

People, Forests and Narratives:
The Politics of the Community Forestry Movement
in Thailand

Surin Onprom

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Statement of Authorship

This thesis remains a copyrighted work of the author, Surin Onprom. Any errors or omissions contained within are the responsibility of the author.

This work has not previously been submitted for a degree or diploma in any other university. To the best of my knowledge and belief, this thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the thesis itself. All sources have been appropriately acknowledged.

Human Research Ethics approval was granted for the thesis prior to commencing fieldwork.



Surin Onprom
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Abbreviations and Acronyms

CBNRM	Community-Based Natural Resource Management
CF	Community Forestry
CFB	Community Forest Bill
EGAT	Electricity Generating Authority of Thailand
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
FIO	Forestry Industrial Organisation
GO	Government Organisation
HAMP	Highland Agricultural Marketing and Production Project
JoMPA	Joint Management of Protected Areas
LDI	Local Development Institute
NCFN	Northern Community Forest Network
NDF	Northern Development Foundation
NFP	National Forest Policy
NGO	Non Governmental Organisation
NLA	National Legislative Assembly
NRM	Natural Resource Management
NTFP	Non-Timber Forest Product
PFM	Participatory Forest Management
RECOFTC	Regional Community Forestry Training Center for Asia and the Pacific
RFD	Royal Forest Department
TAO	<i>Tambol</i> (sub-district) Administrative Organisation
TEI	Thailand Environmental Institute
TFSMP	Thailand Forestry Sector Master Plan
TH-HDP	Thai-Norwegian Church Aid Highland Development Project
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

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Abstract

The conflict associated with the rights of local people with regard to forests and forest resources in Thailand may be traced back to the nineteenth century. It became the subject of hot political debate at the national level in the early 1990s. The national debate surrounding the passing of the Community Forest Bill between the early 1990s and 2007 involved various political actors who held different assumptions, beliefs and knowledge regarding the relationships between people and the forest environment. In the debate, these political actors produced, distributed and used various storylines about people, forests and their relationships in order to legitimise, justify and position their political claims regarding people and forest relationships.

This thesis starts with the premise that the community forestry movement cannot be separated from the storytelling of and about local people and forests. It aims to understand the politics of forestry decentralisation in general, and the politics of the community forestry movement in particular. The thesis seeks to examine the use of people and forest narratives in the context of the long debate on the Community Forest Bill. It also examines the interplays between national and local narratives about people and the forests. In particular, it looks at how local lives, landscapes and the relationships between them have been shaped by the ways in which actors employ narratives.

The thesis involved narrative analysis and ethnography. Written and oral narratives about people and forests at the national and local level were obtained and analysed. Four broad narrative themes were identified at the national level. Adding to written narratives on national level narratives, seventeen key informants including policy makers, academia, policy advocates and forest officers were interviewed. At the local level ethnographies of two forest communities were conducted where interviews, participant observation and the “walk and talk” technique were employed to examine the local narratives responding to the national narratives.

The thesis found that actors’ policy narratives about people and forests are multiple and diverse. The multiple narratives mirrored the multiple views, assumptions and

knowledge of political actors toward the relationships between people and the forests. The storytellers deliberately assigned meanings to people, forests and their relationships by employing different terms and language. They strategically simplified stories for political reasons to mobilize political support or to destabilize policymaking assumptions. The storytellers tended to talk only about convenient issues and to deliberately hide the controversial ones. The local narratives were also diverse. In the context of resource contestations and conflicts, local people actively both produced their storylines responding to national narratives and adopted available narratives to their practices in particular the resource management practices. Although the narrative strategies helped local people to reclaim and renegotiate their rights over resources, those adopted narratives in turn became “narrative traps”, since they omitted important rights including the rights to farm and the right to harvest timber.

Figure 1: Thailand Map and Research Sites



Chapter 1

Introduction

I started framing my research proposal in 2008, the year that Thailand's Constitutional Court declared that the Community Forest (CF) Bill passed by Thai Parliament in 2007 was not valid¹. In the previous year the National Legislative Assembly (NLA) had passed the Bill, but, at least two Articles in the Bill were seen to deprive local communities of the right to access and utilise forests that they had been dependent upon for their livelihoods. Article 25 limited eligibility to set up community forests to those who had lived in and managed protected forest areas for at least 10 years prior to the Bill's promulgation. Article 35 stipulated that logging was not allowed in community forests classified as protected forests. As it turns out it was not promulgated. The failures and flaws of the Community Forest Bill reflected the conflicting views and assumptions of the social actors who were involved in its drafting and passing. One group supported a preservation idea and perceived forest resource utilisation by local communities as a threat to biodiversity conservation. This "nature-oriented" group often associated poverty with deforestation and biodiversity decline. Proponents of this notion frequently argued that communities and forests, particularly in the country's protected areas, had to be kept apart if the latter were to have a chance to survive. On the other hand, members of the "people-oriented" group claimed that local communities had long been living in harmony with nature. They criticised "scientific forestry", arguing that the state-led approach to natural resource management eroded local resource practices and knowledge. The group argued for decentralising power from the State to local communities.

My research agenda grew out of years observing and participating in the long debate about the Community Forestry Bill. In this thesis, I seek to examine the underlying assumptions and beliefs held by the various social actors regarding local people, forests and the relationships between them through storytelling about people and the forests.

¹ The Bill was passed by the NLA in November 2007, but it was challenged on the basis of community rights as indicated in the 2007 Constitution, by a group of Senators, who filed a petition in the Constitutional Court. The Court decided that the Bill was not valid because the NLA lacked a quorum when it was voted on.

As a former NGO worker, I am fully aware of, indeed have witnessed more than one claim regarding the above inter-relationships. Between 1996 and 2004, I worked for the Regional Community Forestry Training Center for Asia and the Pacific² (RECOFTC), an organisation based in Bangkok, Thailand. During this period, I joined Thailand's community forest movement, aiming to advocate the passing of the CF Bill. "We" criticised the group of conservationists and some forest officials for lacking knowledge and understanding of the relations between people and the forests. In this thesis, my research enquiry seeks not only to question the nature-oriented views against the legal recognition of community rights to forests, but also to challenge some of the views of the people-oriented advocates claiming to support forest communities.

Examining the underlying assumptions, motivations and meanings that social actors give to people, forests and the relationships between them in the particular context of forestry policy reform, I employed narrative analysis as my research methodology approach. I considered narrative analysis suited to my study given that a "narrative analyst is interested in generisable statements, [and that] propositions are determined by the extent [to which] they can be located in the particulars of a social context" (Fischer 2003 p.165). Four actors' policy narratives about people and the forests were identified and examined: official community forestry; community rights to forests; forests as the supermarket of the poor; and the conservationist narrative. These narratives emerged in the process of social actors conversing and arguing with others.

My research project was undertaken in the context of forestry reform and decentralisation in Thailand, a process often referred to as the community forest movement. The world of the community forest movement in Thailand is fraught with uncertainty, with complex and contested issues regarding people, forests and the relationships between them. Who are the people living in the forests? What forms of interaction take place between the people and the forests? Has highland agriculture caused the water in the lowland to dry up? Have forest resources contributed to poverty reduction? This study aims to examine how people, forests and the relationships that exist between them have been addressed in the policy narratives. Additional questions are raised and addressed in the thesis: Why do the language and terms employed in the

² Now the Center for People and Forests.

narratives given rise to a sense of uncertainty and to complex and contested issues? To what extent do these narratives reflect the dynamic relationships between the local people and the forest environment? In addition, this study aims to illustrate how various narratives have been used in various contexts.

The expression “people and forest narratives”, as it appears in this work, generally refers to the stories and claims that political actors tell and make about the forests and the peoples’ interrelationships with them. In the context of a limited understanding of people/forest relationships, and a paucity of empirical data, the politically-driven narratives surrounding people and the forests emerge to become political devices either for use by policy actors or by nature-oriented or people-oriented advocates. Claims about people and the forests are embedded in relations of power interacting across geographic scales. This study attempts to distinguish between the “national” and “local” scale of people and forests narratives. The “national narratives” of people and forests refer to the ways in which stories about people and forests have been framed to address national debate and policy formulation. “Local narratives”, on the other hand, refer more specifically to the stories villagers tell about their relationships with the forest environment. Both terms refer to where the narratives refer to where the narratives originated. In practice narratives move backwards and forwards between levels. The question that needs to be addressed is: whose interests are served by which people and forests narratives?

The issue of narratives in environmental and development politics have increasingly drawn the attention of various scholars in various disciplines (Blaikie et al. 2007; Forsyth and Walker 2008; Roe 1994). However, I argue that previous studies of narratives in environmental politics have paid little attention to the strategic actions contained within the narratives. Rather, they have based their argument on the idea of simplistic explanation and on imperfect dominant narratives. Such studies suggested either replacing the mainstream narrative with a counter-narrative or combining the mainstream narrative with the counter-narrative.

My thesis argues that people and forests narratives are not merely simplistic explanations of people and forests relationships. Rather, they contain a level of “strategic simplification” (Li 2002) that selectively presents only the convenient issues

pertinent to people and the forests, and strategically refuses to mention, present and address controversial issues in order to shift the political debate and resultant course of action. I reconfirm the argument that narratives have played a vital role in environmental politics or, more specifically, in the politics of people and the forests. The people and forest narratives have been constructed in order to justify, legitimise and position assumptions, beliefs, knowledge and claims relevant to the relationships between people and forests during the national debates over the drafting and formulation of the Community Forest Bill. Additionally, my thesis examines the operation of narratives in particular forest community settings. Two iconic cases of “good” and “bad” forest communities were selected for study. This work found that local communities are active participants in forest resources contestation and conflict. They construct and adopt narratives themselves in order to justify and legitimise their claims to forest resources and land. And, while these strategic local narratives may help local residents to reclaim their local resources and settlements, their rights to resources are rarely addressed through this form of strategic action. My study concludes by emphasising that people and forest narratives can be seen as actors’ political tools, strategies employed by social actors when responding to assumptions, political motivations and beliefs regarding people and forest relationships.

Research Aims

This research aims to understand the politics of forestry decentralisation in general, and the politics of the community forestry movement in particular. The specific objectives of the study are twofold. First, it seeks to examine the use of people and forest narratives in the context of the debate about the Community Forest Bill. Second, it examines the interactions between national and local narratives about people and the forests. In particular, it looks at how local lives, landscapes and the relationships between them have been shaped by the ways in which actors employ narratives.

The three following main research questions were raised and addressed:

- 1) What are the narratives about people and forests and how have the relationships between them been framed and portrayed in the narratives of people and the forests?
- 2) How have people and forest narratives been produced, compiled and distributed? What methods and strategies have been utilised in the process? And, whose influence has prevailed?
- 3) How have forest dependent communities produced their narratives? And, to what extent have national claims over people and the forests influenced local narratives?

The Structure of the Thesis

The first four chapters in this thesis introduce and present background to the thesis as a whole. Chapter One lays out an overview of the research, the research aims and research questions. Chapter Two provides the historical background to the people and forest struggles in Thailand. Chapter Three discusses the concepts of decentralisation, actors and policy processes and the concept of policy narrative. Chapter Four explains the methods and techniques used. Issues of researcher positionality are also discussed in this chapter.

Chapters Five to Eight each present one of four main actors' policy narratives surrounding people and the forests. Each chapter presents the storytelling told by social actors, discusses the narrative strategies and analyses what has been left out from the storytelling. Chapter Five examines the storytelling about people and forests told by officials and reflected in official programs. Chapter Six presents the community rights to forests narrative which was constructed to counter the officials' narrative. Chapter Seven presents the forests as supermarket of the poor narrative, which is a supportive narrative to the community rights narrative. Chapter Eight examines conservationist's

narratives which were developed mainly to counter the community rights to forest narrative.

Chapters Nine and Ten investigate local narratives – the storytelling about people and the forests told by local people. Also, it discusses the ways in which local lives, landscapes and the interaction between the two have been shaped by the storylines those local people told in response to national narratives. Chapter Nine examines the ways in which local villagers of Huai Kaew village develop the forest for livelihood narrative in order to reclaim their rights over the forest resources in the context of resource contestation between local people and outside powers. Chapter Ten examines victim's narratives. It investigates the ways in which the Hmong farmers employed the conservation narratives as their strategy responding to conservationist's narratives which blamed them as watershed destroyers.

Chapter Eleven presents the conclusion and implications of research. This chapter highlights and discusses four major research findings including 1) the role of actors' policy narratives in assigning meaning to people, forests and their relationships; 2) the power effects of narratives on local lives and landscape; 3) victim narratives; and 4) the narrative strategies. The policy and research implications are also discussed.

Chapter 2

Thailand's Forests, Livelihoods and Struggles

Introduction

The conflict between people and forests in Thailand is a long story, the origins of which may be traced back to the nineteenth century, but, it was only relatively recently, in the early 1990s, that the issue became the subject of hot political debate at the national level. Although in more recent times the national debate has to some degree abated, the struggle between people and forests in many areas of Thailand still persists. This chapter sets the background and context essential to any understanding of the political debate surrounding people and forests in Thailand. My assumption is that one cannot comprehend the importance of the production of policy storylines regarding people and forests without first realising the historical aspects of the conflicting issues. In other words, the stories cannot be separated from the controversy surrounding the people and the forests.

For more than a century, forest resources in Thailand have been controlled and regulated by the State property regime. In the late 1800s, the Siamese government initiated a forest bureaucracy, the Royal Forest Department (RFD), which was expected to control and regulate timber extraction, especially teak in the North of Thailand. Around that time, bureaucratic action was guided by a British forester named Herbert Slade, who later became the first conservator (Director General of the RFD) (Usher 2009). Slade, upon taking charge of forestry, set up an official forest management system, which was developed based upon the Burmese system, which was identical to those used by the British in colonies ranging from India to Australia. In addition, forestry science, based mainly upon German forestry thinking, was introduced to and employed by Thai forestry. Influenced by its German legacy, it is of little surprise that forestry science in Thailand has focused only upon valuable timber resources. The principle of “sustained yield” of timber extraction, which was considered the magic formula by the Thai foresters, has been taught in the forestry curriculum of Kasetsart University up to the present time. In addition, the State enacted forestry laws and

legislation in order to secure its rights over and claims to the forestlands. The first Forest Act, which was enacted in 1941 and defined “forest” in political rather than biological terms, offered the State the controlling power over the forest lands, meaning that that no one but the State has the right to occupy or use the land. Following its enactment, territorial demarcation of forest areas commenced. The National Forest Reserves Act was formalised in 1964 followed by the designation of forest reserves which were reserved for timber harvesting. By the end of the twentieth century, 230,000 sq kms (44 per cent of the country’s surface area) were categorised as forest reserve land under the exclusive jurisdiction of the Royal Forest Department (Usher 2009).

