with usufruct rights. The deal anticipates that after five years of continuous occupation of the land, the peasant family will gain a more solid possession right over one hectare. Map 3 illustrates the spatial structure that emerges from this form of peasant mobilisation. It shows a clear opposition between a couple of large landholdings and a multitude of small landholdings, the latter being located at the periphery of the former.



**Map 3: Peasants and landlords in the Boeung Pram area**

On this basis, the family commits to work for the landlord by supporting the clearance of his land and by providing free labour during the rice harvest peak season. The strategy of these landowners is to increase the number of indirect beneficiaries of the land redistribution in order to expand the pool of peasant supporters so as to bolster their agricultural entrepreneurship. It is worth noting that the deal made between the landlord and the peasant is purely informal and completely at odds with the legal framework of the government, which in this particular case would promote forest conservation or co-management between the administration and the communities.

The territorial arrangements at stake here are quite different from those in Prey Thom. The peasants initially formed protective barriers around these large landholdings. Secondly, by supporting the forest clearance, they supported the actual implementation of these large landholdings that became agricultural enterprises. Finally, by accepting the domination of the owner, they legitimised and supported a method of land access that is deeply uneven. Indeed, these patron-client relations are highly asymmetric and comparable to the enslavement of a part of the peasantry by a sovereign power. Yet, they offer a certain kind of rationality for the actors operating within this territorial context.

The relationship between peasants and power is clearly predicated upon the basis of support for Khmer Rouge control of land; it implies more than simple acceptance. Even if, from the peasants' perspective, this support is justified due to the difficulty of accessing land, rather than political affinities, it strengthens political and economic patronage and legitimatises land control practices.

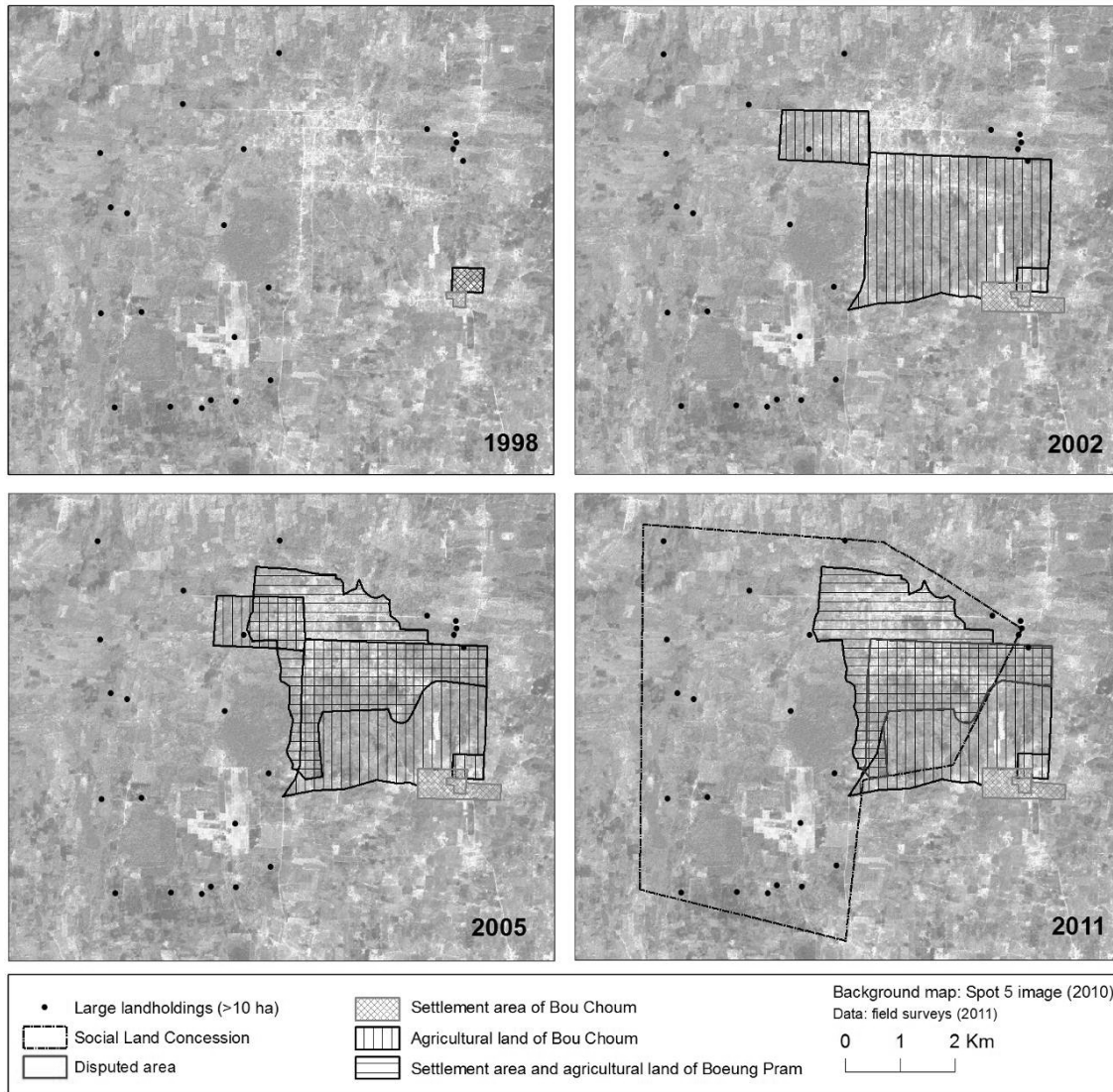
This factor points towards the contradiction between government-KR reintegration policy and the current forest management policies of the same government. Even though the mode of land tenure is at odds with the legal framework promoted by the central government, this case shows that two completely different relationships involving the authority and access to land do in fact provide rationality and actual tenure security.

