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"Up" and "Down". "Zomia" and the Bru of the Central Vietnamese Highlands

Part II.: Fleeing the State or Desire for Modernity? Reflections on Scott and Salemink[1]

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Abstract: In the first part of my study, based on micro-historical data related to Scott's hypothesis, I examined whether the Bru were native to their current territory. I came to the conclusion that the Bru are, if not "native," at least *the oldest known* inhabitants of this area, and although their history is inseparable from the histories of the surrounding states, they are not a people fleeing from – and only partially because of – the latter. In part two, I examine the other side of the coin: the issue of state evasion, proving that notwithstanding my criticism, Scott still provides a deep insight into the Bourdieu-esque habitus of mountain-dwellers, including the Bru, and that his thesis is much more than just a "populist post-modern history of nowhere." In the final part of my paper, I refute Salemink's recent propositions contending Scott's theory, rejecting his ideas about an alleged wish for inscription into "modernity" through communism and Christianity – a wish that he attributes to hill peoples.
Keywords: Central Vietnamese Highlands, Bru ethnohistory, lowland-highlands relationship, culture change, modernity, communism, Christianity

In my book *A la recherche des Brou perdus* [In Search of the Lost Bru] (2000), and in a 2008 paper ("Whoever came here to impose himself upon us, we have accepted his rule" – in French),[2] I analyzed in detail the conspicuously pacific ideology of the Bru, the lack of any political component in their ethnic identity. Examining the Bru's encounters with the outside world,[3] from the earliest records up until my fieldwork in the 1980s, I drew attention to three adaptive survival strategies:

First, withdrawal, avoiding contact, or eventually escape. In this regard, I analyzed in detail the prerequisites of such a withdrawal: Bru demography, abundance of land,

[1] I would like to express my gratitude to my colleague and friend, Mihály Sárkány for his comments on the first version of this manuscript, most of which I incorporated into my paper.
[2] For its Hungarian version, see Vargyas 2002.
[3] By "outside world" I mean the Vietnamese and the Siamese empires from the 16th to the 19th centuries, French colonization in the 19th and 20th centuries, and the Vietnamese Socialist Republic since 1945.

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traditional mobility patterns including crossing state borders, and the like – all of them important points in Scott's argumentation. I concluded that the Bru are a non-violent, introverted, shy and gentle people whose most typical behavior is avoiding confrontation and withdrawing into an "uninhabited" forest. Second, borrowing and incorporating a great number of foreign elements into their own culture, i.e., a surprising readiness for "becoming similar" to neighboring cultures and for culture change. In both tangible and intangible Bru culture, I pointed out a great number of foreign (Lao/Phu Tai and Viet) elements, proving the importance of this mimicry-like behavior, which – together with trade, a well-known means of maintaining peace and formally of great importance to the Bru[4] – expresses the same fundamentally peaceful behavior. Third and last, a (seeming) readiness to accept any political domination over them and yet at the same time maintaining their ethnic identity.

The three strategies – despite their apparent contradictions – are different manifestations of one and the same habitus. Let us concentrate on the first and third points, which are in evident connection with Scott's thesis and which are, in fact, a conspicuous illustration of his "weapons of the weak:" "foot dragging, dissimulation, desertion, false compliance, pilfering, feigned ignorance, slander, arson, sabotage, and so on (…), these Brechtian or Schweikian forms of class struggle (…) [that] *typically avoid any direct, symbolic confrontation with authority*" (Scott 1985:XVII-XVIII, my emphasis).

Avoiding close contact, confrontation or foreign domination by withdrawing or escaping into the woods or, failing that, quick yet actually feigned submission to foreign domination is perhaps the Bru's most typical behavior. Since the "discovery" of the Bru in the last third of the 19th century, our sources do not cease to mention the timid, almost cowardly nature of the Bru. Their earliest mention by the French Doctor Harmand, for example, says:

> "I meet a lot of savages [during the first crossing of the territory inhabited by the Bru, G.V.] (...) As soon as they spot me, they hide or run away; when escaping is impossible, they pass by me without looking at me, pretending they had not seen me, but not succeeding in hiding their agitation. (…)"
>
> "I come across a fairly large number of Moï[5] (...) Upon my approach, they hide themselves cleverly in the underbrush, vanishing from sight as if they were ghosts, not even a dry twig cracking under their feet. (…)"
>
> "In the evening, still alone, I run into a group of savages who, gripped by a mad terror at my sight, throw down their weapons and kneel before me." (Harmand 1879-80:302, 308 and 310; my translation.)

Reading the first two accounts, one might think that this could be attributed to fear, the avoidance of strangers, or the dreadful novelty of a first encounter with a white man. The third case, however, when the Bru – having assessed the hopelessness of armed resistance

[4] The Bru were traditional middlemen with their elephants between the seaside and the Vietnamese Cordilleras.

[5] *Moï* = old Vietnamese pejorative word appropriated by the French for the general description of mountain dwellers, something like "savage."

– throw down their weapons and kneel before the mighty stranger, clearly shows that readily submitting to those more powerful and the bodily gestures associated with it are a deep-seated form of behavior in the Bru's habitus. At the beginning of the French colonization, in 1905, the French governor ("résident supérieur") of Quảng Trị, a certain Valentin, reports the following in his handwritten account[6]: "*I could hardly imagine a Moï tribe that could be governed more easily than the Kha-Lu* [i.e., Bru, G.V.] (...) Since *they accepted the rule of the Kingdom of Annam without reservation*, the mandarins of the province have been governing them to the fullest extent, without any problems" (Valentin 1905:8–9, published in Vargyas 2000:182; my translation, my emphasis).

Half a century later, in 1947, the Bru's fear of foreign powers was even more emphasized by another unparalleled document, Lieutenant Barthélémy's detailed military report, which deals with the issue of the designation and re-definition of the border between Vietnam and Laos, while giving a detailed account about the peoples living here.[7] I quote: "The long-haired, almost naked Kha Leu, living in miserable huts that they move frequently, having no home industry and ignorant even of weaving, living only on rice produced on their clearings and on products of the forest, *perpetually resemble hunted animals. Fearful to the point of being despairing, suspicious even to the point of falsehood, they live in constant fear of the invaders, be they Annamite, Laotian or French*" (Barthélémy 1947:10, published in Vargyas 2000:267; my emphasis).

All this is in complete harmony with what I witnessed almost a century later among the "Vân Kiều" and "Tri" in Khe Sanh and Tchépone: the peaceful, almost timid, reticent attitude of the Bru. The following is an example of their first reaction to the foreign intruders and their instinctive withdrawal: on one of my trips between 1985-1989, talk of a Vietnamese surveying engineer came up, whom I did not meet myself but whose task was said to be the mapping of the country's "uninhabited" areas for the purposes of a possible future Vietnamese resettlement project.[8] Although during my stay, until the end of 1989, the plan remained merely a rumor, it still created a tense atmosphere among those who knew of it. Typically, one of the first reactions to my question,

[6] This unique manuscript, *Rapport ethnique sur les moïs de Quảng Trị* [Ethnic Report on the Savages of the Province of Quảng Trị], is found in the Manuscript Archive of the EFEO Paris Library, under MS 378/1905. For its first French publication, see Vargyas 2000:179–201 (Appendix I).