In the early 1990s, community forests were proposed as an alternative to conventional scientific forestry. The latter was criticized for its failure to maintain and protect the natural forests when it became evident that Thailand’s forest cover had dramatically decreased from in excess of 50 per cent in the early 1960s to less than 25 per cent in the 1990s (Saneh and Yos 1993). Within advocates of community forests, the participation of the local “grassroots” people in forest management seemed to gain public approval as a solution to the deforestation problem. But conflict occurred during discussion of the legal process to recognise the right of the local people to control and manage forest resources. The main conflict centred on the areas designated for the establishment of community forests and the utilisation of resources within the established community forests. The following questions were posed: would the Bill allow community forests to be established in protected areas? Would the local people be permitted to use timber from the community forest? This conflict, which was encapsulated in the long-running debate over the Community Forest Bill between the early 1990s and 2007, was rooted in the opposing views about people and their relationships with forests. The people-oriented camp strongly supported the idea of establishing community forests in protected areas whereas the network of conservationists strongly opposed this proposal. The ensuing conflict, which endured for more than three decades, ended in 2008 when the Constitutional Court decided the Bill was not valid. More detail will be discussed later in this chapter.

The underlying theme of the conflict surrounding the Community Forest Bill was in part related to the different assumptions and beliefs regarding the causes of deforestation. The pro-people and community groups, on the one hand, tended to consider the state

development policy as the major contributor to forest degradation. The state scheme for national forest logging was considered the main cause of deforestation. On the other hand, conservationists tended to see the local people, who were dependent upon natural resources for their livelihoods, as key actors in – and contributors to - deforestation. The different views regarding deforestation held by these diverse social groups resulted in the proposal of different policies and options for dealing with perceived causes and outcomes. For example, forest officials and conservationists proposed a strict approach in a bid to prevent forest exploitation by local access and utilisation.

This chapter begins with a discussion of the problems of deforestation and development in which, I believe, the contestation over resources in Thailand is rooted. Then, it delineates the reaction of the State to the problem of forest degradation, the resource conflicts that have occurred in different regions of Thailand, and the reactions and resistance of local agents to the state resource management approach. The final part of the chapter presents the community forestry movement and the national debate/conflict over the Community Forestry Bill.

Deforestation in Thailand

There is no doubt that the numbers of natural forests in Thailand, as in other of the world's developing countries, are diminishing steadily. As one can see from Table 1, forested areas diminished from over 60 per cent of total land area in the early 1950s to approximately 25 per cent in the late 1990s (Hirsch 1987; RFD 2010). Scholars estimate that since the mid 90s, Thailand has had less than 20 per cent forest cover: forest areas decreased sharply between the late 1960s and early 1970s (Delang 2005; Hirsch 1987). However, the rate of forest decline has been relatively stable since the mid 1980s at approximately one per cent per year (RFD 2010).

Surprisingly, the RFD claims that forest cover in Thailand increased from approximately 25 per cent in the late 90s to more than 30 per cent in 2000 (RFD 2010). This estimated figure has led to a debate among involved stakeholders. Some believe that the increase in forest cover is partly because the scale of measurement changed in line with high resolution aerial photography. Also, doubt surrounding image interpreters' confusion over rubber plantations and natural forests cannot be dismissed.

Since the beginning of the year 2000, however, the remaining forest cover has been relatively stable at approximately 30 per cent (RFD 2010).

Table 1: The Estimation of Remaining Forest Cover in Thailand between 1949 and 2008.

Year	Percent of Total Area in Forest	Area in Forest in 1,000 ha.	Comments
1949*	69	32600	Area in forests and pasture
1955*	63	32129	
1956*	58	30288.3	Area in forests and pasture
1959*	58	30010	Official estimate
1961*	56	29000	Estimate from aerial photography
1963*	53	27100	FAO world forest inventory estimate
1965*	53	27300	Land use survey; probable over-estimate
1966*	51	26500	
1969-1970*	52	26900	Land Development Department estimates from aerial photography
1973**	43.21	22170.7	
1976**	38.67	19841.7	
1978**	34.15/ 25*	17522.4/ 13018*	
1982**	30.52	15660.0	
1985**	29.40	15086.6	
1988**	28.03	14380.3	
1989**	27.95	14341.7	LANDSAT-TM
1991**	26.64	13669.8	LANDSAT-5(TM) scales (1:250,000)
1993**	26.03	13355.4	LANDSAT-5(TM) scales (1:250,000)
1995**	25.62	13148.5	LANDSAT-5(TM) scales (1:250,000)
1998**	25.28	12972.2	LANDSAT-5(TM) scales (1:250,000)
2000**	33.15	17011.0	LANDSAT-5(TM) scales (1:50,000)

Year	Percent of Total Area in Forest	Area in Forest in 1,000 ha.	Comments
2004**	32.66	16759.0	LANDSAT-5(TM) scales (1:50,000)
2006**	30.92	15865.2	
2008**	33.44	17158.5	

The total land area in Thailand is 51,312,000 ha

* Source: Hirsch (1987 p.132)

** RFD (2010)

In Thailand, the causes of deforestation are the subject of serious debate, participants in which are divided into two groups. Some scholars contend that deforestation in Thailand is rooted in the strategy of national economic development (see Delang 2002, 2005; Hirsch 1987; Sato 2003). As Hirsch suggests: “Past and present deforestation in Thailand cannot be explained by any single, isolated factor. Rather, deforestation can be seen as part of the broader development of the national economy and polity over the past century” (1987 p.134). For Hirsch, two economic development processes have contributed significantly to deforestation: 1) the expansion of the agricultural economy by increasing the area under cultivation; and, 2) the political process of State formation which involves progressive linking of the national periphery with the centre and the consequent increase in accessibility of previously isolated forest areas. In the following section I elaborate upon these two processes.

Starting in 1855 when the Siamese government opened the country to international markets in line with the Bowring treaty, exploitation of natural resources and agricultural production for foreign markets played a crucial role in the development of the country as well as in its deforestation (Brenner 1999). Delang (2002) observes that as a consequence of this opening up, large areas of the Chao Phraya basin were planted with rice, resulting in loss of forest as rice crops increased between 1905 and 1995 (see Delang 2002). Most of this increased rice production was for export rather than for the domestic market. Delang observes that “[w]hile in 1850 less than 960,000 hectares (ha) was planted with rice, in 1905 there were over 1.44 million ha, and in 1950 about 5.6 million ha (Delang 2002, p.486).

During this period of rice land expansion, many forests in the lowlands, particularly in the central plain of Thailand, were cleared and transformed into paddy cultivation, a land conversion activity by landless rice farmers encouraged by government policy (Delang 2002).

After the Second World War (post-1945), the international market demand for highland cash crops rose, further driving the transformation of forested land in the highland areas into cash crop production. Maize and soybeans were two particularly important cash crops in the 1950s. Production, particularly of maize, was mainly for export to the feedstock industries of Japan and Taiwan (Hirsch 1987). The production areas of these crops were increased dramatically from approximately 12,960 ha in 1950 – 1952 to 1,192,160 ha in 1989 – 1990 (Delang 2002). During this period, not only were highland and lowland farmers involved in cash crop growing but also agribusiness became involved in growing cash crops. Delang claims that the latter group often gained financial help and other benefits from the government, being part of the process which stimulated the transformation of forested lands into cash crops. Thus, forest depletion occurred as a result of the clearing of land for cultivation in response to economic incentives for commercial agriculture and/or subsistence production.

Hirsch (1987) clearly describes the various patterns of agricultural land expansion in each region of Thailand. In the Northeast, for example, forested lands were cleared initially for kenaf plantation as part of an industrial crop diversification policy. This was followed by rapid clearance of land by smallholders for cassava planting in response to the demand for export created by the European feedstock industry, particularly in the 1970s.

A further factor exacerbated deforestation in the periphery of Thailand in the 1970s. During this time the Thai government placed emphasis on the national security policy which it saw as vital to combating the Communist Party of Thailand, members of which had established bases in the forests in many provinces (Delang 2005; Hirsch 1987). After the 1976 coup d'état, thousands of students, farmers, trade unionists and others escaped into the forests to join the communist insurgency. In order to deny forest refuge to those who opposed the military regime, the government introduced a policy of opening up the country's peripheral areas by constructing roads into the forests and

encouraging lowland farmers to settle along these roads that were expressly built in the interests of national security (Hirsch 1987). The opening up of these forested lands at the periphery facilitated the expansion of agricultural lands and land occupations by landless farmers. As Hirsch (1987) noted: “the opening up of peripheral areas facilitated commercial agriculture...[I]t has been the more recent construction of roads that has facilitated both timber operations and follow-on cropping” (Hirsch 1987, p.136).

Previous works on the histories of deforestation have attempted to convince their readers that deforestation is closely linked to national development, security policies and international market demands. In addition, emphasis has been upon growth of national and international economies at the expense of forests.

State officials, particularly forest officials, have been reluctant to accept the claim that national development strategies are major contributors to forest degradation. Rather, they tend to blame population growth and the increasing demands for resources essential for sustaining human life. Also, stories of shifting cultivation, forest land encroachment, illegal firewood collection and, of highland farmers destroying watershed forests have been repeatedly published by media and taught in schools. The following is an example of a forester’s view regarding shifting cultivation and forest degradation: “The devastation of the forest is primarily a consequence of expanding human population and their needs for cultivable lands to feed themselves and for fuel wood, rather than a consequence of industrial forest exploitation.” (Sathit 1988)

According to Sathit, shifting cultivation is one of the major causes of forest destruction in the mountainous areas, especially in the north-west of Thailand where “nomadic hill tribes” (Sathit 1988) live. He claims that “they slashed and burned the dense forest land to plant cash crops, such as opium poppy, cabbage, and other vegetables. Extensive tracts of denuded highlands left over are often seen in the Northwestern highlands of Thailand.” (Sathit 1988)

Another report of highlanders destroying watershed resources was recounted by a social science scholar turned conservationist, Dr Suchira Prayoonpitak, in an interview with *the Bangkok Post* on 20 July, 1997: “They [highland people] clear the forests to plant vegetables, thus damaging the sponge effect of the watershed. Rivers downstream are

dried up as a result. Moreover, the chemical fertiliser and pesticides that were widely used upstream also contaminated downstream rivers.” (Suchira 1997)

Forest officials and environmentalists in Thailand tend to blame forest dwellers rather than state development policies as the major cause of deforestation. Hence, conflicting views between activist scholars, who argue for the relationship between development policies and forest degradation, and forest officials, who blame local communities, dominate environmental politics in Thailand. These different views regarding deforestation politics have led to different approaches to management and control of natural forest resources. In the next section, I discuss the ways in which State officials and like-minded conservationists attempt to deal with perceived problems of deforestation.

State Response to Deforestation

Since it was established in 1896, the Royal Forest Department has played a major role in controlling and regulating Thailand’s natural forest resources. It is responsible for all land not under cultivation or claimed otherwise by individuals or institutions. When forest resource was abundant, the Department’s policy and strategies were mainly focused upon extraction of timber from natural forests, that is on forest products sold to raise national revenue. During the period, teak was recorded as the number one export product of Thailand. After the mid 1980s, when forest resources declined and became degraded, State policy regarding forest management started to change towards forest conservation and protection. Since then, a number of conservation strategies designed to protect and restore natural forests have been introduced by forest officials. The combined techniques of territorialisation of forests (Vandergeest 1996) and enactment of forestry laws are considered to be the two most effective strategies employed by State forest officials in the interests of forest conservation.

In 1985 in response to the increasing rate of deforestation, State officials introduced the National Forest Policy (NFP). This policy, which was approved by the Thai Cabinet, advocated more control over forest inhabitants, who would only be allowed to practise permanent and sustainable agriculture (Anan 1998). The policy suggested that Thailand should maintain its natural forest cover at 40 per cent in order to achieve its dream of

sustainable development. Within the proposed figure of forest cover, 25 per cent of the total area should be allocated to commercial forests, with 15 per cent maintained as protected forest. Some observed that by considering the forest areas proportions during this time, the RFD's focus was still on commercial forestry (Buergin 2003). Due to rising criticism regarding deforestation and the RFD's commercial plantation orientation, as well as to resistance to its resettlement policy in the forest reserve, the forest agency was forced to shift its focus to conservation forestry. As a consequence, in 1992, the National Forest Policy was changed. The new proportioning of forested lands reversed the previous portion and saw a quarter of the total land area designated as conservation area, and 15 per cent as commercial forest areas (Anan 1998; Buregin 2003).

In the late 1980s, the RFD was forced to consent to a nationwide logging ban, mainly due to widespread public pressure arising from a flood disaster that occurred in the south of Thailand, resulting in the deaths of more than one hundred villagers. As a result, the cabinet's solution was to ban all logging nationwide on 10 January 1989 (Buregin 2003; Hirsch and Lohmann 1989).

After the logging ban was introduced, the State forest agency channelled its efforts into the protection of forested lands. The forest officials employed a forest zoning program which originated in the United States system for national parks (RFD 1993) and became central to a concept of the protected area system set out in the Thai Forestry Sector Master Plan (TFSMP) of 1993 (RFD 1993). But, although the declaration of protected areas commenced in the 1960s, it was not until the late 1990s that the number of protected areas increased considerably. Areas of protected forests extended from approximately 10 per cent in 1985 to in excess of 17 per cent of land area in 1999 (Buregin 2003). As of July 2002, there were 81 terrestrial national parks and 21 marine parks with a total coverage of more than 18 per cent of the Kingdom's total areas (ICEM 2003). The result of rapid protected area designation, and the failure to first consult with local residents rendered forest inhabitants, who had been living in the areas prior to the state forest demarcation and declaration, illegal forest encroachers.

In the "degraded" forest outside of the protected areas, forest officials sought to revive forest cover through reforestation. The introduction of rapidly growing tree plantations

was seen as an appropriate strategy in these areas. By 1987, the aim was to replant 28,000 sq km of degraded forest land with rapidly growing tree species, such as eucalypts. However, the State had to realise its limitations in terms of budget and manpower when implementing such large scale forest plantations. It accordingly sought to build partnerships with private companies interested in agro-business plantation, assuming a new role of facilitator of the policies and regulations required to meet the demands of investment companies. In the eastern part of Thailand, for example, the RFD rented degraded forests to the Suan Kitti Reforestation Company, which aimed to establish 400,000 rai (640 sq km) of eucalyptus plantation to supply a pulp mill and a self-sufficient Thai paper industry (Usher 2009). By 1990, the Company had planted more than 100,000 rai (160 sq km) of eucalyptus plantation.

Vandergest (1996) observes that the promotion of private plantations was considered to be the one technique that would allow forest officials to maintain their jurisdiction over these lands. This was partly because most of the land in Thailand is claimed and used by farmers in the forests (Vandergest 1996). Hirsch and Lohmann (1989) observed, regarding occupation of the forests, that “large parts of the forest reserves are now de facto farmland, some of it workable on a sustainable basis, some of it heavily degraded” (Hirsch and Lohmann 1989 p.449).