### ***Resistance and peasant struggles in Boeung Pram and Bou Choum***

Boeung Pram and Bou Choum are two villages in Bavel District involved in land conflict. The current site of the village of Bou Choum was controlled by a Khmer Rouge military commander (Deng Yang), who managed the land distribution at the end of the nineties. This included the redistribution of large landholdings to closely connected dignitaries (often according to their rank in the army), land sale to businessmen and investors in the region, and the redistribution of small plots to demobilised soldiers or landless peasants (according to the KR rule of allocation of five hectares per family). In 1998, the first households to settle in Bou Choum were recipients of land distributed by Deng Yang (map 4, upper left and right frames). The first inhabitants of the current village of Boeung Pram arrived in the area in 2005 at a time when the land, even though unoccupied, was redistributed to military commanders or sold to private individuals, including some residents of Bou Choum (map 4, lower left frame). These newcomers (demobilised soldiers of the government army, then Khmer Rouge army soldiers) quickly organised themselves around a charismatic leader (Chhea Ny) to secure ownership of these territories. The social unrest and mobilisation of peasants was substantial. Chhea Ny and hundreds of peasant families, settled in the area through the use of force. Populations from Bou Choum and Boeung Pram mobilised together to take over land from the large landowners. Their goal was to extend farmland for a growing immigrant rural population in desperate need of agricultural land.

The expansion of cultivated domains was limited by the presence of landlords in the area who did not permit encroachment onto their landholdings. However, these communities did not recognise the legitimacy of these landlords and encroachment onto landlord landholdings (Srey Poun) eventually occurred. The conflict escalated and led to the arrest of Chhea Ny who was charged with illegal deforestation and illegal sale of agricultural land. Taking advantage of the weakening Boeung Pram community, the local landlord (Srey Poun) convinced Bou Choum's farmers to ally with him; the deal they struck would see them recover the agricultural land they originally received from Deng Yang, if they helped to evict the few families of Boeung Pram that were still living on the land. This opportunistic manoeuvre on the part of the people of Bou Choum to secure their land rights would not succeed, as Chhea Ny remained very active in his jail cell. He managed to mobilise a network of stakeholders to stand up for his cause: influential members of the local CPP bureau, the district and provincial administration, the forestry and land administrations, local NGOs, and even human rights lobby groups. On his release from prison, Chhea Ny and his retinue formed a small guerrilla army and would reoccupy, at gun point, the land reoccupied by Bou Choum (map 4, lower right frame). Chhea Ny went further and managed to have the provincial state land management authority recognise the contested land as private state land. Eventually, the land was integrated into a social land concession programme, which comprehensively excluded Bou Choum residents. The development of the conflict is depicted in Map 4. The map shows the superposition between the land first occupied by Bou Choum's farmers and subsequently by Boeung Pram's farmers (area with square grid pattern). The dotted line represents the extension of the new Social Land Concession.