[7] This 40-page document, both typed and printed, is courtesy of my colleague M. Ferlus (Paris). For its first French publication, see Vargyas 2000:257–297 (Appendix IV). I will return to this document later.

[8] "Internal colonialism," or the large-scale resettlement of parts of the majority constituents from the overpopulated plains to the mountainous, "uninhabited" areas populated by minorities, was during my fieldwork (1985-1989) not yet known in the areas inhabited by the Bru. However, in some parts of Vietnam – like elsewhere in Southeast Asia, such as Indonesia – internal resettlements have become state-level policies in 1975, after the reunification of the country (cf. Hardy 2005), but the process interestingly missed Quảng Trị and was much more typical to the Central Highlands (formerly known as Cao nguyên Trung phần, now known as "Tây Nguyên:" Đắk Lắk, Đắk Nông, Gia Lai, Kon Tum, Lâm Đồng provinces).

"What are you going to do when that happens?" was "We'll leave.[9] We do not want to live with them."

This evasive behavior is also confirmed by the 300- to 400-year history of the Bru – outlined in the first part of my study (Vargyas 2016) – in which there are no known instances of armed conflict, resistance or war, neither between individual groups of Bru nor with foreign invaders, although it is known, for example, that they had been victims of the Siamese raids of the 18–19th centuries, and that they had been resettled in large numbers on the right bank of the Mekong. Likewise, there are no accounts of a potential resistance from the Bru in Vietnamese chronicles, which seems to suggest that the Kinh penetrated the mountainous region without any actual confrontation.[10] Finally, the shield and the sword, devices par excellence of hand-to-hand combat, are characteristically absent from the weapons of the Bru – unlike their neighbors, the Katu and the Tà Ôi – only the spear and crossbow, weapons (also) used for hunting, are known.[11] Because

It should be noted that there is no need for artificial or violent intervention to change the demographic landscape. The process takes place spontaneously, "naturally"—but it is nonetheless colonialism. Take the example of the district capital of Hướng Hóa Khe Sanh. Before French colonization, Khe Sanh was an insignificant Vietnamese *huyện* [rural district] center on the edge of the Annam Empire, in the heart of Bru country, where some half a dozen or less Vietnamese functionaries resided (Harmand 1879-80:308ff). Colonial Route No. 9, built by the French on the site of the former pedestrian paths, gradually opened the area to strangers, starting at the turn of the century. Shortly afterwards, Vietnamese traveling merchants settled down along the road. A century later, Khe Sanh developed into a vibrant Vietnamese town, despite the casualties of about half a century of civil war: in the 1989 census, the majority of the 21,000 Vietnamese in the district lived in Khe Sanh and its vicinity. It is also worth noting that this population is roughly the same as the total number of Bru living in the Hướng Hóa *district* (1989:22, 800, 1999:23, 121), and this district is one of the most densely populated.

[9] The Bru word is *de* = "leave, abandon, go."

[10] And it was so. Li Tana (1992:129–147) expounds the fact that the Nguyen rulers of the 17–18th centuries, threatened from the north by the Trinh and expanding southward, not being able to afford to be attacked from the side or from behind from the west, that is, from the mountainous regions, have been particularly peaceful towards the people of the mountains. While in the south they pushed a policy of power – concomitant with the pacification of defeated peoples – in the west they pushed a policy of "reconciliation rather than control" (1992:131). As a result, during the two centuries in question, mountain peoples (but not the Bru) took part in only five uprisings against the Nguyen! It was also a part of the policy of reconciliation that, while in terms of traditional Vietnamese–Highlander relations tax payment was almost the only form of contact, in Central Vietnam this relationship was of a highly economic nature—that is to say, the exchange trade in which the Bru played an active role (cf. later), had a very important role; in any case, Nguyen economic policy was based on maritime and land trade, as opposed to the traditional Vietnamese farming model. The good relationship with the mountains and their inhabitants was so important to the Nguyen that they received special emphasis in the ritual-religious field through some unique rituals. Such rituals were, for example, the *mở núi* = "opening the mountains," as opposed to the North Vietnamese *son phòng* = "defense against the mountains" ritual; or the *đi nguồn* = "going to the source," read: "going to the mountains and collecting valuable things;" or the *lễ cúng chủ đất cũ* = "offering a sacrifice to the former [and perceived as a ghost] master of the land." According to Li Tana, one of the distinctive features of *Đàng Trong* (i.e., the Nguyen Empire), as opposed to North Vietnam, was that the Viet were partially mixed with the mountain dwellers, or rather, lived in close proximity of each other. Despite all this, the chapter devoted to the contact between the Vietnamese and highlanders concludes that there was no intermarriage between the two populations, and that the Viet were traditionally afraid of the mountains and their inhabitants.

[11] It is worth noting that one equipment *par excellence* of the Bru *shaman* is the sword, which is, however, used only for divination.

of this peaceful, "friendly" behavior – which is in direct opposition to the aggressive, warlike habitus of the Katu and Tà Ôi – I thought, following and in agreement with M. Piat (1962), that the etymology of the name used for the Bru, *kalơ* (Kha Leu, Ca Leu/ Ca Lu, etc.), which is still unexplained to this day, might go back to the Bru word *kalơ* = "friend" (Vargyas 2000:134–135 and 2008).

In summary, generalizing a contemporary description of the *Laotian* Bru*:* "The (...) khá[12] tribe that we encounter in this place is extremely peaceful" (Macey 1905:31). Since the very first descriptions of them, the Bru have come across as a people who avoid contact and conflict with strangers, retreating and even fleeing in such situations, and, if that is not possible, easily surrendering to those more powerful. To quote another early French source, Captain De Malglaive:

> "Oh, the violence! It is the *ultima ratio* in Kha country, as it is elsewhere. As soon as it is employed in self-defense, or by the local police force, without the intervention of strangers (who hold a direct and immediate superiority), the natives will easily submit to it. They easily recognize the supremacy of Europeans and accept their laws without resistance, provided that they leave them their personal liberty and the independence of their race on the land where they were born." (Malglaive 1902:123, my emphasis.)

This quote leads us to the following topic: what happens if (or when) this retreat becomes impossible for various reasons? Let us turn to our sources again. In Lieutenant Barthélémy's 1947 report, the above quoted paragraph continues as follows:

> "The long-haired, almost naked Kha Leu, living in miserable huts that they move frequently, having no home industry and ignorant even of weaving, living only on rice produced on their clearings and on products of the forest, *perpetually resemble hunted animals. Fearful to the point of being despairing, suspicious even to the point of falsehood, they live in constant fear of the invaders, be they Annamite, Laotian or French.* The eternal target between two great powers whom they only know by their representatives, the Annamite '*linh*'[13] and the Laotian '*phulit*,'[14] all of whom loot and brutalize them to the best of their abilities; passing from the authority of Savannakhet to the domination of Quangtri without knowing the reason, and especially without having been asked their opinion; unable to move freely as they see fit, sell their rice and buy salt and buffalo wherever they please, *the Kha Leu ask but one thing: let them live peacefully. This dream is the only driving force of their existence: in all circumstances, this is what motivates them to act.*" (Barthélémy 1947:10, published in Vargyas, 2000:267; my emphasis.)