In 1992 when the forest officials reassessed the success of the reforestation scheme, they realised that their dream of replanting up to 28,800 sq km of degraded forests with eucalypts as indicated in the organisation policy, had been hardly achieved. The 1,600 sq km of plantation that had been achieved fell far short of the ministry’s aim (Usher 2009). Landless people inhabiting state-claimed forests were seen as the main obstacle to the successful implementation of reforestation. State forest officials duly implemented certain measures designed to deal with these people. The most well known and controversial state action taken against landless people inhabiting the forests was the Land Resettlement Program for the Poor Living in Degraded Forest Reserves (*Khor Chor Kor* in the Thai language). The *Kho Chor Kor* program was implemented following the military coup d’etat of February 1991 and supported by the army, which became involved in the national reforestation program for reasons of national security. Briefly, the program aimed to resolve the land issue in order to reach the national goal of 40 per cent forest cover. The plan was to relocate some 6 million people squatting

illegally on National Forest Reserve land into orderly villages under military control. The program promised that each family in the targeted site should be allocated fourteen rai for cropping land and one rai for residential area. After completion of this land allocation to landless farmers, the officials hoped that there would be 15,000 sq km left for reforestation. The Program, which was set to be implemented in every region of Thailand, began its first phase in the northeast. But, unfortunately, the relocated villagers did not receive what the project promised and this gave rise to protests at both the local and national levels by local people and local NGOs (see Usher 2009). Media coverage of the details of the local opposition to the State relocation plan made it a topic of heated national debate. As a result, the resettlement plan was officially suspended on 3 July 1992.

In the early 1980s, forest officials employed a community forestry approach to forest management. In principle, many forest officials presumed that the responsibility for the protection of the remaining forests and the reforestation of degraded forests should rest with the local people and communities who were dependent upon the forests and should thus show an interest in their protection. Starting in 1987, the RFD, with the support of international organisations such as the Ford Foundation, initiated a series of pilot projects aimed at developing practical field methods for RFD-community collaboration in developing land use management plans and activities which met both local needs and the objectives of the national resource management policies (Komol and Thomas 1990). However, the state community forestry limited its implementation to the degraded National Reserve Forest only and limited the transfer of the rights to decision-making regarding forest resource utilisation to local communities in the targeted village sites (more detail will be presented and discussed in Chapter 5, which examines official community forest narratives).

Chusak (2008) observes that the RFD has successfully mobilised the support of conservationists, elites, the urban middle classes and the politically powerful media for its exclusionary conservation policy. This public support has lent the RFD the legitimacy to implement its policy denying the proposal to allow local forest inhabitants to live in protected areas. I will suggest here that the strategic collaboration between the RFD and the army was part of this successful if controversial story. By rendering deforestation an issue of national security along with water shortages, severe floods, and

other natural disasters, the army and forest officials gained public approval to implement a program that sought to keep local people out of the watershed forests.

In sum, it may be concluded that the forest officials constantly implemented the above policies and strategies in response to changing political and societal contexts, such as timber exploitation to raise national revenue. Once resources became scarce and degraded, the forest officials turned their authority to the protection of national forests. By placing conservation high on the political agenda, the state forestry department, as an administrative organisation could maintain its power base within the state's bureaucratic system and secure its control over forested lands. It seemed that the new role of the forest officials as conservationists gained the approval and political support of the urban based people, who stood to benefit from forest environmental protection in the forms of clean water, fresh air, attractive natural sites for tourism, and the prevention of natural disaster such as floods. Unfortunately, the local people and forest inhabitants had to bear the responsibility and cost of conservation.

Settlements and Land Rights

The historical undermining by the State of local people who lived in the forests caused conflict between the people and the forests. The major problem was that no legal recognition of any kind existed for local rights over land and resources in the State claimed forests (Anan 1998).

Prior to the 1950s, Thailand's national territory and lands were still under the control of the King and then subsequently of the State. The literature on the history of forest occupancy suggests that in the nineteenth century, when the national territory was controlled by the King, the interaction between the people and the forest environment did not catch the attention of the government. At the frontier, commoners were encouraged to farm any land they had cleared: they could make ownership claims on such lands. The customary *jap jong* rights to forest claims were recognised by the villagers themselves and the system of forest claims continued through into the twentieth century. Even today, most farmers living in the forests possess no legal documents of ownership, despite their de facto use. During the pre-colonial era, lands were registered for tax purposes. Within the village, the village headman played a

crucial role in allocating usufruct rights to villagers. Although occupancy by commoners was registered, the State did not enforce individual land rights. Thus, land effectively had no price. The modern form of property rights had yet to emerge. The forests near the villages were treated as commons and used for swidden agriculture, timber, and as a source of tax payments and trade goods. In addition, local regulation played its role in controlling and regulating forest-related activities (Lohmann 1993).

The relationship between farmers and the forests started to change when the Thai government declared National Reserve Forest areas in 1964. This official declaration of National Reserve Forest turned forest communities into forest encroachers. Many villagers, who already lived in the forests prior to official forest demarcation became illegal settlers. Cultivation, along with some other restrictions, was specifically prohibited in these designated areas. Analysts insist that despite this prohibition, 20 per cent of Forest Reserve land was cultivated, supporting approximately 1 million squatter households (Brenner et al 1999; Rigg 1993).

Prior to the 1964 National Reserve Act, the Forest Act B.E. 2484 (1941) defined forest as any land which was not yet occupied by anyone according to the law. The law sought to conserve 50 per cent of the Kingdom's land areas as forests. This implied that all land, except for privately owned agricultural land and buildings as well as wasteland would be considered forest and all of this forest land would belong to the State. Private ownership of land in reserved forest areas, protected forest areas, national parks and wildlife sanctuaries was prohibited by forestry law. Land outside of forested land was governed by the Land Code of 1954. According to the law, all land belonged to the State or individuals. Land documents or title deeds could be obtained for land which had been settled for a long time, which had been surveyed by the government, and which was recognised as privately owned. No communal ownership rights or use-rights of land are recognised under current Thai law.

Scholars have revealed that the situation of ethnic minorities regarding land rights is even more precarious than that of lowland farmers. This is partly because some among them lack Thai citizenship. As Brenner et al. (1999, p.37) note: "The state has been and still is reluctant to grant full Thai citizenship to ethnic minorities (despite official statements to the contrary) while any secure land rights are made conditional on Thai

citizenship”. Brenner et al. point out that this is partly due to State views regarding the traditional agricultural practices of the highlanders, i.e., swidden agriculture, which is entirely different from the form of paddy field practiced by the lowland Thai farmers. Highland swidden agriculture was seen as unsustainable, a form of agriculture that destroyed the forests. For this reason, it deserved prohibition rather than secure land rights.

The status of the farmers who inhabit the forests is somewhat ambiguous and contradictory. As settlers, farmers and their agricultural practices in the forest areas are illegal according to forest laws regulated by the RFD. But, at the same time, their villages are officially registered with the Interior Ministry. Hmong Pakluay village, for example, which is located in Ob Luang national park, and its forest area, are classified as watershed class 1A. According to the National Park Act, permanent settlement of this area by people is entirely prohibited. In 1994, however, the Hmong Pakluay community was officially registered as village number 14 of Mae Soi sub-district, whereas in the past, it was part of another official village within the same sub-district but located outside of the park. The case of the Karen communities in Thung Yai Naresuan Wildlife Sanctuary is a further example of this kind of situation. For more than one hundred years, the Karen villagers have been domiciled in a forest area that later became a wildlife sanctuary. This implies that the Karen ethnic people settled their communities in the area prior to its official demarcation as a wildlife sanctuary. All of them have the status of official villagers registered by the Interior Ministry. Brenner et al. (1999) observe that while the RFD’s focus is on conservation emphasising restricted use of fallow areas necessary for the practice of the traditional swidden, other state agencies are promoting cash crop cultivation within the protected areas as a substitute for the illegal land use by the illegal villagers in the sanctuary (Brenner et al. 1999). The key issue lies in settlement contradictions: many farmers are incapable of distinguishing between lands where encroachment can legally occur and where it is illegal. And, in many cases, the state claimed forest areas are not clearly delineated. The boundaries of forest reserves and protected areas are frequently unmarked and poorly known to local communities. In addition, the settlement contradiction manifests itself to different degrees while some villagers are considered de facto residents by the RFD, others in more sensitive areas like national parks and wildlife sanctuaries live with the permanent threat of eviction.

Recognising the conflict between the people and the forests vis-a-vis land rights and its negative impact on proposed forest cover changes, the Royal Forest Department began to offer the squatter families usufruct certificates giving them temporary cultivation rights. The National Forest Land Allocation Program (known as the STK Land Certification Program), which was initiated in late 1970s and is operated by the National Forest Land Management Division of the RFD, was directed primarily towards people living illegally in the forest areas. It was reported that by 1985, more than 624,000 families had been incorporated into the program and 6.3 million rai (10,080 sq km) of land had been classified and prepared for landless farmers (TDRI 1987). However, implementation of the official program for land usufruct certification (STK) was restricted to “degraded forests” within the reserve forests only. Many local people, had been living in the dense forest cover areas, particularly in the conservation forest areas, did not receive this type of land certificate. Thus, the STK program did little to solve the problem of land insecurity faced by many farmers inhabited in the forest areas, particularly of the hill tribes or *chao khao* living in the conservation forest areas.

In sum, people in the forests have had to face contradiction. Although their villages may be registered and have gained permanent settlement status, this is quite different from land ownership rights. According to Thailand’s forestry laws and the Land Code of 1954, identified forest lands belong to the State. Forest lands are in effect owned by the State, which has the authority to allocate and control the resources in these areas. Land in the forests cannot be owned by individuals, and, although some farmers in the forests have been granted temporary usufruct rights to the land, their access to farmlands and resources at some levels continues to be restricted and limited.

Debating the Community Forest Bill

Since the early 1990s, debate surrounding people and forests was framed by discussion about the formulation of the Community Forest Bill. This national debate sought to produce legal mechanisms to solve the conflict between the people and the forests. However, there were conflicting ideas between the commonly referred to as “dark green” conservationists and the community rights-based forestry advocates regarding the forest areas wherein community forests would be allowed to be set up. The former

group proposed that community forests would be allowed in forest areas, particularly in “degraded” forests, but must be located outside of conservation forests. This proposal was opposed by the latter group, who advocated decentralisation of power from forest officials to local communities. Their political aim was recognition of community rights to forests by both the State and forest officials. The debate has seen many versions of the Bill revised and discussed. National debate over the Community Forest Bill more or less ended in late 2008 when the Constitutional Court ruled that the Bill was not valid because the National Legislative Assembly (NLA) lacked a quorum when it was voted.

The process pertinent to the Community Forest Bill officially started in 1991, when the government appointed a committee to investigate the prospect of community forests. This committee, which comprised academics, NGOs and forest officials, was chaired by Professor Niwat Reungpanich, a former Dean of the Forestry Faculty, Kasetsart University. It was expected that the appointed committee would produce some guidelines and policy recommendations crucial to the implementation of a community forest-related approach by the forest agency. Following the recommendations made by the appointed committee on community forests, one year later, the RFD drafted the Community Forest Bill and submitted it to the Cabinet, who approved the principle of the Bill. Not surprisingly, the Bill was criticised by the network of NGOs, scholars and local communities who claimed that the RFD version of the Bill overemphasised commercial plantations and included only planted tree stands in community forests. Opponents argued that this would ensure the RFD’s absolute management power over forest resources control and allocation. Since the completion of the first draft by the RFD in 1992, and the subsequent counter-proposal of a “people’s version” by a network of scholars, development activists and local people, in subsequent years have been six versions in total.

Brenner et al. (1999) maintain that the contents of all of the draft documents consisted mainly of rules and regulations about whom to allow- and how to supervise and control- communal forest management. A major part of the documents emphasised the composition and functions of committees to be established at the local, regional and national levels. Brenner et al. further point out that in general, the principle of “community forests” was widely agreed upon in all of the documents, as long as no one questioned exactly how they should be put into practice. In these authors’ view, any

pragmatic questions relevant to the proposed community forests were not addressed as intended in the documents. For example, is logging for local consumption compatible with sustainable forest management? Can people and forests co-exist only if there is a clear border between settlements and protected areas?

Attempts to integrate all of the proposals of the Bill together were made several times in different regions of Thailand at public hearing. One remarkable hearing was held in April 1996. Hosted by the National Economic and Social Development Board, it was chaired by Thailand's influential public scholar Dr Prawes Wasi. This public hearing was remarkable in the sense that it was the first time in Thailand's history that a national public hearing on environmental law and policy was conducted. Also, participants in the meeting were represented by different groups of people from different backgrounds including NGOs, GOs, academics and local community representatives. The meeting proposed a draft Bill, the "Suanbua" version, which claimed to represent all party interests. The Suanbua was named after the meeting venue, the Suanbua resort in Chiang Mai. The Suanbua version was approved in principle by the Cabinet on 2 June, 1996. Unfortunately, its voting into law was postponed due to the dissolution of the ruling government at that time.

Although the Suanbua version found in principle approval by the parliament, it was still criticised by a number of "dark green" NGOs and RFD officials, who did not see their interests sufficiently represented. The term "dark green" commonly referred to a network of conservationists, who emphasised conservation objectives in their work and political campaigns. This network was initiated and coordinated by the Dhammaanat Foundation, a local NGO based in Chiang Mai. Since the late 1980s, the Foundation has been working collaboratively with the Chom Thong Watershed Conservation Group, a network of lowland farmers in Chom Thong, implementing the Mae Soi watershed forest restoration project, which is connected to Doi Inthanon National Park, Chom Thong district, Chiang Mai province. In 1989, the Foundation, together with the lowland farmers proposed relocating the Hmong farmers of Paa Kluay village outside of the forests which lowland farmers claimed to be their upper watershed. According to the draft Bill, they disapproved of the idea of the legal establishment of community forests in conservation forests, particularly in upper watershed forests as indicated in the Suanbua version. Their major concern was that increasing population densities, modern

needs and the economic interests of people would lead to the overuse and degradation of forests. They refuted any notion of the local community ability to manage forest resources sustainably, and argued for protected areas to be generated excluded from being designated community forests (Brenner et al. 1999).

In 1999, the Northern Community Forest Network (NCFN) was established. This farmer network was closely associated with the Northern Farmer Network and other people's network in the North that were supported by the Northern Development Foundation (NDF). The work of the NDF included all aspects of community development, including women's rights, crop trading and pricing, land and forest land tenure and participatory natural resources management. The NCFN, however, attempted to narrow its focus on the campaign for the "people friendly version" of the Community Forest Bill. The following year, the network submitted a draft copy of the people's version to the parliament, an action made possible by Article 170 of 1997 Thailand's constitution whereby a petition supplied by 50,000 signatories may be proposed to law. The heart of the people's version of the Bill centred on, of course, the demand for legal recognition of local community rights in forest resource management and regulation.