**Map 4: The evolution of land occupation in the Bou Choum and Boeung Pram area**

This conflict reflects the opposition between two forces of land control: the sovereign Khmer Rouge power, which resulted in land control that subordinated the peasantry to warlords, and the power exercised by state authorities using the instruments of neoliberal governance. It also demonstrates the opposition between peasant mobilisations in relation to two opposing forms of land control; one that provides a legitimate form of power and access to land through KR patronage (Bou Choum), and another in which there exists a rejection of the subordination to land inequalities inherited from the reintegration process (Boeung Pram). The latter form of peasant mobilisation is best understood as a process that seeks to deny a sovereign power through disputes over land and challenges it via the legal instruments that the neoliberal government power offers.

This case also reveals that the attitude of the central government concerning this land dispute has shifted. Firstly, the legal institutions (juridical system and land law) are used – with the consent of the central government – as an instrument to secure the land privileges of the elites (ex-KR, businessmen, private companies or local governmental agencies) by playing a central role in the evictions of peasants. This is an analysis shared by human rights organisations, including Amnesty International (2008) and Licadho (2007), which both worked on the specific case of Boeung Pram. But subsequently, a state-peasant ‘contract’ was implemented as a result of a specific form of protest

(carried out by Chhea Ny and his community) which constituted an opportunity for the central government to reassert its presence in this near-stateless zone. This contract is based on the engineering and implementation of social land concession (whose beneficiaries are the peasants), the creation of an entirely new commune in the area, the support of farming activities through intensive training, and the establishment of forestry co-management schemes in conjunction with the forestry administration.

However, the case in point suggests that the characterisation of a simple duality between two sovereign powers does not suffice to render the complexity of the situation on the ground. The presence of a strong leadership (Chhea Ny), which not only utilised NGOs, human rights groups and neoliberal modes of property right, but, indeed, also resorted to mob violence to gain and defend territory until its ownership could be legalised, enabled this peasant mobilisation to engineer a new type of state-peasant 'contract'. Although this new type of contract has fundamentally changed the dynamics of the interrelationship between peasant actors and the authority by benefitting some groups of peasants, it has also resulted in the exclusion of certain other peasant actors and communities (i.e. Bou Choum).

### **The peasants and the state along the northwest agricultural frontier**

The history of power and land control strategies as well as local practices of control have shaped the circumstances of current agricultural colonisation, and, in particular, the processes involved in peasant mobilisation and their relationship with the state.

In the pre-colonial era, access to land was spatially and functionally adapted to the demands of royal power with the objective of placing the agricultural production and labour force under the effective control of the state through a system of taxation. Later, in the context of the development of the European world-economy, the French intervened in Cambodia to extract land and forest rent. Access to land became a highly militarised matter and the market-driven modernisation of land tenure regimes (forest enclosures and land titling) initiated or reinforced social differentiation and exclusion processes within the peasantry. The Khmer Rouge state nationalised land resources and strictly controlled their access, so as to impose a primitive style of agrarian accumulation. In the post-conflict reconstruction period, high-ranking government officials became central actors in controlling forest enclosures and the timber market. As a consequence of current neoliberal modernisation, access to land is adapted to the institutions of global food marketing.