Barthélémy – and this is what really matters to us – goes into further detail about the ways in which the Bru living on the two sides of the [Vietnam-Laos] border, on the geographic and political periphery, taking advantage of the opportunities, declaring

[12] *Khá* = old Lao pejorative word appropriated by the French for the general description of mountain dwellers, something like "slave."

[13] *Linh* = Vietnamese word meaning "soldier," in compound words: border guard, police officer, member of any armed body.

[14] *Phulit* = Lao word meaning "policeman;" the "corrupted" Lao pronunciation of the French word "police."

themselves sometimes as Laotian, sometimes as Vietnamese subjects, moving back and forth between the two countries, try to escape tax liability or any kind of foreign dominance. First, with regard to the "nomadism" of the Bru – which he attributes to the depleted fertility of the soil on the Vietnamese side caused by the over-utilization of clearings – he talks about the continual migration of the Bru from east to west, from Vietnam to Laos, to which "the [French, G.V.] colonial authority eventually had to acquiesce, acknowledging the triumphant moment of inertia of the Kha Leu and the fact that this migration is a real natural phenomenon, impossible to eradicate or even control" (Barthélémy 1947:13, published in Vargyas 2000:270). He then goes on to say:

> "The fact that the Kha Leu of Annam overran Laos made it impossible to make any satisfactory regulation on the Laos-Annam border issue. *For a people as independent and egocentric as the Kha Leu,* this tense atmosphere [presented earlier in the report, G.V.] burdened with constant conflicts is an ideal climate for *realizing their dream, which we already mentioned above: to achieve that the invaders leave them alone.* Further confusing the already confounding maps, but at the same time counting on each of them, *taking advantage of the benefits that both camps offer, without noting their disadvantages*, declaring to the Laotians that they are Annamites, while being careful not to be registered on the Hướng Hóa [= Khe Sanh, Vietnam] tax rosters, the Kha Leu, with their everlasting complaining, manage to make even the simplest possible situations incomprehensible. *Their sole purpose is to exclude themselves from the control of public administration representatives, whatever the administration. The Kha Leu have been playing this turncoat game with remarkable hypocrisy since the beginning*. Starting in the 15th century, although they lived in the territory of the King of Vientiane, they paid tribute to the Emperor of Annam. When a century later the Phu Tai slaughtered the 'sadet'[15] of Ban Dong village and extended their sovereignty to all mountain tribes in the country, the Kha Leu took shelter under the protective wings of the Empire of Annam. When, however, their cultivable lands diminished, they became Laotians again and migrated westward, but again became Annamites as soon as they had to pay taxes, which is higher in Laos than in Annam. Many of them moved back east when the Laotian government wanted to make them work [read: *forced labor,* G.V.] on Colonial Route No. 23 under construction at that time. And nowadays the Kha Leu, being subject to the tyranny and oppression of the Viet Minh's secret committees, have suddenly remembered that they are actually Laotians: they talk about their Laotian Kha brothers with deep emotions and submit petitions to join them in Tchépone, but will be ready to become Vietnamese as soon as the tax collector appears. *This turncoat policy of the Kha Leu* can also be caught out in a large number of villages on both sides of the border: depending on the events, it only takes them a few moments to become loyal subjects of Annam or Laos as needed. *Caught between the anvil of Annam and the hammer of Laos, the Kha Leu believe that they can use any means to benefit from this dangerous situation—for the lowest price.* In Kha Leu country, it is not the strongest one who is right but the one who demands the least. It is beyond doubt, however, that up to the war, the authorities of Quảng Trị were far more understanding and liberal than the Savannakhet authorities, especially from a fiscal point of view." (Barthélémy 1947:15–16, published in Vargyas 2000:272–273; my emphasis.)

[15] *Sadet* = originally a religious-political leader in the language of the Jarai, one of the most well-known Vietnamese mountain tribes. Here, in the figurative sense, something like "local chief."

This to-the-point, clear report contains almost all the things that Scott writes about in his book (2009): fear of contact with state powers increasingly extending their reach through distance-demolishing techniques, retreat to the geo-political periphery to avoid them, a seemingly willing acceptance of foreign authority while also wriggling out of such control, a stubborn insistence on personal liberty and independence on the periphery, a "turncoat" policy in pursuit of all these, etc.; that is, to quote him again: "foot-dragging, dissimulation, desertion, false compliance, (...) feigned ignorance (...) sabotage, and so on" (Scott 1985:XVII).

All of these "weapons of the weak" *of the past* described by Barthélémy and others were conclusively reinforced by my own fieldwork. In my aforementioned article (2008), in analyzing the Bru statements that suggest a seeming lack of any political component in their ethnic identity, or else its rapid shifts ("we have accepted the rule of anybody that has come here"), I found that the key to understanding it lies in two factors: on the one hand, in Bru, or generally "Montagnard," socio-political organization, which lacks an overarching political-administrative unit beyond the level of the local group or village, "tribe" being a loose linguistic-cultural entity, and where this results in identity being primarily tied up with kinship; and on the other hand, in the center/periphery relationship characteristic of the Thai/Lao type of "feudal" political systems *(muang)*, in which a relative and smooth relationship exists between center and periphery: what is center in a smaller unit, becomes periphery in a larger one. In such systems, the periphery enjoys a relatively great independence, provided that it accepts the sovereignty of the larger, all-embracing political unit and periodically and symbolically reasserts it, and that it duly pays an often symbolic tax. Given these two prerequisites, i.e., that the center does not interfere too much with the matters of the periphery while the latter does not contest the supremacy of the former, the system functions smoothly in the long run.

I concluded that the Bru, just as other highlanders, have been living *on the periphery*, albeit *within* the political systems surrounding them. In order to maintain their relative independence –and in sharp contradistinction to their aggressive, warlike neighbors, the Tà Ôi and the Katu – they have developed a "smooth" strategy. "It consists of accepting the overall frameworks of the embracing political system, arousing as little attention and causing it as little trouble as possible, remaining unnoticed, seemingly integrated, being *in* and *outside* of it at the same time" (Vargyas 2008:363). While the identity of the ruler is evidently of no importance to them ("we have accepted the rule of anybody that has come here"), they keenly insist on their privileged liberty on the periphery of the political system. In short: "if you leave us alone, we accept you as a ruler"—meaning that "for preserving their *freedom* on the periphery, the Bru are willing to give up even their *independence*" (Vargyas 2008:366).

To reinforce the above, I will provide a couple of examples of these "weapons of the weak" utilized by the Bru, based on a yet unpublished, more than 18-hour-long tape-recorded life history of a Bru (in Vietnamese "Vân Kiều") man.[16] The selected excerpts – which obviously represent only a small, but in terms of this paper extremely important,

[16] The recordings were made in the Bru language in 1989 in Quảng Trị Province, in the vicinity of Khe Sanh/Hướng Hóa, where I had been working between 1985–1989 (for a total of 18 months). The recordings were transcribed and translated in 2007-2008. I am currently working on the publication of the entire material as a book.

part – illustrate the "shy" worldview, adaptation strategies and techniques, and the "turncoat" behavior of the Bru discussed above. I have chosen one or two characteristic details for each topic, but the reader should keep in mind that further examples could be listed for any of the statements.