But, evidence soon emerged of conflict regarding the draft Bill rejected by the Lower and Upper Houses (the Senate and House of Representatives respectively). In 2001, when the Lower House led by the Thaksin government approved the draft Bill and submitted it to the Upper House for agreement, the majority of the members of the Upper House disagreed with the Bill. The disagreement between the two Houses was attributable to two major points: the first concerned the locations of the community forest areas, the second human habitation. Questions of locating community forests in different area categories arose, with special emphasis on protected areas. Many Senators disapproved of the proposal to allow the establishment of community forests in state conservation forests. The second point related to the activities and residence of people in community forests. The main opposition centred on whether or not local people were able to manage and protect forest resources sustainability. More specifically, the utilisation of forest resources, by the local people in protected areas, particularly of timber, was restricted and questioned by the Senators. However, in 2002, when the draft bill was sent back to the Lower House, the People's Representatives reconfirmed the approved version. A joint committee with representatives from both the Lower and

Upper Houses of parliament was appointed to reconsider issues of contention and to reach mutual agreement over the Bill.

The appointing of the joint committee was quite an interesting process given that both the nature-oriented and the people-oriented camps attempted to propose that their representatives should sit on the committee. Consideration of the draft bill by this committee extended over three years from early 2004 until 2007, partly due to disagreement between the committee members regarding the two issues of conflict. The process was ceased in late 2006 concomitant with the dissolution of the Thaksin government following a military coup.

In 2007, the bill was taken up again for consideration by the interim military government. On 21 November, the Bill was passed. But, unfortunately, it seemed that some local communities, particularly people who had been living in the fringe of the protected areas, were not to benefit from the Bill. They were restricted from setting up community forests and were not allowed to utilise the timber in the protected areas. Section 34 of the Bill, for example, points out that community forests can only take place within a protected area if the community collects NTFPs. Therefore, despite a community having access to the resources within a protected area, this access still would not allow them to cut down trees within the protected area, given apparent political concern about the ability of those communities to conserve their resources for the future. The version of the Bill that was passed thus disappointed the pro-community advocates. Briefly, the pro-community advocates claimed that at least two Articles in the version of the Bill deprive local communities of the right to access and utilise forests which they have been depending upon. For example, Article 25 limits eligibility to set up community forest to those who lived and managed the protected forest area for at least 10 years before the Bill was promulgated in 2007 (Buntoon interviewed with *Bangkok Post* 3 February 2008). Later, Senators, who had supported the “people-friendly” version of the Bill, filed a petition in the Constitutional Court challenging the Bill on constitutional grounds. In November 2008, the Court ruled that the Bill was not legal because the NLA lacked a quorum when it voted. Table 2 briefly summarised events regarding the Thailand’s Community Forest Bill between the early 1990s and 2007.

Table 2: Summary of Major Events in the History of the Community Forest Bill.

Time	Event
1992	Draft Bill prepared by RFD was approved in principle by Cabinet
1993	“People friendly” CF Bill drafted and supported by “Light Green” NGOs and activist academics
1995	NESDB conducted a workshop for drafting the CF Bill with involvement of identified stakeholders and their representatives The “Suanbua Draft” was produced
1996	The Bill was approved in principle by the cabinet on June 2, but the government postponed the passing of the Bill “Dark Green” NGOs and RFD officials criticised the “Suanbua Draft” and demanded a revised draft
1997	A public hearing was conducted by an appointed committee consisting mostly of academics. Approximately 250 participants attended A new committee with different composition was set up, chaired by the Prime Minister’s Office Minister. A revised version was drafted and submitted (the “Juridical Committee Version”)
1998 (May 18)	A new revision of the draft emerged (the “P.M. Appointment Committee Version”)
1999	The Northern Community Forest Network was established and campaigned for a people-friendly Bill
2000	The draft people version was formulated and submitted to the Parliament (referring to Article 170 of the 1997 Constitution). The end of the Chavalit government in November stopped this legislative process.
2001	The Thai Rak Thai Party won the general election and came to power on February 26. The draft bill was approved on November 7 by the House of Representatives (the Lower House) A committee with 27 members appointed by the Upper House of Parliament was set up with 3 representatives from the “Light Green” NGOs to consider the Bill
2002	The Bill was revised by the Senate on March 15 The House of Representative confirmed the approved version
2004	A joint appointed committee with representatives from both the

Time	Event
	Lower and Upper Houses of Parliament was set up to find mutual agreement on the bill
2007	The bill was taken up again for consideration by the post-coup government and was passed on November 21 Members of the Senate filed a petition to the Constitutional Court challenging the passed version on constitutional grounds.
2008	The Constitutional Court ruled that the passing Bill was not legal

Sources: This table was prepared by the author of this thesis and published in Fisher (2011). It has been slightly modified here.

The lengthy controversy surrounding Thailand's Community Forest Bill shows the difficulty of achieving a consensus on a matter that was vulnerable to different attitudes and approaches to relationships between the people and the forests and the protection and the management of natural resources. The whole debate was shaped by two conflicting notions about people and forests. One was that forests, particularly conservation forests, have to be protected from people; the other questions whether forest inhabitants are suited to living in harmony with the forests. Of course, perceptions and assumptions concerning the relationship between people and forests invariably differ. The question is to what extent these conflicting notions reflect and represent the ongoing and dynamic relationship between the people and the forests.

Chapter 3

Conceptual Background

Introduction

This thesis examines the strategies and power relationships underlying the policy narratives produced by political actors involved in the community forest movement in Thailand. My argument is that the movement cannot be separated from the storytelling or narratives of and about local people and forests. In other words, narrators deliberately simplify stories for strategic political reasons either to mobilise political support or to destabilise policy-making assumptions. In order to facilitate comprehension of this argument, three related concepts of decentralisation of natural resource management, actors and policy-making processes and policy narratives are reviewed and presented. The intention of this chapter is to provide some insight into these concepts, and to establish the conceptual framework of the research by drawing upon previous studies and examples.

NRM Decentralisation and Politics

Since the early 1980s, decentralisation has emerged as a political and economic tool in most developing countries. In the Natural Resource Management (NRM) sector, analysts claimed that over 60 countries reported decentralising of some aspects of natural resource management (Agrawal 2001). Although the degree and scale of decentralisation differs among these countries, it is clear that decentralisation is an important subject in the current development paradigm. Decentralisation of NRM is a dominant theme in contemporary discussions of natural resource and forest policy in many developing countries throughout Asia and the Pacific. However, whether decentralisation policies ultimately fulfil their promise is subject to on-going debate.

The implementation of decentralisation has been justified on various grounds. Some, who argue for its good governance dimension, claim that decentralisation contributes to

increased efficiency, improved resource allocation and accountability, and empowers the common people, allowing them greater participation (e.g., Larson and Soto 2008; Meynen and Doornbos 2004). This is because “locals” (such as local governments) know the needs and desires of their constituents better than national governments; and, at the same time, it is easier to hold local leaders accountable. Some argue that decentralisation promotes democracy by bringing the State closer to the people, increasing local participation and building social capital. Decentralisation policy has also been purported to improve sustainability (Larson and Soto 2008). According to these views, decentralisation is implemented when the State seeks to create social and political mechanisms that will facilitate sustainable development. In contrast, however, Agrawal (2003) and Fisher (1999, 2010) observe that decentralisation is sometimes implemented when states are incapable of delivering their policies. This may occur when official departments lack adequate staff or the financial resources to implement their policies without the participation of local residents. On occasion, the allocation of responsibility and administrative functions to “locals” has been seen as the solution to the crisis. Another observation made by Larson (2004) is that pressure applied by international donors often plays an important role in initiating decentralisation. Again, decentralisation tends to occur when there is significant elite support within government and pressure from international donors offering financial incentives (Larson 2004). More recently, Agrawal contended that the demands of - and pressure applied by - local actors combine to drive the initiative of decentralisation. Local demands are very important in the bringing about of real political change (Agrawal 2003). In sum, it may be said that the drivers of decentralisation policy are diverse. Its implementation has been justified on the basis of efficiency, people’s participation, empowerment and accountability.

Although decentralisation is not a new concept, it seems that the term carries a range of definitions and thus means different things to different people (Larson 2004; Wittayapak and Vandergeest 2010). Generally speaking, decentralisation transfers power from the centre to the lower levels (for example, the transfer of power from the central forest department to regional or provincial forest offices). The process of decentralisation gives rise to two main questions. The first involves power itself. What

kind of power will be transferred? The second question involves place/organisation. Where will the power be transferred to? Who will be the recipient of the transferred power? Ribot attempts to address these questions by distinguishing two types of decentralisation: administrative and political (Ribot 2002). Administrative decentralisation, which is also known as “de-concentration”, refers to the transfer (of power) to lower-level government authorities, or to other local authorities who are upwardly accountable to the central government. Political decentralisation or “democratic” decentralisation refers to the transfer of authority to representative and downwardly accountable actors such as elected local government.

Fisher maintains that power is shifted to three types of locations: 1) regional or local offices of the bureaucracy; 2) local political structures or local government; and, 3) local communities or natural users (Fisher 1999). Fisher, differentiating between decentralisation and devolution, argues that whereas decentralisation may be defined as the relocation of “administrative functions” away from the centre, devolution is the relocation of “power” away from the centre. For Fisher, power can be equated with the capacity or authority to contribute to decision-making (Fisher 1999). Regardless of difference of definition, it seems to me that the common theme or consensus among these decentralisation proponents is that they all agree that the “power” of decision making should be devolved to “locals”, particularly to resource users.

Power and types of power are central and critical to any understanding of the implementation of decentralisation. Agrawal and Ribot (1999) distinguish four broad powers of decision-making: “1) the power to create rules or modify old ones; 2) the power to make decisions about how a particular resource or opportunity is to be used; 3) the power to implement and ensure compliance to new or altered rules; and, 4) the power to adjudicate disputes that arise in the effort to create rules and ensure compliance” (Agrawal and Ribot 1999 p.378). Similar to Fisher, Agrawal and Ribot agree with the notion that power to make decisions in some domains of action that influence others increases the autonomy of the actor who gains these powers and can thus be considered a form of decentralisation. As they note:

Such powers enhance the discretionary authority of local bodies, and directly affect the use of resources. Decisions of this type need not affect the behaviour of others by prescribing what they must, must not, or may do. Thus if a local body comes to have a larger budget or greater power of revenue raising, and or greater autonomy to expend the budget as it sees fit, a degree of decentralization has been achieved even if it does not exercise greater powers of rule making. (Agrawal and Ribot 1999 p.379)

In cases where the concept of decentralisation fails to mention in which direction the powers are to be shifted, it is possible that decentralisation policy may lead to functions and powers being transferred to elected local governments which are upwardly accountable to a superior authority only. Thailand's *Tambol* Administrative Organization (TAO) is one such case. My work experience in Mae Tha sub-district of Chiang Mai province revealed that TAO implementation plans are likely to be set up in response to national policy and "orders" from the centre rather than in consideration of the priorities of villagers in the area. As such, proposals by villagers in many cases were treated as optional for implementation by the TAO. Somewhat regrettably, projects proposed by ordinary villagers, such as community forestry activities, although incorporated in the TAO Development Plan, would only be given financial support if the TAO had funding left over from allocation to other projects which complied directly with government policy such as infrastructure development, education and health.

Contemporary debate over decentralisation

I will commence this section by exploring three main points of critique regarding decentralisation.

a) A central government seeks to retain its power over resources.

Transferring power without accountable representation is dangerous. Establishing accountable representation without power is empty. (Ribot 2002 p.2)

The first critique centres on the transfer to local government of significant, autonomous decision-making authority regarding forest resources. To date, such transfer is rare (Ribot 2002; Larson 2004). Most current decentralisation reform remains under tight

central government control. Also, in many cases, central governments have transferred administrative functions to local authorities without sufficient resources and meaningful decision-making power (Fisher 2010). Central governments commonly maintain control over forest resource management through extensive bureaucratic procedures such as forest management plans, price controls, marketing and permits for cutting, transport and processing (Edmunds et al. 2003). The question is: what justifies a central government's aim to maintain control over resources? Larson reveals the three main arguments repeatedly used by central governments to defend their maintaining of central control: 1) the issue of scale and public goods; 2) low local capacity; and, 3) political interference (Larson 2004). According to Larson, central governments tend to assume that lower-level authorities will be tempted to recognise short-term priorities rather than long term benefit of the public good. As well, it may be that local interests will prevail over long term national interest. Thus, central governments appropriation of forests as public resources is justified. Another common argument for maintaining central control over forest resources is low local capacity. Forest officials claim that forest management is a technical-based activity that requires technical experts to implement programs. Lack of local technical expertise has been used to justify continued central forest department control over forest resources.

b) Local complexity vs a simplistic view of decentralisation

One critique regarding state decentralisation policies and programs is that the design and implementation of state decentralisation are too often standardised and too simplistic to respond effectively to local heterogeneity. A recent book edited by Geiser and Rist (2009)³, shows that state decentralisation programs are problematic given that they have a tendency to follow blueprint procedures, top-down implementation, and standardised application over large areas. In practice, these programs encounter complex realities at the local level. Complexities include, for example, regulations regarding access to land, forest and water, and ongoing conflict over resources between numerous stakeholders, who have different levels of influence and power. Within these

³ Geiser and Rist derived the conclusion from case studies conducted in South Asia and Latin America.

complex situations, the problems purported to be solved by decentralisation are, in fact, exacerbated (Geiser and Rist 2009).

The above complexities are further elaborated through a discursive approach to decentralisation. The application of a discourse analysis approach to decentralisation helps to expose the complexities contained within the concept and its implementation on the ground. In local contexts, for example, notions of citizens, local people, voters – those who are to receive, through decentralisation, a greater voice in shaping their futures – are indeed a very heterogeneous category. The literature on decentralisation often shows a highly stratified, complex, often competing local social reality, such as settlers and indigenous peoples, forest owners and non-owners, and ethnically or diverse groups that cannot be totally encompassed by a notion like “community”. Of course, their expectations of - and stakes in - decentralisation differ. Geiser and Rist note that while state decentralisation ostensibly aims to empower people at the local level, decentralisation is invariably contested because “locals” are socially heterogeneous (Geiser and Rist 2009).

c) The implementation gap

The last point of critique over decentralisation is closely linked to both points discussed above. It may be suggested that due to local complexity, and the unwillingness of central governments to transfer power to local communities, decentralisation has failed to meet the standards of democracy and equity promised in theory. In effect, decentralisation has failed. Much of the literature on decentralisation is organised around this failure, referring to it as “an analysis that begins with promises, and then turns to the question of repeated failure to achieve these promises, not surprisingly perhaps, frequently end[ing] with what is now labelled the implementation gap” (Wittayapak and Vandergeest 2010 p.11). Reference is to a situation wherein inconsistencies between the national policy goal of decentralisation and the implementation of resource management at a particular site exist.