Throughout this history the balance of power between state and markets has evolved along with the disciplinary instruments of land control (boundaries, taxation and markets). However, these mechanisms have always served a circular sovereign power structure and have contributed to subordinating the peasantry to the state and/or market elites. Incarnated by the King, the Protectorate, the Khmer Rouge or the post-conflict political leaders, these sovereign systems of power were built on controlling forests and agriculture, as well as the people whose lives depend upon them. The emergence of government-like power and land control instruments (what we refer to as neoliberal tools) is, of course, embedded in this historical context of violence. These tools are used by the army, political parties and the market. Pilgrim (2010) argues that when they are coupled with the threat of force, initially employed by the military for territorial acquisition and control in warfare, these neoliberal tools for land management and territorial development have become institutionally deviant in the sense that force is legitimised by government institutions against private citizens and interests.

However, peasants are not resigned to passivity in this exercise of power. The history of the region is also one of struggle and resistance. The dissidence of the northwest in relation to the central power of the government has prompted the political and economic rapprochement between Thailand and local patronage networks and also fuelled trade/smuggling of forest and agricultural products. Driven from Thailand, these networks form the basis on which the region penetrates the world agro-industrial markets. In this context, migrations are part of the continuing process that brought important peasant populations to the northwest and also resulted in establishing historical continuity in the relations between regions (in particular, the southwest and the northwest). These migrations are aligned with

national policies but not controlled by government; the peasant household is the main locus of agency in the management of these migrations that form part of strategies for managing vulnerability.

The case studies focus on the ethnography of land acquisition and how it fosters a diversity of circumstances under which land control strategies occur. They also assess the impact these strategies have on the spatial as well as economic structure of new territories.

At the local level, land control and power are undoubtedly twin forces. The local authorities and warlords that emerged after the KR reintegration were legitimised in their control of land distribution. Some general rules were established to frame the land distribution, but the local authority had a lot of discretion in their implementation. The emerging spatial structure of these new territories is a mosaic of large and small landholdings. The large landholdings (considered to be KR spoils of war) were usually passed on to businessmen through market land transfer (high-ranking KR leaders were entrenched and no longer visible). Smaller landholdings were redistributed to migrant households by a local authority (the representative of the state), or directly by a warlord acting in a stateless institutional context.

The peasant's position vis-à-vis this power varies and peasant attitudes that favour one or another form of land control result in differentiated state formation processes. This case illustrates three forms of land control, which, in turn, reflect three types of peasant mobilisation: 1) in Prey Thom, the peasant accepted the control over the distribution of land by the ex-Khmer Rouge local authority, and in particular the capture of the land rent by the elite and the socio-economic differentiation resulting from it; 2) in Boeung Pram, the peasants demonstrated their support for the KR legacy and the large land enclosures inherited through the reintegration policy, even if they remained unprotected by the state; 3) in the Boeung Pram/Bou Choum case, peasants resisted this KR legacy and mobilised to create new solutions to land distribution with state actors. There are similarities and differences between these cases that help to inform our understanding of state formation along the northwest agricultural frontier.

The first two cases illustrate peasant acceptance or support of the rules under which they received the land from the village authority or KR landlord. The resulting peasant mobilisation worked to legitimise the land control practices of the elite; as if an agreement – elsewhere referred to as a contract (Sikor and Lund 2009) – would bind the elite and the peasantry. Favouritism and exclusions are key components of the land distribution process, but they are risks for the peasants.

In both cases, the choice of land control is not a deliberate political decision made by the peasants; it is an act of opportunism. The factors that influence peasant decision making are highly contingent on their livelihood circumstances and on the network that facilitates the peasant's migration. The migrations, which nourish agricultural colonisation, are driven by the necessity to acquire land (push factor) and guided by the proximity of family-acquaintance networks (pull factors). The prevalence of migrants from neighbouring districts and the southwest region of Cambodia is significant and was quantified in the 2008 demographic census data (Diepart and Dupuis 2012). Opportunism is key, and we suggest that the legitimacy of power and the attitude of the peasant towards it are not fixed and absolute, but rather dynamic and changing. In the first two cases, the agreement between a land recipient and the elite is negotiated individually between the elite and the household, without the interference of a community-based institution that would be a defender of their rights. The absence of a solid community mediator tends to reinforce the disparity between the elite and the peasants.