The protagonist of the story, *Khỡi Sarâng,*[17] was born around the late 1930s–early 1940s in the vicinity of Khe Sanh. Like most of his fellow Bru, he was brought into contact with the North Vietnamese communist guerillas as a young boy. During the French period of the war, he was too young to get involved. He first married in 1959. In the same year, the South Vietnamese government imprisoned him for two years in Quảng Trị for "communist work." After his release, between 1961 and 1965, he became chief in his native village, but worked again for the revolutionary troops. In 1965, he left the communist side and moved to the "fortified hamlet" in Khe Sanh with his entire village. From 1965 to 1968, he was a soldier in the service of the American troops. In 1965 and 1967, he underwent military training in Pleiku; in 1968, during the siege of Khe Sanh, he fled to the region of Cam Lộ where he lived in the refugee camp in the village of Kũa. He lost his entire family there, and later remarried. Around 1972, he returned to his home region, where he lived until his death (probably in 1992).

The theme that the Bru accepted any type of dominance ("we have accepted the rule of anybody that has come here" or, in literal translation, "whoever imposed himself upon us, we have accepted his rule") runs through most of Texts 1–3. *Khỡi Sarâng* again and again reaffirms what, as we saw, was the key motivation behind the behavior of the Bru in the past: respecting the superiority of those who are stronger (be they Vietnamese, French or American), submitting themselves, and assuming timidity consciously and explicitly. This behavior is obviously that of the weak, who know from experience that resistance is impossible for them. The quotes address the question of whose side the Bru fought on in the civil war in Vietnam and why.

Text 1:
KS: "That's true. Whoever has come here, we have accepted his rule! Generally speaking, we do not like fighting. […] We fear being killed, destroyed. If they [the Vietnamese] say they will shoot us, we have to accept that they will shoot us indeed. We, the Bru, we are not a warlike people, we do not harm each other. When we are ordered to 'enter [join] the army,' we enter it."

Text 2:
KS: "We Bru all are like that! Whenever and whatever armies came here, we fought hand in hand with them." GV: *Whenever and whatever armies came here, you fought on their side?* KS: "Whenever and whatever armies came here and needed soldiers, we entered that army. Firstly, because we got food and clothes; secondly, because it is all the same for us what country it is. We Bru do not want a home and a country."

Text 3:
KS: "Whoever's soldiers we were, we did it by command, but we disliked dying! We did not like it at all." GV: *What do you mean you did it by command?* KS: "We were always ordered:

[17] *Khỡi Sarâng* is a pseudonym, which the delicate subject calls for.

'somebody has to go,' or 'you have to go,' and nobody could reply 'I won't go!' So, we did it. One entered the army only because one was forced to do that. You could not say to the French that you did not want to."

This last text brings us to the adaptation strategies of the Bru: the seemingly "turncoat," "treacherous" behavior and false-compliance. Text 3 then continues:

KS: "Thus, we informed the revolutionaries of that [i.e., that they were forced to become French soldiers, G.V.]! At that time, you know, the communists were much more flexible. If you entered the French army, you entered it. Once it happened, they [the communists] talked to you this way: 'all right, but when we fight, and you shoot, do not shoot us, shoot above our head!'" GV: *Did you really agree on this?* KS: "Yes. 'Shoot above our head!'" GV: *That you should not shoot them?* KS: "Not at all. 'Let somebody else shoot! Shoot above our head!' And when we actually shot above their head, they knew immediately that in front of them were 'good' people! And later they inquired specifically after the name of that person, 'who was there, who was that Bru'?"

In another example, in a text too long to be quoted here, *Khõi Sarâng* told me a story about how they once succeeded in securing themselves from both warring parties by informing them and mutually denouncing them to each other, considering themselves to be the allies of both: "We had one road for going and another for coming back." The lesson in this is that the Bru always rally on the side of the one who is present and *immediately* dangerous, thus oscillating between the two parties according to circumstances.

It often came up in interviews what the Bru consider "nice behavior" towards them, namely, the avoidance of direct pressure, the preservation of their freedom of choice and their personal liberties – in line with the cited statements of Barthélémy and others. Text 4 gives a poignant insight into this Bru mentality:

KS: "If we accepted their [French, G.V.] rule, this was because they treated us well, and when we met them, they did not harm us. We accepted them only because of that! When they told us to have it our own way, go about our own business, wherever we want to go we could go, whatever we wanted to do we could do, whatever we needed we could get it for ourselves, nobody should do harm to anybody, or speak evil of anybody – everything was immediately all right between us! And if nowadays the Vietnamese would not hold daily briefings, if all of us could cut trees wherever we please, if we could go wherever we want, and we would not need papers and permissions for everything – everything would immediately be all right between us! Yet nothing but those 'papers'! You can only go anywhere if you have papers, we are told again and again to not cut the trees, 'don't do it!' and we obey all the time. If we would not do so, we would go to prison. (…) That's how we are, the Bru people! And if even one of us is killed, hundreds will be shaking, we are all afraid if even one of us is liquidated! 'You see, they killed one of us, these ones are serious!' Yes, we are a very unfortunate people. If we had our own chief, somebody from among us, we would not endure it any more, it is not impossible that we would fight them!"

The same opinion is echoed in Text 5:

> KS: “If the Vietnamese came and ordered us to fight on their side, we fought with them! If the Americans came and ordered us to fight on their side, we fought with them. If they take us to war, we fight on their side, we are in an ‘elder brother–younger brother’ relationship. But if any other country comes here and takes us into war and, what’s more, treats us well, we shall get into the same ‘elder brother–younger brother’ relationship’ with them.”

The ultimate points the interviews brought out are survival and well-being: food and clothes are of the highest value for the Bru. *Khỡi Sarâng* repeatedly asserts that these are the main goals of their life, the main motives for their actions. Text 6 offers an indisputable evidence of this:

> KS: “We were always ordered, ‘somebody has to go,’ or ‘you have to go,’ and nobody could reply ‘I won’t go!’ So, we did it. But if somebody had said, ‘if anybody is willing to enter the army, he should, but whoever dislikes it should not enter it’ – nobody would have entered it! But again, ‘if anybody is willing to enter the army, he should, but whoever dislikes it should not enter it, but those who enter it will not know penury’ – everybody would have wanted to enter the army! He had everything he needed, food and clothes, whatever he wanted. This is a nice life! That’s how we Bru are!” GV: *And if you had gotten food and clothes from one side, and you had gotten them from the other side, too, was it all the same to you which side you rallied on?* KS: “Yes, for us it is all the same, we rally to any of them! We are interested only in food and clothes; whether invited or not, if we live well, young and adult alike will enter the army.” GV: *Did you not enter it because you were communists in your heart of hearts, or true friends of the Americans?* KS: “No, in our heart of hearts we all want to eat and clothe ourselves well, that is how we Bru are! We would like to eat and clothe ourselves well, and wherever we will be given that, we will rally on that side immediately.”