A number of studies reveal the gaps that persist between decentralisation discourse and practice. Analysis reveals that central governments are reluctant to transfer meaningful decision-making powers and sufficient resources to local government units and local communities to implement assigned policies (IGES 2007; Fisher 2000, 2010; Larson 2005; Larson and Soto 2008; Ribot et al. 2006). Local communities have only been granted access to use and monitor resources. The power to make decisions as to how resources should be managed is often retained by state forest agencies (Agrawal and Ostrom 2008). This is, in the main, due to central officials' lack of trust in the capacities of the very people who are supposed to be empowered by decentralisation reform (Ribot et al. 2006). Only limited powers have been effectively transferred away from the centre. Ostensibly' decentralised powers are exercised by actors who are upwardly accountable to central government, a strategy of central government designed to retain power over natural resource management. Moreover, conflict and contradiction with existing official laws and policies are likely to block the progress of decentralisation (Larson 2005).

Decentralisation can produce unintended negative impacts on local forest resource management. The conventional literature on decentralisation tends to apportion blame to top-down, donor driven decentralisation of resource management as a major contributor to the failure of decentralisation. Wittayapak and Vandergeest (2010) argue that there may be many other ways in which agency politics shape decentralisation initiatives. For example, when local institutions are not accountable to local people, decentralisation programs are transformed into new opportunities for collusion among local elites and state officials seeking opportunities to gain control over resources and incomes (Wittayapak and Vandergeest 2010).

In the forestry sector, decentralisation has taken different forms, processes, even names. The latter include: Joint Forest Management in India, Community Forestry in Nepal, the Forest Allocation Programme in Vietnam, the Land and Forest Allocation Programme in Lao PDR and, Community-based Forest Management in the Philippines (IGES 2011). These differences in nomenclature suggest that decentralisation has different meanings for different people. In addition, decentralisation policies are closely linked to

the existing political economy of each nation. Its successful implementation, and solutions to building meaningful “democratic” decentralisation, do not develop outside of the social, economic and political interests of each set of actors within a nation. Larson argues that decentralisation programs in general are initiated at the national level, with financial support by international donors and involving local communities in project implementation. Larson (2005) terms this process “top-down” decentralisation.

In sum, although decentralisation remains highly contested, it has the potential to create new political spaces wherein the State, the private sector, community-based groups and social movements may engage in public action. In the next section, literature on social actors involved in the processes of NRM decentralisation reform is reviewed and discussed.

Actors and Powers in Policy Reform

Policy planning has become a contested arena in many countries especially in the developing and transitional countries in Asia and the Pacific. Thailand, for example, is in the process of reforming and transforming its policies regarding natural resources management. It is also planning more people’s participation policies. This section aims to delineate policy dimensions, particularly policymaking processes and the links between policy planning and the role of the environmental movement and advocacy. Three areas of policy literature are reviewed and presented: 1) policy content; 2) policymaking process; and, 3) the role of interest groups in the policymaking process. The main focus of this section is upon natural resources management policy.

Why do policy and policy reform matter?

Mayers and Bass (1999) argue that as far as the forestry sector is concerned, policy matters a lot. They insist that whether or not forests and trees are planted, nurtured or removed depends upon 1) the decisions people make; 2) the power they have to act; 3) the resources available to them; and, 4) the knowledge, skills and information people have. All of these factors are influenced by beliefs and paradigms concerning what

makes for progress. Mayers and Bass contend that sometimes these beliefs are enshrined in - and protected by - the policy process itself. They conclude that policy can play a role in shaping both the available options and the balance of power between the different people who make decisions.

Proponents of policy reform support the notion that the “right” policy and the policy reforming process can pave the way to solving the problems created by the excessive power of some people and the lack of influence of others. Mayers and Bass criticise old and current policies alike for their lack of interest in forest use or clearance, and in covering the associated environmental and social costs. This has resulted in ordinary people having to bear the brunt of most of these costs (Mayers and Bass 1999). In addition, they stress the problem of current policy processes, which are not open to collective decision-making about how to deal with changes in the environment and economy. The justification for collective decision-making is that it is widely recognised that the environmental and economic change that is occurring is beyond the control of particular groups of people. Policy processes which offer public participation and ideas are, therefore, of considerable concern.

Usher (2009) argues that in Thailand, state forestry⁴ is narrowly framed and tends to focus overwhelmingly on the commercial value of timber, ignoring other types of flora and fauna which sometimes have high value for inhabitants. The local people, their knowledge, and some plants associated with local usage, have been deleted from the state forestry paradigm. In Usher’s words:

Thailand’s state forestry tradition does not reflect the country’s astounding, multi-faceted biological and cultural diversity. Thai forestry has concentrated almost exclusively on a few tree species, focusing overwhelmingly on extracting timber and keeping local people away from the forests. Through much of its history, Thai foresters have ignored other types of flora and the vast body of human knowledge associated with their uses. (Usher 2009 p.1)

⁴ Although the author does not specifically define the term, “state forestry” can be understood as the policy, theories, knowledge and practices related to formal forest management in Thailand

IGES (2007) stresses the need to develop and reform the legal framework that institutionalises community forestry and provides communities with secure tenure. It draws upon lessons learned from South East Asia and South Asia which reveal that under some existing arrangements communities are only provided with management rights for degraded land. Their use rights are insecure, their access to commercially valuable timber and non-timber forest products is unjustly restricted and/or regulations prohibit legitimate livelihood activities on forestlands (IGES 2007).

With reference to India and Nepal, Springate-Baginski et al. (2007) examine the impacts of Participatory Forestry Management (PFM) on local livelihoods, and suggest that the policy of participation has produced optimistic outcomes. Irrespective of the various shortcomings that have occurred, the authors suggest that PFM has legitimated access to the forest and improved the livelihoods of the tribal peoples, who have a long history of forest habitation, and of those who have been marginalised to the least productive lands, who have the greatest reliance on the forest. However, the impacts of PFM on livelihoods have been varied, not only at the local and intra-household level, but at the regional and state levels as well.

As regards the process of establishing a new path for the management of forest resources, i.e., one that will capture emerging trends, it is fair to say that reform of forest management policy is of critical importance. This policy revision may help many countries to keep abreast of changing circumstances and to enhance the value of forests to society.

Public policy and policy reform can prove both complex and dynamic, partly because the term “policy” embraces a range of different aspects, which sometimes contradict each other, such as poverty alleviation and biodiversity conservation. Also, they need to cover and link different scales from the local to the national and international levels. Forest policy has to respond to different societal interests which may prove competitive and change over time. In Thailand, for example, “dark green” conservationists and development NGOs disagreed over the issue of local people and protected areas. The latter, basing their assumptions on the issue of human rights, supported the legality of

local settlement in state-claimed protected areas. The former, who disagreed with the proposed Bill, advocated control over and, if possible, relocation of the forest inhabitants to areas outside of the forests. These conflicting approaches became encapsulated in the debate over the Community Forest Bill, which had sought to find a solution to the problem of people and the forests since the early 1990s. As a result, Thailand still has no agreed national policy on people and the forests.

How is policy made?

There are two distinct views of the policy process. It is seen either as a rational system or as political dialogue. Conventionally, policymaking is widely viewed by scholars as a scientific or rational model, according to which policymaking, as a problem-solving process, is rational, balanced, objective and analytical. In this model, decisions are made in a series of sequential phases, starting with identification of a problem or issue and ending with a set of activities to solve or deal with it. In dealing with such disagreement, this approach supports the notion that policy analysts can pursue truth through the process of testing hypotheses; that is, by measuring them against the standard of real-world experiences. As such, it may be referred to as “positive policy analysis” or positivist (Anderson 2011; Dye 1981).

Howlett et al. (2009) argue that the rational model of policymaking is rational only in the sense that “it prescribes procedures for decision-making that, in theory, will lead every time to the choice of the most efficient possible means of achieving policy goals” (Howlett et al. 2009 p.144). They list a series of sequential actions which the policy maker is required to undertake consistently and predictably in order to make decisions: 1) a goal for solving a problem is established; 2) all alternative strategies of achieving the goal are explored and listed; 3) all significant consequences of each alternative strategy are predicted and the probability of those consequences occurring is estimated; and, 4) the strategy that most nearly solves the problem or solves it at least cost is selected (Howlett et al. 2009).

A positivist approach to policy cycles and planning is probably the common understanding of policymaking adopted by the public and many scholars. The implications of this model are that good sound argument based on evidence is the key to effecting policy development. Policies are designed rather than developed through a more iterative development process.

The conventional view has its critics, who have pointed out that the rational model is far from the reality. In practice, the policy process is not linear, it does not proceed uninterrupted to its logical stage. It's trajectory is complicated by a multiplicity of interests, competing ideas and power. Not only are policy solutions open to debate, but basic questions like deciding on policy goals often cause conflict. The case of Thailand's Community Forest Bill formulation is a good example here. In this particular case, policymaking was not just about how to achieve the government's forest conservation goal, but whether forest policy should aim at maintaining biodiversity, reducing poverty, or a combination of these goals. Different policy actors often have different goals.

The alternative view of policymaking sees it as a consequence of political activity arising from a series of decisions. Authors who follow this approach generally see policymaking as a process of dialogue and negotiation between people with different viewpoints and different degrees of power holding. They see the whole process as essentially messy. Lindblom (1959), who refers to the whole policy process as "muddling through", claims that the ways in which administrators make decisions do not always follow the positive paths advocated.

Anderson (2011) refers to policy cycles (simplified framework, the formation and implementation) as political processes in the sense that they involve conflict and struggle among individuals and groups, officials and agencies, who have conflicting ideas, interests, values and information vis-a-vis public-policy issues. He argues to the effect that "[p]olicy making is 'political'; it involves 'politics'. That is, its features include conflicts, negotiation, the exercise of power, bargaining, and compromise – and sometimes such nefarious practices as deception and bribery" (Anderson 2011 p.5).

Juma and Clarke (1995) observe that in the African context, contemporary policy hardly responds to complex economic change. This may in part be because the current policy framework is influenced by a view of the socio-economic system that is mainly informed by classical mechanical thought which sees the world as relatively stable, in a world which social policy could be reasonably informed by disinterested scientific findings of a traditional kind. The authors urge consideration of policy as a process of complex change. As they note:

The policy process is by no means the rational activity that it is often held up to be in much of the standard literature. Indeed, the metaphors that have guided policy research over recent years suggest that it is actually rather messy, with outcome occurring as a result of complicated political, social and institutional processes which are best described as evolutionary. (Juma and Clarke 1995 p.128)

Actors and their influences on policymaking

The previous section illustrates a trend of policymaking analysis which seemed to move from an expert-designed-policy model toward political processes of policy planning. Analysts recognise that policymaking is no longer purely technical implementation but is influenced by a range of interest groups that exert power and authority over policymaking. These influences affect each stage of the process from agenda setting to the identification of options to weighing up the alternatives, choosing the most favourable and implementing them.

Some literature suggests that “interest groups” in the policy arena are diverse and ambiguous, that is, they embrace various types of policy actors including individuals, organisations, agencies, policy-makers and elected or appointed committees. These groups are located on different geographical and political scales. Different scholars employ different criteria to distinguish and categorise them. For example, Anderson (2011) employs territorial criteria to categorise policy actors into domestic and international policy actors. Howlett et al. (2009) use legal authority criteria to classify groups of policy actors in an attempt to make the separation between “the official policy-makers” who have the legal authority to engage in the formulation of public

policy and “the others” such as important constituents or pressure groups. Howlett et al. argue that official policy-makers perform policymaking tasks that are at least somewhat functionally different from those of others. However, they concede that official policy-makers may, in fact, be significantly influenced by others.

The different categories of policy actors in policy analysis reflect the complexities of actors who either seek to influence policy change or are affected by the proposed policy. I would like to emphasise here that discussion of policy actors needs to be context specific and should clearly identify who is being talked about. Researchers may find generalisation and fixed categories of policy actors useful as they will help them with analysis and to present their research findings more cogently. But, this type of scholarly action may lead or contribute to the marginalising of individuals or groups of people from the policy planning process. In Thailand, for example, opting to use only the broad NGO category, without reference to a specific organisation and its work, may be of little help if one seeks to understand the politics of forestry decentralisation. This is partly because there are differences among NGOs regarding their ideologies, assumptions and strategies. Some NGOs are willing to work collaboratively with state departments with the expectation that such strategic collaboration will lead to the accomplishment of their organisational goals. But, some may reject entering into a strategic partnership with the State for specific reasons. In addition, there may be differences among individuals within the same category, even among people associated with the same organisation. Many front line forest officials, who work in the field and work closely with the villagers, may hold different ideas about people and the forests that originated with their superiors or directors located in the centre. Thus, an understanding of - and recognition of - these complexities and diversities is critical to any understanding of forest decentralisation politics.

Mayers and Bass (1999) stress that in a climate of decentralisation, “there tends to be a bigger cast of policy actors than first meets the eyes” (1999 p. 8). In their viewpoint, any assumptions of national forest agencies as central actors who control the policymaking process rarely reflect the real situation. In the current era of globalisation, they argue, another government agency responsible for trade and macroeconomic

policy may prove more influential. However, they admit the exclusion of several mainstream forest actors from policy processes.

Keeley and Scoones (2000), with reference to the creation of an actor-network that enables policy actors to influence policymaking, suggest that in theory, members of the actor-network gravitate together through a sharing of common values and outlooks. Networks, in this sense, are mechanisms through which knowledge becomes practice. They are constantly adjusted if contexts and circumstances change. In the words of Keeley and Scoones:

Tight, well-integrated actor networks, drawing on particular discourses about environment and development, may unravel if contexts and circumstances change. In the case of the emergence of a participatory perspective to natural resource management, this has been a fairly gradual process, with in-roads into the dominant position being made through new networks of NGOs, working together with colleagues within government and with the support of a variety of international actors, from the research and donor communities. (Keeley and Scoones 2000 p.110)

I regard the notion of an actor-network as being very useful and critical to understanding the politics of policymaking. As this study will show, like-minded actors have employed actor-networks as political tools for producing policy narratives about people and the forests in order to influence and frame national debate surrounding the controversial issue of people and the forests.