The outcomes of peasant mobilisation regarding state formation are distinct. In Prey Thom (Case 1) the KR reintegrated the national administration and it is recognised as the legitimate authority by the Royal Government. In this context, the state develops through the institutionalisation of asymmetric social relations of production (polarisation of wage labour/capital) which results from contrasting land control practices. In Boeung Pram (Case 2), the process develops in an ostensibly stateless institutional context. The Cambodian state does not condemn the large landholdings (this would contradict their own KR reintegration policy), but clearly does not approve of them and very likely

will not prioritise any state projects in the area (social infrastructure, roads, etc.). Ultimately, peasants undergo a double-faceted marginalisation.

Case 3 (conflict in Boeung Pram – Bou Choum) is characterised by a totally different form of state formation. The mobilisation of peasants against the KR legacy is driven by a claim over a piece of land on a warlord landholding. The factors that made the protest in this case possible concern, first of all, a strong leadership that can rally peasant voices. Leadership is a necessary but not sufficient condition. The peasantry also requires the support of state institutions (technical line agencies and the territorial authority) to bring about its protest. The rationale of state agencies in supporting protest is to gain some legitimacy in these stateless zones, which is a more effective way to ‘governmentalise’ the space (Peluso and Lund 2011). But the state does not venture alone into these hostile lands. A merging of interests to form a coalition is needed in order for this to happen. A form of state develops through managing conflict and requires a technical and social approach that is functional vis-à-vis the government’s neoliberal policies. It needs to be consistent with the new instruments of governance (state land classification, social land concession, community forestry and fisheries, etc.).

Beyond the diversity of dialectical relations between authority and access to land, a common theme runs through these cases of fragmented sovereignties. What unites these fragments is the struggle for territorial control between two forms of land control which are actually able to provide tenure security to peasants: the remnants of the Khmer Rouge order and that of the contemporary neoliberal state. This struggle over land control is central in current state formation processes. However, it is not simply dualistic, because, both modes of land control use similar legal instruments, mechanisms of power, knowledge systems and opportunistic alliances. In this context, peasant mobilisation resembles opportunistic behaviour that follows rules set by authorities that serve the interests of elites and markets.

## **Conclusions**

Practices of land control have been central in the agrarian development of northwest Cambodia. Processes of enclosure, labour taxation and the commoditisation of natural resources have determined the relations between peasants, markets and the state.

First, we showed how these practices of land control date back to pre-colonial times. The deployment of a cross-border network of politico-economic actors between the northwest and Thailand to exploit the forests, the political tensions between the northwest and Phnom Penh and the in-migration flows of peasants to the northwest have shaped the political economy of land and the management of the area’s natural resources. From the 1970s onwards, in a context of war and conflict, state formation and land control processes have become violent. The acts of violence exercised to maintain order over the territory have always worked to subordinate peasants to the state or to markets.

The ongoing neoliberalisation of the Cambodian state is embedded in this historical context and plays on a legitimised use of several forms of violence (military, political and economic) in land and natural resources management. These practices have provided and renewed the legitimacy of Khmer Rouge soldiers and warlords in the control of land distribution.

The second part of our argument shows how, at local levels, ex-Khmer Rouge leaders manifest authority. The state being formed along the agricultural frontier in the northwest is not homogenous or guided by a single coherent vision. The local context in which the KR authority exists is diverse. It draws on agro-ecological resource endowments and local history based upon different local power structures and connections with political and market actors. Local practices of land control have consolidated different types of local land sovereignties in ways that engage various types of relations between peasants and the local authority. This heterogeneity implies different types of peasant mobilisation and the simultaneous construction of different forms of rural territories. These fragmented sovereignties are embedded in a centralised agrarian political economy through a dense patronage network with strong vertical accountability. In addition, there is no real political will by the central government to identify and manage these contradictions between the disparate local power structures.

In this context, the very future of the Cambodian peasantry remains uncertain. We have highlighted the increase of agricultural wage labour as a direct consequence of land and capital concentration. The institutionalisation of wage labour and the development of the necessary instruments to tackle the community, economic, social and environmental sustainability issues form the basis on which we can further describe future agrarian transformations and their impacts on the peasantry in northwest Cambodia.

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