Let us resume then. Both our historical-archival sources and my own field data clearly confirm the depth and accuracy of Scott’s analysis, and the acuteness of his conclusions. The state evasion of the Bru, the “weapons of the weak” they use in order to escape from the inevitable consequences of their contact with those who are stronger, to evade controllability, legibility and taxability, their fears and subsequent reactions, their escape or quick submission, their desires and their goals, their “habitus” in the Bourdieu-esque sense – all these fit perfectly with what Scott generally said about “Zomian” peoples. Thus, without knowing the Bru and referring to them even once, his work (Scott 2009) is illuminating for us, and remains – far from being just a “populist post-modern history of nowhere” (Brass 2012) – one of the key publications that will serve as inspiration for many years to come, notwithstanding his factual misstatements, deficiencies, sweeping generalizations, exclusive wording, and all else that I argued in the first part of my paper, and all that could and should be contended (e.g., the question of “intentionality”).

Scott's insight and depth of understanding gains importance particularly in light of Salemink's (2015) recent writing, which reflects on and contends with Scott through a diametrically opposed proposal. "Inspired by a sympathetic but critical reading" (2015:392) of Scott, he offers "a contrasting vision of Highlander motivations and desires from the Central Highlands of Vietnam" (2015:388). He argues that "the postcolonial state in the present era of globalisation operates as much through attraction as through coercion and dispossession, and that Highlanders often do not seek to evade the state, but seek to belong to ecumenes that transcend their social spaces and embody modern universals" (2015:395). "Highlanders were often motivated by the desire to become modern, and enacted such desires by joining ecumenes that embody modern universals, in particular revolutionary and Christian ecumenes, exemplifying oppositional pathways to modernity" (2015:388). Both paths, namely, revolutionary and Christian conversion,

> "(…) are predicated on an abandonment of traditional cultural notions and habitus, and on the inscription into national and transnational ecumenes. (…) Historically, Highlanders' embrace of a revolutionary ecumene may have been an act of resistance against the states that they knew – the colonial state and the South-Vietnamese state – but it ended up tying them firmly with the state-making project in their territories of the victorious revolutionary state. (…) Highlanders' embrace of an alternative, Christian ecumene can be interpreted as a localising move – against the towering presence of an oppressive national state predicated on another ethnic group, the Kinh – and simultaneously as a transnationalising move, in the sense of bypassing the state to insert themselves into a global community of faithful: a 'Christian *ummah*,' as it were." (Salemink 2015:403)

It is obvious that today, in the second decade of the 21st century, in a globalized postmodern world, it would be difficult to make generalized statements like Scott's without having them challenged by a single life history, a single person, a single agency, or a single testimony that points to an opposite example, possibility or solution. By now the Vietnamese Highlands have undergone such a social, economic, political and ethnic transformation that everything has been turned upside down compared to the past; new avenues opened for vernacular populations, their choices and constraints multiplied, and they had to face dozens of new problems, such as lifestyle changes, Vietnamese expansion, pauperization, and assimilation. For this reason, to be arguing backwards from today's point of view, to be projecting this image onto an earlier state, is a dangerous undertaking, which, in a worst-case scenario, could turn into anachronism. What today is an undeniable fact, act or opportunity, goal, desire, motivation or aspiration, was not the same yesterday – it could not be.

In fact, Salemink does not really talk about the same period as Scott. While Scott's analysis is, before all, historical in its scope, and he writes about pre-colonial and colonial states and the past approximately 2000 years, Salemink writes not about a postcolonial state but a "postcolonial state in the present era of globalization" (2015:395), i.e., about the last quarter of a century – at the most – of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam.[18] This

[18] Before the *Đổi Mới*, at the time of total political isolation, we cannot speak of globalization, of the free flow of people, ideas and goods in the Highlands of Vietnam, even if communism itself is, of course, a globalized ideology.

is a fundamental difference, even if it is true that Scott “does not refrain from making observations about the present, implying that motivations that impelled ‘Zomians’ in the past may still be at work today” (Salemink 2015:393). However, “might still be at work today” is a conditional tense which – even if proven that it is not “at work” today – does not negate its validity in the past.

So, what about the Bru? In the foregoing, I made it clear that, as far as the Bru’s past and present habitus is concerned, I am in complete agreement with Scott. It would not make sense to enter into this debate had Salemink not based his opinion – at least in part – on the Bru that I have studied in depth and am familiar with and, among others, on a few of my writings, overinterpreting my data. Although I am not doubting that his analysis may be more applicable to other parts of the Central Highlands, I still have to contend with him as far as Bru feelings, motivations, desires and aspirations are concerned. In my opinion, neither the communist nor the Christian conversion meant – or did so only partially – the “abandonment of [Bru] traditional cultural notions and habitus” (Salemink 2015:403). The devil, as usual, is in the tiny details, at the expense of grand theories.

Let us start with communist conversion. Based on the aforementioned life history recording and two years of fieldwork, I dare say that “communist conversion” – if there was such a thing at all, and I will return to this – was *not* a result of a wish of being inscribed into modernity, into the wider national and transnational ecumenes beyond their own “social space,” and only partially due to a desire for goods and services associated with modernity. The means of communist persuasion among the Bru, like everywhere in the world, were “carrot and stick,” that is, promise and coercion. I will not go into the details here;[19] let it suffice that when communist propaganda among the Bru began in the early 1930s, one powerful weapon of gaining ground was Vietnamese agitators – as if they were anthropologists doing fieldwork – spending many years among the Bru: living and working with them, learning their language, getting acquainted and accepted by them, familiarizing themselves with the area.[20] Moreover, unlike the colonists, they had the same skin color and body build as the Bru, shared a partly common historical experience, and so on. So, when the time came, and the opportunity arose, they were able to influence public opinion for their own purposes.

One way of doing this was, naturally, through promises. The hope of a better and more beautiful life is appealing to everyone, in Europe as well as in the Vietnamese Highlands. But what does that mean specifically? Politically, the most alluring promise was the – blurred and not precisely outlined – equality/independence/self-determination that the Highlanders would be given; one piece of evidence of their disillusionment with this is the poster of Ho Chi Minh and his letter of April 19, 1946 addressed to the representatives of the Congress of the Southern National Minorities in Pleiku, which to this day hangs on the walls of their huts. In the letter, which was publicly read at the conference, Ho Chi Minh referred to the Vietnamese as the blood brothers and sisters *(anh em ruột)* of the Highlands’ minorities (both in the North and South), expressly mentioning the Jörai,

[19] These issues will be addressed in detail in my planned book based on the above-mentioned life history.

[20] It seems that the posting of communist agitators in the Highlands inhabited by nationalities was a deliberate strategic consideration on the part of the Communist Party of Vietnam well before the actual civil war.

Figure 1. Poster in a Bru house with Ho Chi Minh's portrait and his April 19, 1946 letter addressed to the representatives of the Congress of the Southern National Minorities in Pleiku.