Another point concerns the uneven distribution of power among the various policy actors. Actors in the policy arena have different types of power (Agrawal and Ribot 1999). According to Agrawal and Ribot, these differences depend upon the historical, social and political constitution of the power of each actor, which may be based on ideology, wealth, heredity, election, appointment or other deciding factors. I would add that power imbalance will occur particularly in contexts wherein there is an imbalance in the structure of society. Structural imbalance can, in turn, offer greater opportunities for some policy actors, who seek to secure or increase their power. From my point of view, the uneven distribution of power between policy stakeholders is worth

considering because it could potentially determine whose voices and ideas will gain validity or lack validity in the forestry policy planning process.

Fairhead and Leach (1997) observe that villagers' perspectives of development problems have been subjugated under the formulation of development policy. They claim that international narratives delineating environmental degradation and change, although replete with "demonstrably false ideas, have come to acquire validity in policy circles" (Fairhead and Leach 1997 p.35). The authors point to the "webs of power" that underpinned the construction of explanation about environmental change and degradation.

Similarly, Blaikie and Springate-Baginski (2007) write that the power of policy actors to persuade target audiences in the policy process may derive from access to other sources of power. For example, the World Bank may have a narrative of good practice in participatory forest management and may be able to publicise and fund it. A small NGO, with 20 years of hands-on policy practice on the ground, may make similar policy recommendations and employ the same narrative but their policy proposal may have less influence at larger scale. Larger and politically dominant partners tend to be the predominant projectors of narratives.

Much earlier literature on policymaking tends to underestimate the political role played by local people or local resources users in their attempts to influence policy change. In actual fact, they are actively involved in the changing of policy both discursively and materially. In my research sites in Thailand, for example, villagers and their allies have communicated discourse like "policy makers and forest officials do not understand local contexts" to others beyond their village boundaries, their aim being to delegitimise the current forestry policy that they see as destabilising the good relationship between the local people and the forest environment. In addition, networks of community forests have been established in every region of Thailand since the Community Forest Bill came under consideration by the Parliament in the early 1990s. These community forest networks, the Northern Community Forest Network in particular, played a direct role in influencing the forestry decentralised policy, by

proposing their own version of the Community Forest Bill in 2000 to the Parliament. The mobilisation of local resources users has been facilitated and supported by like-minded NGOs.

The final point informed by previous studies is that multiple actors engaging in policymaking occupy divergent versions of the “truth” and competing views regarding people and forest relationships. Local people invariably have their own stories, which may be based on truth or myth. The ways in which claimed truth – or narrative - is produced and communicated to others will be discussed in the next section.

Actors’ Policy Narratives

Many forest policies have been based on the assumption that once upon a time people lived in harmony with nature, that this broke down as people became numerous, needy and greedy, and that all kinds of environmental and social calamity will result unless the wielder of the policy (usually government) takes dramatic action by creating forest reserves, controlling use of forest products and generally ordering people around – and out of forests. Variations on this story, often spiced up with different sorts of “crisis” at different times, have served policy-makers well and enabled forest departments and the other agencies given life by the policy to justify their existence and expand the territory and resources under their control (including donor cash in recent times). (Mayer and Bass 1999 p.30)

It is increasingly recognised that most policymaking involves policy narratives. As quoted above, the story of forest degradation, which is closely linked with population problems, has been used by forest related agencies to trigger action over the forestlands in the name of forest protection. In addition, there is the issue of justification which policy stories lend their authors. Policy narratives have played a crucial role in policy-making processes. This section will (a) discuss the concept of policy narrative; (b) review the functions of policy narratives in policy planning; and (c) review the critique of narrative studies in environmental politics.

Defining policy narrative

Narrative is not easy to define. Many scholars in development and environmental politics studies use the term differently, making it difficult to ascertain a fixed or commonly accepted definition (for example, see Fairhead and Leach 1995, 1997; Forsyth and Walker 2008; Fortmann 1995; Hajer 1995; Roe 1994). Roe (1994), for example, defines narratives as “stories – scenarios and arguments – that are taken by one or more parties to the controversy as underwritten (that is, establishing or certifying) and stabilizing (that is, fixing or making steady) the assumptions for policy making in the face of the issue’s uncertainty, complexity or polarization” (1994 p.3). According to Roe, narratives and stories have a common definition: that is, each story/narrative has a beginning, a middle, and an end. The story revolves around a sequence of events or positions in which something happens or from which something follows (Roe 1991).

Hajer (1995), who interprets the notion of the storyline somewhat differently, claims that, a storyline “is a generative sort of narrative that allows actors to draw upon various discursive categories to give meaning to specific or social phenomena” (1995 p.56). In this sense, the primary function of storylines is that “they suggest unity in the bewildering variety of separate discursive components parts of a problem” that otherwise has no clear or meaningful pattern of connections” (Hajer 1995 p.56).

Forsyth and Walker (2008) view “environmental narrative” as an explanation that simplifies the relations between an environmental problem and its causes. This explanation does not develop in a vacuum, but is shaped by the interaction of environmental knowledge and social order upon which the explanation is based. According to Forsyth and Walker, “environmental narratives are simplified explanations of environmental cause and effect that emerge in the context where environmental knowledge and social order are mutually dependent” (2008 p.17).

Taking account of the above discussion, it can be concluded that narratives are stories that policy actors tell to make sense of events and stabilise the claims that underpin

policy interventions. This is partly because in the policy arena, very often much is unknown. Stakeholders frequently hold opposing views and knowledge concerning a particular issue, and sometimes, agreed criteria against which decision-making should be weighed, are absent. Thus, through their telling of stories policy actors share the social meaning of events or actions with their audiences. In sum, a narrative or story is told in a particular context that significantly informs the content and form of the narrative.

In addition, narratives involve stakeholders. Stakeholders in policy narrative production can be divided into two groups: the storyteller and the audience. McBeth et al. (2010) suggest that in the policy arena, the storyteller stakeholders including interest groups, media, and elected officials, construct policy stories to shape problem definitions to suit their favoured policy outcomes, to expand or contain the status quo, and to influence public opinion. Their audiences consist of citizens and other stakeholders who the narrators hope to influence (2010 p.393). Here I will suggest that in particular circumstances, the positions of storyteller and audience may overlap and become ambiguous. Particular stakeholders may position themselves as storytellers, but at the same time be treated as audiences by other stakeholders.

Role, function and power of narrative

Policy narratives play a vital role both in everyday lives and in the policy arena. Much of the policy narrative literature emphasises three roles of storytelling: persuasion, sense-making and legitimacy.

Here I will briefly discuss the role of narrative as a communicative device in daily life. Stories are more pervasive in our daily lives than people tend to realise (Kaplan 1986): they are frequently used to explain a variety of complex situations. Stories may be told for different purposes and in different contexts. In daily life, for example, stories can take the form of a game where everyone adds a new line. Stories can be used to foretell the terrible fate of people who break the rules; they may construct a dilemma, then end with a question for the listener/s to ponder (De Groot and Zwaal 2007). Thus, in

everyday life, people frequently use stories to explain why events happen, to communicate with friends and co-workers, and to position themselves in the society to which they belong.

Besides using narratives to communicate the events they experience in their everyday lives, social actors also use stories to create meaning for events. In effect, narratives do the sense-making work. Kaplan suggests that people have a natural desire to impose “order on complexity” (Kaplan 1986 p.768), in order to make sense of their everyday experience, their lives as a whole, and the world in general. In the process, social actors tend to inject order into a series of complex events, transforming them into a coherent, narrative structure.

Roe (1994) argues that in the face of complex and sometimes highly charged issues, a better understanding of the dynamics of a particular event is provided by what she terms “policy narrative”. According to Roe, policy narratives or stories are taken by one or more of the parties involved as underwriting the controversy and establishing the assumptions for any policymaking. Informed by literary theory, Roe defines stories as having “beginnings, middles, and ends, as in scenarios; if the stories are in the form of arguments, they have premises and conclusions” (Roe 1994 p.3).

Thus, policy narratives should not be regarded as purely communicative devices, for they also do sense-making work. In the policy arena, policy actors tell stories to make sense of their political claims. The question is: why do people use stories to make sense of events? Kaplan suggests that it is partly because narratives have “unique ability” (1986 pp.769-770). This implies that they can be employed to explain events without reference to external principles, laws or criteria. Kaplan further argues that narrative explanations do not depend for their explanatory power on explicit outside references. The telling of stories provides another way of explaining complexity without having to agree on explicit criteria to render the claims meaningful.

Much of the policy narrative literature emphasises the role of narrative as a persuasive device. Narratives are not “just talk” or interventions for other’s amusement, but they

are persuasive constructions (Blaikie et al. 2007 p.92). Political actors attempt to persuade involved stakeholders to provide support for a particular course of action. So, when these actors articulate a policy narrative, they are trying to get the audiences to affirm their favoured policy claims. In this context, social actors typically employ “political tactics” to appeal to particular the audience they are addressing (McBeth et al. 2010 p.394). These tactics involve the strategic uses of language to influence public opinion and policy process. According to McBeth et al., these narrative political tactics vary depending upon whether a group of social actors “sees itself as winning or losing in the policy debate” (2010 p.394).

Narrative strategies are not just about what is included in a story, but about what is left unsaid. Li (2002), arguing for “strategic simplifications”, observes that the notion of community-based natural resource management (CBNRM) contains strategic simplifications. She maintains that in order to gain support in the policy arena, the advocates of CBNRM persistently convey interdependence between local resource users and environmental protection in the upland context. It is unclear whether the characteristic of community-environment association really pre-existed on the ground or whether it was a goal the project sought to achieve. In addition, Li highlights the simplification strategy through the creation of iconic CBNRM. The upland communities “are said to deserve resource rights because they are or could be good resource managers”. But, agriculture, the contemporary use of land by local residents and market linkages are left out of this strategic action.

Similar to Li, Walker (2006) argues that the community rights to forest movement in Thailand tended to exclude the use of agricultural land from the political campaign. Walker further maintains that where the campaigners clearly recognised the philosophical claim that people and forests can coexist, “there [was] no explicit recognition of the legitimate role of agriculture in upland forested areas” (2006 p.111). Thus upland agriculture became hidden in the discourse surrounding community rights and forests.

Lastly, the literature on policy narratives in environmental politics regards stories as a mean of discursive legitimacy. The above case studies suggest that policy narratives contributed to a) justifying the actions of the state to establish control over resources and take them away from the local residents (Armitage 2004; Forsyth and Walker 2008); b) legitimising and justifying international aid and development agencies' interventions on the ground (Fairhead and Leach 1996). These narratives serve as moral authority allowing these distant stakeholders and development experts to speak for nature and to claim the rights over land and resource they do not own (Fairhead and Leach 1995, 1996; McCarthy et al. 2009; Roe 1995); and, c) positioning social actors and institutional practices in the processes of ongoing and competing ideas (Fischer 2003).

In sum, it can be concluded that policy narratives have played a vital role in the policymaking processes. The narratives or stories within the context of policy debate and reform have at least three kinds of work: to create meaning and validate action, to mobilize action, and to define and present alternative ways of looking at things (Fortmann 1995).

Critiques of narrative studies of environmental politics

In the previous section, I reviewed and discussed the various roles of storytelling in the policymaking arena. It seems fair to say that the role of narrative in the realm of environmental politics has been increasingly recognised for decades. In this section, I review and discuss critiques of narratives. Influenced by post-structuralist thought, environmental narrative analysts tended to suggest that the dominant form of environmental narratives is invalid. According to Forsyth and Walker (2008), these environmental explanations are “simplistic, misleading, and highly selective”. The extant studies, I argue, tend to understate the role of narrative strategies, that the storytellers aim may be to shift the subject of debate and course of action in various contexts of resource contestation.

There is little doubt that stories of “environmental crisis” have been used to justify state actions and policies for century. The well known shifting cultivation argument was employed to stabilise and legitimise government intervention that sought to replace this backward activity with fixed agricultural technologies. In the Lao PDR, for example, the government introduced a policy signalling the end of shifting cultivation (Fisher 1996), their claim being that this form of cultivation was a major cause of deforestation and erosion. Portraying shifting cultivation in this way, “alternatives” to stabilise shifting cultivation were proposed and implemented by the government of the Lao PDR (Fisher 1996). A further example of a powerful regional environmental crisis was the Himalayan degradation theory. Scientific studies and publications in this region led to the widely accepted explanation of the mountain catastrophes linking the population explosion with mountain deforestation, soil erosion, and massive downstream destruction. This “Theory of Himalayan Environmental Degradation” (Ives and Messerli 1989) was used to justify the policies and actions that aimed to reorganise the mountain subsistence farmers, who were seen as the root cause of the deforestation problem.

Critiques of the “environmentalism as usual” (Forsyth and Walker 2008 p.3) mainly question the accuracy and validity of these environmental crisis explanations. Ives and Messerli (1989), for example, who examined the validity and implications of the Theory of Himalayan Environmental Degradation presented above, found a) that deforestation in the Himalayan region occurred more than a hundred years ago; and, b) that the positive role played by the mountain subsistence farmers must be recognised as the vital key to - not as the cause of - the problem. Clearly, Ives and Messerli’s study shows the theory of Himalayan theory to be flawed.

Another claim of critics of environmental narratives is that the dominant explanations (deforestation, desertification, conservation, and development narratives) rarely reflect local “realities” and dynamics. This line of analysis is likely to explore the history of knowledge production, reveal the social actors involved in the production process, and highlight new “reality” identified by on the ground studies. Analysts have produced counter-narratives as alternative forms of knowledge to conventional and flawed

explanations of local and environmental change. Terms such as “indigenous knowledge”, “participatory” and “subsistence cultivators” are commonly found in these analyses (see Armitage 2004; Bassett and Zueli 2003; Fairhead and Leach 1995, 1996; Roe 1991). According to the analysts, counter-narratives were seen as more people-oriented and as experiencing locally specific forms of environmental knowledge.

Forsyth and Walker (2008), commenting upon the “discourse coalition” that characterises the environmental crisis explanation, note the opposing assumptions of highlanders as the “forest guardians” or “forest destroyers”. Both components of the coalition share a common vision of environmental change, that is, “the upland crisis, born of a series of questionable beliefs about environmental processes in the uplands” (2008 p. 19, p.227). Although these perceptions were generated by different and sometimes opposing social actors, they nonetheless share the same underlying bias that labelled local residents as highlanders who are either forest protectors or forest destroying agents. This simplification of environmental degradation led to a faulty explanation of environmental change in the uplands. Somewhat surprisingly, Forsyth and Walker seem to pay little attention to the specific historical and cultural contexts in which the environmental narratives were generated.

In sum, it seems fair to suggest that in the policymaking process, wherein so many issues remain unclear, contested and ambiguous, the production of policy narratives is crucial. These narratives not only serve to justify and make sense of the proposed ideas of policy reform, but also play a significant role in determining the shape and process of events. More importantly, policy narratives have the potential to make people see things differently and shifting the course of the political struggles (Fischer 2003). This is a crucial point that this thesis seeks to elucidate. Each narrative pertaining to people and the forests, the focus of this thesis, contains different world views, beliefs and assumptions regarding the relationships between humans and nature, and between local people and the forests in particular. The narrators would like both the policy makers and the public to view these relationships as they view them and, by extension, to support their version of the Community Forest Bill.

Exploring the Use of Narratives in Context: A Conceptual Research Framework

This research critically examines the various narratives surrounding people and forests in the context of the national debate over forestry decentralisation policy in Thailand, a debate encapsulated in the drafting processes of the Community Forest Bill since the early 1990s. In the conflicting policy arena, different policy stories about people and the forests have been recounted by policy actors in order to justify their political claims, and to legitimise their respective positions in the policy debate. The thesis also seeks to examine the narratives told by members of forest communities, who were the subject of the political debate. In the context of resource contestations among concerned stakeholders, local people use storytelling as a political device to mobilise political support and shift the course of action.

By “people and forest narratives”, I mean the stories told by social actors regarding the people, forests and the relationships between. These stories are neither neutral nor unproblematic, but contain political aspirations. They are not born in a vacuum, but are driven by the assumptions, beliefs and aspirations of the social actors involved in the production of the stories. In this work, I treat storytelling about people and the forests as a political device. The terms “narrative”, “storyline” and “storytelling” are used interchangeably in this thesis.

This study focuses on the political aspects of policy storytelling about people and the forests. I have drawn the term “power of the storylines” from policy and environmental narrative literature that seeks to determine whether narratives are neutral or unproblematic with respect to simplification, representation, positionality and partiality of knowledge. Forsyth and Walker (2008), who suggest that storylines play a crucial role in the positioning and shaping of environmental debate, point to the tendency of narrative production to legitimise and promote certain world views regarding upland agriculture, watersheds and highland people. Li (2002), moves beyond the question of partiality in terms of what narratives represent to consider also what has been left out from the representation.

This thesis highlights three aspects of policy storyline. First, it looks at the contexts and events in each storyline, the main aim being to illustrate the nature of people and forest narratives by focusing on their content, people's voices, and the contexts where the stories were used. Second, it focuses on the knowledge strategies embedded within the storytelling, particularly upon the language employed by narrators to make sense of and stabilise their claims about people and the forests. Lastly, it seeks to highlight which issues policy narratives deliberately hide or silence. The unsaid and unsayable issues and political aspirations behind these actions is a key issue the thesis seeks to address. This task, which extends beyond the texts, attempts to ascertain the various assumptions, beliefs and political aspirations underpinning the storytelling.

In focusing on the power of storylines, it must be emphasised here that the production of policy narratives surrounding people and the forests may reinforce or contribute to power imbalances, that is to local people's struggle for rights to access local resources. Policy narratives may deliberately omit mention of agricultural practices in the forests for some political reason or other. As such, in this context, examination of policy narratives is critical.

Chapter 4

Research Methods and Fieldwork

Introduction

This research has combined narrative analysis with ethnography to explore the production, distribution and consequences of people and forest narratives in society, particularly in a forest community setting. As regards narrative analysis, in the course of my research I recognised that policy actors use policy narratives (a) to make sense of their claims; and, (b) to present said claims as they pertain to people and the forests, and to the public and policy makers. My research aims not only to examine the internal organisation and content of narratives, but also to examine narratives in the socio-political context. More specifically, it aims to examine people and forest narratives in the context of the community forest movement in Thailand between the early 1990s and 2007. This required me to step outside of the narrative content and to consider questions such as who produced the various type of narratives? what are their interests and aspirations? and, what were the consequences?

At the outset, I contacted political actors involved in both the movement and in narratives production. These political actors, both individuals and organisations, were located at various political administrative levels in villages, districts, and provinces and in Bangkok. They belonged to different social categories including NGOs, officials, policy makers, rural people and local organisations. Two forest communities were chosen in the interests of studying the power effects of narratives on local people's lives, the landscape, and the relationships between them. In the process, the "field" for narrative studies was clearly fixed and located. The field was defined by the nature of the stories, and by the numbers of stakeholders involved in the storying-telling process. Mayer and Bass (1999) claim that:

“Field work” for policy analysis cannot be restricted to discrete local communities or bounded geographical areas, nor to corporations, élites and their centres of power. We need to focus on the social and political space articulated through relations of power and systems of governance between and amongst these levels. (1999, p. 8)

This research was divided into three phases. The first involved the identification of policy narratives regarding people and the forests. In this phase my main activity was to obtain documents containing written narratives pertaining to people and the forests. The second phase involved interviews with key informants. The focus of the last phase was upon ethnographies of the two forest communities. Key activities of this phase included interviews, participant observation and the “walk and talk” technique. Each phase complemented the next, so they were not strictly separated chronologically. And, because they overlapped, it was necessary to work back and forth among the three phases. For example, some key informants advised me about publications that had been published during the debate over the Community Forest Bill. If these publications were not as yet in my hands, I searched and obtained them after I concluded the interview.

The list of key informants was compiled following the perusal of documents, publications and newspaper columns relevant to people and the forests. My fieldwork was informed by my working experience with the Regional Community Forestry Training Center for Asia and the Pacific (RECOFTC) an organisation based in Bangkok, between 1996 and 2004. These types of experience allowed me to plan where I could obtain publications and who I should meet and interview.

My Multiple Positionalities

The particular identity and approach of the researcher may influence and shape research encounters, processes and outcomes (Hopkins 2007). The links between the various identities of researchers and research outcomes may be evidenced in different ways. For example, the ethnicity of the researcher can determine the structure of everyday interactions with research participants. As well, researchers’ positionalities may impact significantly upon the ways in which they are read and interpreted by research

participants (Hopkins 2007). Positionalities may include aspects of identity (race, class, gender, age, sexuality, disability) and personal experience of research such as training and previous projects worked upon by the researcher. In this section, I reflect upon my own multiple positionalities that originated from both my previous work and current social position, given that these positionalities shaped and influenced my fieldwork in Thailand.

Although I identified myself as a PhD candidate from the University of Sydney when engaging with my research subjects and participants, I realised that social position had a role to play when conducting research in my homeland of Thailand. I preferred people to recognise me as a student while I was conducting my research project, but, this was not to be. Reflecting Thai culture, many people and key informants kept asking the same question: what was I really doing? To them, I had a complex identity. Of course, I was a PhD candidate from an Australian university. In my opinion, this rendered my student/researcher identity neutral. My expectation was that key informants would be willing to provide me with information and share their opinions with me once I introduced myself as a PhD student. My aim was to show I stood in the middle of the conflict surrounding the people and the forests and that I favoured neither side. But, my assumption was proven wrong. Many key informants were keen to share and exchange opinions, but only when they were convinced that I was on their “side”. So, sometimes I introduced myself as a lecturer from the Forestry Faculty at Kasetsart University. Sometimes I told them I had previously been an NGO worker advocating for the Community Forest Bill. I had no deliberate intention of misleading people about my identity. I simply wanted to create a comfortable environment for the forthcoming interviews.

I gained a certain advantage from assuming multiple identities. When I first arrived in Pakluay village, I was challenged by Hmong villagers about my social position in Thailand. I initially introduced myself as a PhD student from the University of Sydney. This was how I wanted the villagers to see me during my work period in the village. However, it was inevitable that I should let them know that I was also a lecturer at the Forestry Faculty at Kasetsart University, when they asked about my job in Thailand.

My association with the Forestry Faculty caused a bit of trouble, at least when I first arrived in the Hmong village of Paa Kluay. In time, I realise that it was an issue of trust. The villagers saw forestry scholars, forest officers and conservationists collectively as a group who opposed the farming strategies they had practiced for decades. They thought that all people connected with “conservation” organisations shared the same views about the local people and the forests. In an attempt to solve the trust problem, I finally told the villagers that I had been working with RECOFTC for years during the campaign for the Community Forest Bill. I found that this explanation helped to make my research work in the village much easier.

Hopkins (2007) suggests that when doing fieldwork, it is important that researchers are considerate of both the similarities and differences that obtain between themselves and their research participants. Of particular importance are the similarities between the researcher and the researched, which may include shared experiences and attributes. According to Hopkins, all of these factors could support the researcher’s “alliance formation” (2007 p.388), enabling her/him to establish a workable rapport with key informants and research participants.

I had worked with RECOFTC for almost 8 years between 1996 and 2004. During this time, I had a chance to work with forest communities particularly in the north of Thailand, helping them to develop their “community forest management plans”. From 2000 onwards, I joined the Northern Community Forest Network (NCFN), campaigning for the Community Forest Bill. As a member of RECOFTC, I supported the network by providing relevant information regarding people and the forests, strengthening their members’ capacity by providing training on forest management, taking them on study tours, and organising workshops and seminars. During that time, I worked closely with like-minded NGOs in the north, particularly the Northern Development Foundation (NDF), in building local capacity for managing natural resources at the village and watershed levels. Beyond the site level, I was part of a team organising workshops and political campaigns to promote the legal recognition of local people in forest resource management. Our aim was to support the passing of the Community Forest Bill. In late

2004, I resigned from RECOFTC and since then I have worked for the Forestry Faculty at Kasetsart University⁵.

Although multiple identities allowed me to access key informants more easily, they gave rise to certain risks and dilemmas. There was a general expectation that my research would address their concerns regarding people and the forests. One NGO conservationist, who disagreed with allowing the establishment of community forest in protected areas, asked me to stress her definition of community forest in my thesis. In her opinion, the term “community forest” implies the management of forest resources by local people. The issue of farmlands was not included in community forest management. As regards the pro-community group, some expected my research to criticise the failure of the centralised approach to forest management. They wanted to maintain the concept of community rights to forest stressing that “local communities” were suitable units for resource management.

I am still an active supporter of community forests particularly the form of forest management that aims to empower the voiceless people in the forest communities. In the case of this research, however, I wanted to step back and scrutinise the political claims surrounding the people and the forests critically. I will argue that all parties played their respective “games” in the debate over the Community Forest Bill. As the following chapters will show, all claims about people and the forests contained strategic simplifications which tended to showcase convenient issues while avoiding the more controversial ones. This strategic action somehow led to unnecessary restriction of local access to forest resources. For example, resource users are prohibited from using timber from designated community forests. I support the legal recognition of forest communities particularly the poorest of these communities, but this recognition should not be limited to the rights to resources. Their citizenship right should also be legally recognised.

⁵ While I was doing the research, I was an employee of the Forestry Faculty, but on leave.

Collecting Written Stories

My fieldwork started in late 2009, in the post-movement phase of community forestry in Thailand. Collecting the written narratives of people and the forests proved to be a major source of data and information that would facilitate an understanding of how, why and what actors' narratives have been produced and circulated, and by whom they have been used. Generally, written narratives were produced in association with political events. For example, Professor Niwat (a former Dean of Forestry Faculty of Kasetsart University) submitted an open letter to MPs and media agencies during the debate that preceded the passing of the Community Forest Bill (see Chapter 8). This open letter played a vital role in expressing the conservationists' concerns as to whether community forests should be allowed to be established in protected areas. The letter not only expressed the conservationists' concerns regarding forest degradation and environmental crises, but it also contained policy recommendations as to how community forests should be addressed in policy. In this sense, I regarded open letters as written stories making claims about people and the forests and directing the ways in which the relationships between local communities and the forests were perceived. This letter was addressed directly to policy makers and the public in general.

I faced a huge challenge when I started collecting the written stories. From the outset I had difficulty distinguishing which documents should or should not be counted as "field data", the written stories of people and the forests. There were so many relevant documents and publications compiled by different organisations. The documents I am reflecting on here included books, seminar proceedings, newspapers, CD-ROMs and newsletters. In order to deal with these challenges, I developed criteria on which to base selection of written narratives according to the divisions between the political actors in the community forest movement suggested by the literature, that is, between the nature-oriented and people-oriented advocates. I carried out a stakeholder analysis based upon my previous experience with the community forest movement in Thailand. This analysis was useful for both written narrative collection and key informant interviews. Whereas the former criticised the people and their resources utilisation as destructive agents, the latter tended to blame scientific forestry and promote local knowledge and

local organisation of natural resources management. The criteria I employed helped me to identify which stories should be counted and collected. However, later I found that some documents failed to fit with the above divisions. An example of this is the workshop proceedings about the role of forest resources in poverty alleviation produced by RECOFTC (RECOFTC 2000). The stories contained within the proceedings neither explicitly promoted community rights nor condemned conventional forestry. Rather, they talked about how forest resources contributed to reducing rural poverty and sustaining local livelihoods. However, those stories strongly recommended that forest resources should be managed by local people.

I visited a number of document centres and university libraries seeking written stories about people and the forests. In Bangkok, I went to the RECOFTC Information Centre, the Kasetsart University library, Chulalongkorn University, NIDA, the RFD's library and the National Library. In Chiang Mai, I went to the Chiang Mai University library and the Northern Development Foundation (NDF) office. My working experience reminded me that the NDF had produced a huge number of publications for mounting a political campaign supporting the Community Forest Bill since the early 1990s. I spent at least one day or more in each place seeking and obtaining material. Fortunately, the current information database system allowed me to access materials easily. When searching the library database system for documents, for example, I used the key words *khon kub paa* (people and the forests) and *paa chum chon* (community forest). When I found relevant material, where possible I requested a copy. But, in nearly every case, I had to make photocopies of the material.

I found accessing newspaper articles a difficult experience. In Thailand, only the *Bangkok Post* could provide an archival database and only for a limited number of years. So, my first task was to search the *Bangkok Post* site. Again, I used the two key words I used in the library. When I found the relevant articles on the database, I noted the title of the article, the date and, if available, the name of the author. I then went to the National Library with the information. I later realised that having the date of the article was essential for accessing old newspaper articles. The Librarian asked me to fill in a form requesting the use of the newspaper collection facility. I had to supply the

date, at least the month when the newspaper published, and the name of the newspaper. The newspapers had been chronicled sequentially by month. So, in one collection one could find a month's newspapers at any one particular time. Starting with the *Bangkok Post*, I then searched for newspaper articles in other Thai newspapers, my assumption being that newspapers were likely to respond to particular political debates simultaneously. So, I looked at Thai newspapers which had been published in the same period of time as the *Bangkok Post*. This technique was reasonably successful. I found some articles in Thai newspapers, but it was an extremely time consuming task. So, I ceased searching and made photocopies of the articles I had found. At the National Library, the borrowers were restricted to photocopying within the library only.

I grouped and analysed the material I had collected using (mainly) the narrative analysis techniques discussed below (Polkinghorne 1995 pp.11-12; Roulston 2010 p.166). Rather than coding the data, I synthesized the key concepts and themes drawn from the various materials. There were four main themes relevant to people and the forests: the impact of the local people on the forest ecosystem, forests for livelihoods, community rights and official community forests. These themes were first identified based on the commonly made recognition of two opposing camps - "dark green" conservationists and "light green" community rights activists. I later realized, as I examined documents that there were differences within those two defined themes in terms of the strategies employed in the narratives.