Rhade, Sedang and Bahnar from the Central Highlands. He emphasized that Vietnam was their common country, and that the reason why the majority and minority peoples had not been close in the past was "people who sowed discord and division among us," even mentioning at one point a Department for National Minorities.[21]

[21] For more on the letter, see: Hickey 1982a:392–393, for the text, see: Fall 1967:156. This letter – on account of it not being a law – was not/could not be included in the nearly 1200-page book on the Ethnic Policy and State Law of the Communist Party, published in 2000 by the Ethnic Committee of the [Vietnamese] National Assembly. However, it must be noted that it is still the standard reference in the relationship between the Vietnamese state apparatus and the nationalities, so much so that, as evidenced by the following internet links (courtesy of my friend and colleague, Csaba Mészáros), the establishment of a "Vietnamese Ethnic Minority Day" – planned since 2008 and implemented in 2013 – was also linked to the date of this letter (April 19, 1946). "The establishment of this day aims to educate expand [sic] patriotic tradition, national pride, and promote the awareness and responsibility of preserving and promoting ethnic cultural traditions and strengthening great national unity. It also aims to honour the cultural identity of Vietnamese ethnic minority groups for an advanced Vietnamese culture imbued with national identity; help ethnic groups in Vietnam understand more about each other; and assist each other in socio-economic and cultural development." See:
https://www.talkvietnam.org/2008/04/seminar-to-establish-vietnamese-ethnic-minority-day/
http://hochiminh.vn/sites/en-US/news/Pages/news.aspx?CateID=1&ItemID=594
https://www.vietnambreakingnews.com/2012/10/project-on-cultural-day-of-vietnamese-ethnic-groups-2013-approved/
http://www.vietnamtourism.com/en/index.php/news/items/6049

Interestingly, economically and in terms of lifestyle perhaps the most painful – even mentioned in public in parliamentary and municipal elections, which I heard with my own ears – unkept promise (impossible to keep and thus irresponsible, based on obvious political calculations) was that after the "victory of the Revolution," the Vietnamese and the Bru "will share the cars," i.e., the motorized means of transportation, vehicles, cars will be available [freely] to the Bru, and that "nobody will have to carry loads on foot."

Let us face it, it would be a stretch to explain these and similar desires and promises with the need for inscription into a more modern social context with an increasingly widening horizon. Even if we were to consider the attainment of political equality such a desire, in the 1930s and 1940s, communism in the Highlands of Vietnam did not at all mean a widening horizon, but rather a forced identification with a stigmatized, banned and persecuted local minority. The true appearance of the illusory idea and its international, legal, political, economic and philosophical horizons and aspects were unknown on the local and social levels not only to the mountain peoples, but even to the Vietnamese cadres who taught them. In any case, our sources have always characterized the Bru as an "independent," "egocentric" people that firmly insist on their liberty, and in this regard communism was not able to provide them with anything new—at the most, a new tool.

Rather, it is about what we call well-being, a desire for prosperity. And, it must be emphasized, well-being is *not* equal to modernity! Well-being and the need for progress existed well before modernity; within their own means, the Bru have always tried to "evolve." In one of my writings, right now only available in Hungarian but delivered in English at several conferences abroad (Vargyas 2003),[22] I reported on a failed experiment that took place during my fieldwork in 1988, when they tried to convert a swidden from dry-rice agriculture to wet-rice agriculture; I also presented a true agricultural revolution in detail, in which the Bru, at the beginning of October 1989, on their own initiative, in front of my eyes, switched from harvesting with bare hands (!)[23] to harvesting with a sickle—which also led to the radical transformation of their religious belief system. However, it was not a wider national or international world, or even modernity, that they wanted to integrate into; they just wanted to acquire the goods that would make them prosperous: abundant food—with less work. As far as well-being is concerned, as we have seen in Texts 4 and 6, *Khõi Sarâng* expresses in an unambiguous way the leitmotifs of the Bru's action, which are indeed very worldly things: food and clothing.[24] If we add comfort (car) to this, we have the three most important things that were dominant

[22] The first version of the lecture was presented in 1997 as a conference paper in Amsterdam at the 3rd International Euroviet Conference, and further developed in 2015 at the Winter School of the Ph.D. program of The International Max Planck Research School for the Anthropology, Archaeology and History of Eurasia (IMPRS ANARCHIE). For the Hungarian version, see Vargyas 2003.

[23] However incredible, even during my field trip in Quảng Trị, the Bru have been "harvesting" rice with an astonishingly "archaic" technique not even described in the professional literature: they would run their bare hands along the stalks of rice left standing (i.e., uncut) in the clearings, and collect a handful of rice with a single tug. Though this technique is very slow and painful (as it ruins their hands), what they lost on the swings, they gained on the roundabouts: instead of the normal two-stage grain retrieval (cutting & threshing), the rice grains were harvested in a single phase.

[24] According to a Vietnamese proverb, the three best things in life are: eating, getting dressed, and having sex.

aspirations among the Bru up to the time of my fieldwork (1985–1989, a year and a half in Quảng Trị and six months in 2007 in Đắk Lắk provinces).

The other means of communist conversion was the "stick." In this case, we should not necessarily think of open violence, beatings, or coercion with weapons, even though during the civil war, in more intense situations, they did occur. Rather, we should think of what Text 4 so poignantly expresses: constant bans, rules, meetings, "wishes" and "requests" voiced during them, violent means of verbal influence – I shall keep saying it until they tire of it and do it," or stressing the "elder brother–younger brother" relationship, in which the ethnic minorities are, of course, the "younger siblings" and who, therefore, "must" respect the expectations of the "elders," and then I have not even mentioned open threats. *Be it as it may, the "shy" habitus of the Bru discussed above sooner or later bent to the will of the Vietnamese*; *people everywhere ultimately subjugate themselves to the state apparatus*.

In a kinship-based society, if the elders, the leadership of the village or kinship group – in current sociological terminology, the "opinion-forming elite" – for some reason decides to affiliate with one party, in this case the communist guerrillas, the rest of the village naturally follows them, and in the essentially consensus-based framework of the decision-making mechanism, it does not even occur to anyone to go up against them and act differently. In such circumstances, the issue of "conversion" is hardly relevant: based on the aforementioned life history, I know that *Khõi Sarâng* started his "work" for the "Viet Cong" [Việt cộng] as a teenager, which by that time was considered natural in the whole region because of the long indoctrination, and *Khõi Sarâng* had been enculturated in it the same way that was customary among the Bru.

From the foregoing and from what I learned from numerous Bru stories, especially from *Khõi Sarâng*'s life history, it follows directly that the Bru, depending on the current situation and their interests, oscillated between the two warring parties. *Khõi Sarâng* himself switched camps repeatedly, eventually – when he felt let down by the communists – hiring himself out to the service of the Americans, bringing along his entire village as he was the village chief at the time. And his life history has still not ended here, because when he returned home from the fortified hamlet and refugee camp near Quảng Trị in 1972, given the new political framework, he naturally emphasized his communist history for which he was decorated; and next of kin is a social medium and cohesive force in which former political affiliation is secondary to the fact of kinship. In these circumstances, conversion to communism driven by the desire for modernity becomes an especially untenable argument.

There is one last question we have to clarify because Salemink speaks distinctly of the present, the developments of the last quarter of a century, of the "postcolonial state in the present era of globalization," but he considers the conversion to communism – if I understand it correctly – a phenomenon that took place in the past (though it is not exactly clear when). So, the question is this: we saw how it used to be in the past, but would someone want to inscribe himself into the communist world today? Today, communism is at best a failed historical attempt which everyone who personally experienced it hated or suffered from – except, of course, those who benefitted from the system, which were not few in Vietnam. Among the Vietnamese Highland minorities, however, there were no real beneficiaries to speak of. For the vast majority who experienced it personally, communism, politically, conjures up the most rigorous dictatorship, jail time, relocation

camps, cruelty, and torture; economically, a command economy that resulted in complete impoverishment, and agricultural cooperatives (in shifting cultivation!); ideologically, the non-stop fight against various enemies ("ideological deviants," "traitors," "the rich," "colonizers," "kulaks," "nobles," etc.); the total prohibition or even destruction of religious life; and finally, all the constraints on individual initiatives. Everyone who in the past 70 years ever lived or died in Vietnam, in the Highlands of Vietnam – just as in, say, Eastern Europe or the former Soviet Union – knows this from experience. And yet, if they still desired a national and even transnational world that transcends their own social space, they certainly would not seek it in communism! Let us not forget that, despite all sorts of political and economic "softening," Vietnam is still a Socialist Republic with a single party system where the ruling party is the Communist Party—that is, the country is not a market economy-based democracy. Based on all this, I do not consider it probable that in the past 30 years there would have been a massive *voluntary* conversion to communism among the mountain dwellers (and indeed in all of Vietnam). In fact, in the past it was more of a result of indoctrination and political influence than a conscious individual decision with which to demonstrate susceptibility to a new world, to modernity. Communist ideology as a theory and the (communist) practice based on it have been two different things from the beginning.

Consequently, it is not worth drawing particular conclusions from the long introductory story that Salemink (2015:391) calls an "ethnographic vignette:" the Bru communist cadre's lamentations. I do not doubt that he honestly believed what he said. But I also do not think that his opinion – which, by the way, reflects an hour-long conversation during a day trip, with a single informant, in an intermediary language (Vietnamese), without the knowledge of the context (what did the villagers think of this?) – would serve as a good standard for illustrating the Bru's goals, motivations and aspirations *in general*, especially in comparison with the richness of the sources I listed above. Contrary to what communism means to Salemink, for the Bru, this ideology was not an exposure to the world but rather a complete isolation from it.

The situation is different with Christian conversion. There are, however, some counter-arguments that should be considered. First of all, Christian (Catholic) conversion in the Central Highlands began in the last third of the 19th century. It is not clear why, when we talk about "Christianity," we only speak of Evangelist and Pentecostal Protestantism, which is spreading today at a truly revolutionary speed, and why it is only that we refer to in our discussions. Furthermore, the spread of Christianity (Catholicism) in Vietnam did not even really start among the minorities, but among the Kinh majority in the 17th century (Alexandre de Rhodes). Catholics today account for 8-10% of the country's population.[25] How do we explain their conversion? The spread of Protestantism began later, in 1911, starting from Đà Nẵng in Central Vietnam, but mainly in South Vietnam, yet it is still partially important in terms of the whole population as it constitutes only 0.5 to 2% of the

[25] See International Religious Freedom Report, 2006: "There were approximately 6 to 8 million Roman Catholics in the country, although official government statistics put the number at 5,570,000. Catholics lived throughout the country, but the largest concentrations remained in the southern provinces around Ho Chi Minh City, in parts of the Central Highlands and in the provinces southeast of Hanoi. Catholicism has revived in many areas, with newly rebuilt or renovated churches in recent years and growing numbers of persons who want to be religious workers."

population of Vietnam. Two-thirds of them, however – and this is essential – are members of ethnic minorities, both in the Northern and Central Vietnamese Highlands (Ede, Jarai, Bahnar, Koho, etc.) – a fact that definitely needs to be explained.[26]

As far as the history of this religious denomination and Christianity among the Bru in general is concerned, all that is known about it was summarized in my 2017 Hungarian-language paper (Vargyas 2017, English-language publication forthcoming). I will just outline its essence briefly: the evangelization of the Bru started relatively late compared to other regions. The Protestants arrived first,[27] and their penetration was initially carried out without European participants. We can learn from a Vietnamese-language paper dealing with the 100-year history of the Evangelical Church in Vietnam[28] that a certain Vietnamese pastor by the name of Ngô Văn Lái had been active in Khe Sanh in 1935, but we do not have any other information about him.[29] Pastor Bùi Tấn Lộc first arrived among the Bru in 1942, and his name became inseparable from the history of evangelization among the Bru.[30] However, the larger scale of spread of Protestantism among the Bru is certainly associated with the work of John D. Miller and Carolyn Paine Miller, who, supported by the Wycliffe Bible Translators[31] and the Summer Institute of Linguistics,[32] lived among the Bru in 1961-1975, doing Bible translation (in conjunction

[26] See International Religious Freedom Report, 2006: "Estimates of the number of Protestants in the country ranged from the official government figure of 500,000 to claims by churches of 1,600,000 or more. The two officially recognized Protestant churches are the Southern Evangelical Church of Vietnam (SECV), recognized in 2001, and the smaller Evangelical Church of Vietnam North (ECVN), recognized since 1963. The SECV had affiliated churches in all of the southern provinces of the country. There were estimates that the growth of Protestant believers has been as much as 600 percent over the past decade, despite government restrictions on proselytizing activities. Some of these new converts belonged to unregistered evangelical house churches. Based on believers' estimates, two-thirds of Protestants were members of ethnic minorities, including H'mong, Dzao, Thai, and other minority groups in the Northwest Highlands, and members of ethnic minority groups of the Central Highlands (Ede, Jarai, Bahnar, and Koho, among others)."

[27] I eschew Catholic proselytizing here, as they first came to Khe Sanh, the center of the territory inhabited by the Bru, in 1964, and in 1968, at the time of the Tet offensive, they had to leave (together with the Protestants). See further details in Vargyas, forthcoming.

[28] Nguyễn Văn Bình 2011.

[29] In his unpublished Ph.D. dissertation on the history of the Evangelical Church of Viet Nam between 1911 and 1965, Phu Hoang Le indicates on the map depicting the situation between 1927 and 1941 (1972:259) in Quảng Trị, in the location of Khe Sanh, with a cross but without a name, a "local church manned by Vietnamese ministers"—this most probably refers to the person of Ngô Văn Lái.

[30] We learn of him – and not by accident – from the recently published Vietnamese-language writing on the website of the Protestant Parish in Ea Hiu (Krông Pach, Đắc Lắc Province) active among the Bru displaced in 1972. See Anonymous 2016; and also Bùi Tấn Lộc 1961.

[31] Wycliffe Bible Translators, now known as Wycliffe Global Alliance (2011), is a Christian (Protestant) world organization whose purpose is to translate the Bible into all the languages of the world. Established in 1942.

[32] The Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL) is a worldwide organization for the study and advancement of lesser studied languages, and for the establishment of mother tongue-based literacy. Researching these languages, besides the scientific purposes, aims primarily at translating the Bible and establishing local community development programs. SIL International, as it is known today, dates back to 1919 (William Cameron Townsend), but was formally founded in 1934. Its activity started in Asia in 1953 (in the Philippines, from where it spread to the whole of Oceania). SIL is predominantly funded by Wycliffe Bible Translators, International, and is therefore considered its "subsidiary." See http://www.sil.org/sil and https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/SIL_International

with linguistic research, plus the creation of Bru literacy)[33] and Protestant missionary work. The location of their activity was first Khe Sanh (1961-1968),[34] and later, when the events of the war meant that Khe Sanh had to be evacuated, near the coastal Đông Hà, in Cam Lộ and Kũa,[35] where they followed the civilian population escaping the war. In 1972, they participated (see HICKEY 1982:233) in the well-organized military and propaganda operation in which, at the height of the civil war, the South-Vietnamese government saved 2,300–2,500 Bru from the advancing communist troops by air-lifting them from Quảng Trị[36] and resettling them in the province of Đắc Lắc (see NGUYEN TRẮC Dĩ 1972; HICKEY 1982b:232–233, 2002:313, 315–316). They themselves soon followed them and the retreating American troops. We have to emphasize here: the vast majority of these Bru were relocated because they were Protestants and thus considered natural allies of the Americans! From dropped hints by C.P. Miller (2016[3] Kindle Locations 158–160, 172–175), we learn that in 1975, before being captured by Vietnamese troops and transported to Hanoi, they made a visit from Ban Me Thuot to Buon Jat, to hold one last worship service for their relocated Bru brethren—that is, they were in contact with the Protestant Bru (that they converted?) until the last moment.

In light of the above, and in contrast to what Salemink ambiguously writes (2015:399),[37] it was not *after* their resettlement in the ’90s that the Bru – under the influence of the surrounding ethnic minorities – converted to Protestantism en masse, but much earlier, in the mid-1960s, and in Quảng Trị—a fact which greatly weakens Salemink’s argument. The displaced Bru, having gotten stuck in their “temporary” accommodations in the formerly Buon Jat village (now: huyện Krông Pắc, xã Ea Hiu), an originally Rhade settlement, have been until recently considered a doubly stigmatized population. For one, because they were allies of the Americans, fighting with them against the Northern Communist troops; for another, because they are predominantly Protestant, members of the Southern

[33] See Bru Bible 1981.

[34] No biography of the Millers is publicly available: I have not found any exact or detailed biographies of them in publication or on the Internet, and I have been unable to contact them. Thus, I had to compile the data about their life from scattered sources. In my book published in French (VARGYAS 2000), I put the start of their work in Vietnam at 1958; in light of current data, this is wrong. Hickey’s (2002:222–223) report reveals that they were among the last to have left Khe Sanh on January 21, 1968.

[35] In Hickey’s writings (1982b, 1993, 2002), Cua/Kũa is used in simplified script without Vietnamese diacritics. Since this place cannot be found on the current maps of Vietnam, I am not sure of its exact spelling. In Bru it is spelled Kũa, so that is what I use.

[36] There are different data on the number of relocated people. Nguyen Trắc Dĩ (1972:5 and 6) mentions 2,580 people directly after the events; at the same time, he includes (1972:9) a facsimile of the congratulatory letter written by G.D. Jacobson, Deputy Assistant to the Civil Operations and Rural Development Support/Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, to Nay Luett, Minority Affairs Minister, in which Jacobson mentions 2,301 relocated Bru—as opposed to the above 2,580. Hickey (1982b:233) also reports 2,300 Bru and several Pacoh.

[37] “In 2007, Gábor Vargyas did research in the Bru community in Ea Hiu commune, Đắk Lắk province [...] the lifeworld of the animist Bru became disenchanted. The contrasting finding, however, was that approximately half of the Bru community had converted to Evangelical Christianity which had a strong presence among the Ede and other indigenous groups in the Central Highlands (VARGYAS 2010). In other words, those Bru inserted themselves into a (simultaneously local, national and transnational) *Christian ecumene* [italics in the original, G.V.], understood here as a politico-religious community which goes beyond the local and social and which offers an idiom, style and organisation for acting on an institutionalised hope for a radically different transcendental future.”

Evangelical Church of Vietnam (SECV), a denomination that the government only recognized in 2001, 29 years after their resettlement! Their situation only improved after the 2004 Ordinance on Religion and Belief and its 2005 Implementation Decree (No. 22), and the 2005 "Instruction on Protestantism" promulgated by the Prime Minister. But even so, during my six-month fieldwork in 2007, I was forced to do fieldwork among them under paranoid circumstances, which are too early to speak of in public: I was only allowed to go to their church at the end of my stay, following some significant negotiations, permissions and inspections. The problem, as well as the objection I made in relation to communism – namely, that the ideology and its repercussions in practice are two different things – can once again be raised here. Even though the "Christian ecumene (...) as a politico-religious community (...) goes beyond the local and social and (...) offers an idiom, style and organisation for acting on an institutionalised hope for a radically different transcendental future" (Salemink 2015:399), in reality, in the Highlands of Vietnam, it manifested itself in opposition to what they hoped from it (or what Salemink thinks they attributed to it). It played a role more in shrinking the Bru's world than it did in opening it to modernity.

In the above, I reflected on Scott's and Salemink's theses based on my Bru material. Scott describes a socio-cultural formula and speaks of its implications. Salemink, on the other hand – operating with the concept of "modernity," considered by many to be useless and controversial[38] for its looseness – examines the possibility of moving away from this concept "by joining ecumenes that embody modern universals, in particular revolutionary and Christian ecumenes, exemplifying oppositional pathways to modernity" (2015:388). Based on my own material, I argued that for (some of) the Bru, joining the above-mentioned ecumenes cannot be explained with a need to transcend their own local and social space and a desire for some elusive "modern universals," but much rather with a desire to secure their lasting prosperity. This desire can be caught out in the behavior of the Bru well before "modernity," and its boundaries can be pushed earlier or later—even to the time of the adoption of iron tools. The Bru, like any other population, have never been static and have always strived to increase their "development," their well-being. Hence, the question for me is whether the traditional pattern so acutely analyzed by Scott is applicable in critical situations today, and whether there is a generational difference, a change in attitude in the habitus, goals, desires, and aspirations of the Bru. To answer this question, however, further research would be needed; my own research from 2007 seems to suggest that the traditional pattern remains in force—between and behind the scenes of communist modernity.

Finally, I would like to emphasize that modernity is a concept that is multi-faceted and changes in time. Everything I know about Bru culture is a subjective experience limited in space and time. It has been ten years since I myself have been in the field, so even I do not know all the areas inhabited by the Bru; I have spoken but with a limited number of Bru about their desires, thoughts and aspirations, so all that I wrote might just have been typical of only those Bru, and only at the time when I was there among them. Nonetheless, I have tried to faithfully convey their testimonies to the best of my abilities.

[38] See Goody (2004), who strongly criticizes the applications of the concept, in particular Giddens' version, in which modernity actually becomes an "actor."

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