Interviews with Key Political Actors

Interviews were conducted to obtain narratives pertinent to people and the forests. Because my time was limited, I had to restrict my interviews to key informants who could provide comprehensive narratives of people and the forests. The interview technique allowed me to interact directly with policy actors who were actively involved in the production of people and forests narratives. As well, it allowed me to ask questions, and to clarify unclear issues I had found in the written narratives. The main objective of the interviews was to cross-check and clarify the written narratives. In addition, key informants provided documents and publications relevant to my thesis

topic. As I suggested earlier, I had to work back and forth between obtaining written narratives and interviewing key informants. I found these two activities complemented each other.

A list of key informants was compiled during the collection of the written stories. Eighteen key informants were interviewed through these formal interviews. During my period of fieldwork in Thailand, I also met and talked to many informants in an informal manner. Prior to conducting the formal interviews, appointments were made with key informants via email and/or telephone. I tried to contact key informants, particularly the more senior informants, by email, but later I realised that calling their secretaries directly was more effective and convenient than email. The interviews were semi-structured: the key and variable questions were based upon the individual backgrounds. I used a tape recorder during the interviews but only after the interviewees had been consulted and informed. A list of interviewees is provided in Table 3.

Table 3: List of Key Informants.

Categories	Key informants
Policy makers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wanlop Tungkananulak, former Senator • Panas Tassaneeyanonta, former Senator
Academia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Somsak Sukwong, former Director, RECOFTC • Niwat Reungpanich, former Dean of Forestry Faculty • Yos Santasombat, academic, Chiang Mai University
Policy advocates	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pearmsak Makarabhirom, former RECOFTC staff • Rawee Thaworn, RECOFTC staff • Sayamol Kaiyoonwong, NGO staff, Project for Ecological Awareness Building • Rataya Chantian, NGO staff, Seub Nakhasathien Foundation • Wasan Jompakdee (former member of Dhammanat

Categories	Key informants
	Foundation), academic, Chiang Mai University <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decho Chaiyatap, Northern Development Foundation • Prapat Reunkamfoo, Chair of Chom Thong Watershed Conservation Association • Watana Wanlodom (former member of Dhammanat Foundation), Chaipattana Foundation
Forest officers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Komon Pragtong, former forest officer • Pralong Dumrongthai, Head of Community Forest Department, RFD • Thiti Kanoktaveethakorn, forest officer, the National Park, Wildlife and Plant Department • Chonlatid Suraswadi, Deputy Director, the RFD

The key informants were selected according to the need to represent a range of stakeholders related to the community forest movement and the production of people and forest narratives. In this light, four key categories of stakeholders were identified: policy makers, academia, policy advocates and forest officers. Certain informants were then chosen for interview based on their involvement in the development of community forestry in Thailand and particularly in the process of drafting and debating the Community Forest Bill. Selection of informants was partly based on the need to clarify some issues in statements they had made in the selected stories.

Many of my key informants were no longer involved in the field of community forest. Some had retired, others were working in other fields. This presented a huge challenge. One retired forest officer, who had been actively involved in the drafting process of the RFD Community Forest Bill, refused to participate because he no longer held a forest official position. He suggested that I should interview a forest officer who currently held the post. But, unfortunately, the current officer had never been involved in the

Community Forest Bill process. On the above key informant list, I have tried to show the old and current positions of the political actors.

From a narrative perspective, I treated the interviews as sites of story making between the interviewer and the respondent. When questioned, the interviewees never responded directly, rather they opted to tell a story. For example, when I asked: do you agree with the statement that people and forests can co-exist? the answers varied. There was no simple answer such as “agree” or “don’t agree”. They told stories to support their responses. In other words, interview took the forms of stories. And, where they did not necessarily reflect the reality, they were constructed by the interviewees as a form of narrative interactive exchange with the interviewer who was sitting in close proximity to him/her.

I decided not to transcribe the data from the interviews. Instead, I downloaded the digital files into my computer and copied them to a storage device. The files were named according to the interviewees’ first names. The date, and the venue where the interviews took place, were recorded separately in a document file. This allowed me re-listen to the interviews when necessary. I had earlier realised that transcription was not merely a technical endeavour, but it was a time-consuming and physically-demanding task.

Ethnography of Forest Communities

My investigation of “local” narratives surrounding people and the forests required two forest communities to be purposively selected as study sites: Huai Kaew and Paa Kluay villages. I use the term “purposively” because these two communities were described as “good” and “bad” examples of forest communities by policy actors during the debate surrounding the passing of the Community Forest Bill. Both communities had been used as examples throughout the debate. Huai Kaew was called a forest protective community by pro-community rights advocates; Hmong Paa Kluay, on the other hand, was labelled a “forest destroying” community by the conservationists. My study aimed to investigate how these communities reacted to outsiders’ views and how they

interacted with the forest environment in their everyday lives. The details of these communities are presented in Chapters 9 and 10 respectively.

My data collection in the villages was grounded in ethnographic methodology. I found this methodology particularly useful given that my study focuses on how local people “talk” about themselves in the contexts of resource contestations and conflict. Local people, particularly local Thais, rarely record and communicate their stories in written form. For this reason, the oral narratives and practices that are part of the everyday lives of the local people are critical to any understanding of local narratives. In this study, I approach ethnography as “method of procedure and analysis aimed at close scrutiny of social situations, their actors, and actions in relation to narratives” (Gubrium and Holstein 2008 p.241). The ethnography of narratives focuses on both the historical and everyday narrative activity that is told and communicated to others within the context of resource contestation. The main techniques are participant observation and interviews conducted in the field with the forest communities.

Prior to entering the village, I telephoned the headmen (*pu yai baan* in Thai language) of the two villages and briefly explained the background of my research project and my research plan. The objective of the first phone call was to seek the permission of the village headman to conduct research in the village. Between October 2009 and March 2010, four trips were made to each village. I stayed for between 7 and 10 days in the villages each trip.

Staying for several days in the villages allowed me to observe how the villagers interacted with the forest environment on a daily basis. Due to time limitations, I set up the scope of data which I aimed to achieve in each trip. For example, I aimed to gain an understanding of the village and its land use history during the first trip. This oral historical information would help me to understand who villagers were and how they perceived and presented themselves. In addition, to direct observation, other data collection techniques were employed. Informal interviews, my main method of data collection, were conducted both with individuals and with informal groups of villagers. All parties informed and consulted prior to the interviews. In addition, I brought aerial

photographs (scale 1:15000) as a tool for collecting data about the history of land use. The “walk and talk” technique was very useful for understanding the relationship between the locals’ lives and the environment.

Here, I will elaborate upon the “walk and talk” technique. I learned of this technique when I worked with RECOFTC as a field research assistant between 1996 and 1998. The technique was used as a tool for conducting participatory assessment of rural resources, the aim being to gain understanding of the overall situation of resources in a particular site. I applied this technique in my study. Once in the village, I asked some volunteer villagers to take me to the forests and farmlands, particularly to the farmlands of the villagers who were my volunteer guides. Some questions were prepared and asked to stimulate the conversation between the researcher and the key informants. I found that the key informants preferred to tell me their stories when they were in the forests and farmlands rather than during their interviews in the village. In Huai Kaew, for example, key informants were very keen to show me the forest area that had been cleared by the land investor. In this situation, I was able to hear the oral story in the context in which it emerged. In addition, questions regarding farmlands in the community forests and ownership of said lands arose during our walks. In all honesty, I would not have thought to ask these kinds of questions had the “walk and talk” technique been excluded from my research method.

The study of printed documents and publications in the village was another technique employed in this study. In Pa Kluay, all printed documents and publications relevant to the village were kept in the village centre. These documents had been produced by outside organisations which at some point had been involved in the village development history. I found one document written by a network of NGOs and academics led by the Northern Development Foundation. This document had been drafted when the Pakluay villagers faced strong criticism by a group of conservationists from the lowland in Chom Thong district. It contained historical information about the Hmong of Pakluay. News regarding the confrontations that occurred between the Hmong of Pakluay and the lowland farmers was compiled in the document. I found this document very useful as a shortcut to understanding the land use conflict between the highland and lowland

farmers in the area. In Huai Kaew, documents pertaining to the community forest movement were kept at the village leader's house, not at the community centre. The owner asked if I would like to search these documents, but I found that they were replicas of documents I had already examined at the Northern Development Foundation.

I reflected on my research activities at the end of every day. During this time, I re-listened to the tapes and re-visited my note taking. As well, I re-visited situations and phenomena I had observed during the day. I tried to spend one to two hours on reflection. However, sometimes I found it difficult to spend time on reflection in the village, particularly after I had established relationships with the villagers. They often asked me to join them for a talk and a drink at night after they finished work. I rarely refused their invitations. In fact, I found it very useful to be part of their "drink and talk" sessions. Although the topics varied, I felt that the villagers tried to please me as their "*arjaan*" (teacher). In some ways, they liked to talk about forest-related issues and their personal experiences.

Telling story of the stories

Narrative research, Polkinghorne claims, is the study of stories (Polkinghorne 2007). My thesis focuses on people and forest stories drawn mainly from analysis of written stories, the stories that reveal how policy actors view and understand the relationships between people and the forests. In addition, it focuses on the stories that the local people told about themselves and others and their struggles over resource utilisation and forest control. This means that, in effect, I studied stories solicited from others, both written stories obtained through requests and oral stories obtained through interviews. In this thesis, my role is to collect and convey these stories to readers, stories that were selected, in part, from consultations with key informants. They were chosen for presentation based upon my working experience with the community forest movement in Thailand. I treat the selected stories as evidence for my thesis argument. I want to stress here that the stories as evidence are presented not to determine if events actually happened but to explore the meaning derived by involved policy actors, regardless of

whether or not the events are accurately described. The stories reflect the views of their authors regarding the relationship between the people and the forests. They do not necessarily reflect what really happened on the ground. As Polkinghorne maintains: “The ‘truths’ sought by narrative researchers are ‘narrative truths’, not ‘historical truths’” (2007 p.479). This means that storied texts serve as evidence for personal meaning and claim, not for the factual occurrence of the events reported in the stories.

In the process of presenting the narrative, social/political actors involved in the narrative production are discussed. Needless to say, the author and the storyline cannot be separated. As Fischer (2003) suggests, stories are inherently joint social productions. All of the elements of a story, plot, structure, meaning and resolution are created by people conversing and arguing with others. These political actors could be individuals, organisations and/or a group of individuals/organisations, who work together to produce a storyline.

Interpreting the Interpretations: an Analysis of Storylines

Riessman (1993) states that narrative analysis has to do with “how protagonists interpret things” (1993 p.5). This implies that the narrative analysis approach is distinguished by an interpretive thrust; that is, interpretations are the key methodology to employ to analyse the narratives. The reason, according to Riessman, is that nature and the world do not tell stories - social actors tell stories. Viewed from this perspective, interpretation is inevitable because narratives are representations (Riessman 1993).

Apart from re-presenting the political actors’ narratives, my thesis analyses the underlying assumptions, motivations and meanings that political actors afford to people, forests and the relationships between them. In order to achieve the task of understanding actors’ experiences of people and the forests, I employed narrative analysis, for as Fischer claims: “It is only through a narrative analysis that the thick realm of human experience can be adequately described and researched” (Fischer 2003 p.165).

Narrative analysis concerns itself with stories told either in oral or written form, that reveal or convey people's experiences. Czarniawska (1997) suggests that the contemporary focus on narrative analysis owes much to the focus on language in post-structural orientation, particularly in literature and the humanities. The emphasis of narrative inquiry has played a vital role in the epistemological challenge to the dominant empiricist orientation.

According to Fisher, there are at least two approaches to narrative analysis (1989). The first is concerned with the structure of the narrative. This structural approach, which focuses on the logic of the story, explores the rigour of the logical coherent parts of the story. It seeks to find any underlying consistency present in the holistic elements of the story. The second approach of narrative study is concerned with the basic validity of its empirical and normative elements. This approach involves testing and analysing the criteria and hypothesis. Then, the validity of the narratives is tested through comparison with empirical criteria (Fisher 1989).

My thesis seeks a new way of exploring narrative analysis. Rather than focusing on logic and validity, this thesis examines the power and strategies embedded in the narratives. Two tasks of narrative analysis are set out. First, it looks at the knowledge strategy employed by the narrators. The narrative literature suggests that the stories, particularly the actors' policy narratives, are not just for entertaining audiences (Springate-baginski et al. 2007). They are neither neutral nor unproblematic (Forsyth and Walker 2008). The texts are deliberately constructed with a view to persuading the readers to see things as they want to see them. My aim was to spell out those strategic terms that are deliberately constructed for political reasons.

In addition, my thesis pays attention to what is unsaid or unsayable in policy narratives. Searching for the intentions and motivations behind the texts, I adopted an interpretive authority approach when examining the texts. This analysis goes beyond its literal and conscious meaning. In this thesis, I attempt to ascertain why the stories have been presented in particular ways. The side effect of this calculated action was another task

this study aimed to achieve. Identifying unsaid issues depends on the researcher's judgement, which in this case was informed by both the past and present struggles between the people and the forests. Details of people and their forests struggles are presented in Chapter 2. Social actors' use of language and terminology is relevant here. Under certain circumstances, social actors use language that resonates with their particular political position. For example, forest officials and conservationists are likely to use the term *rai lu'an loy* (shifting cultivation) whereas pro-community groups use *rai moon wien* (rotational shifting cultivation) for swidden agriculture or the agricultural practices of the highland farmers. In Thai society, *rai lu'an loy* has long been perceived negatively by the general public. It contains negative connotations of forest destroying activity. The term *lu'an loy* refers to shifting and moving (agriculture) whereas the term *moon wien* implies rotating. As such, *rai moon wien* or rotational shifting agriculture suggests the ways in which highland farmers use the land in a sustainable manner as opposed to *rai lu'an loy* or shifting cultivation. The connotations of words and terms are commonly found in the stories. The contexts in which the stories were produced and told are highly relevant. They cannot be separated.

In sum, my thesis focuses on narration that operates mainly in the context of policy debate over people and the forests. People and forest narratives are used to communicate, justify and legitimise the claims made by various social actors involved in this context. More specifically, (a) I examine the general features of the storylines, emphasising their uses; (b) I discuss the knowledge strategy employed; and (c) I explore the political motivations that underpin the production of a storyline.

Limitations

Polkinghorne argues that the story itself has limitations (Polkinghorne 2007). He particularly stresses the limitations of language to capture the complexity and depth of experienced meaning. In his words: "The languaged descriptions given by participants of their experienced meaning is not a mirrored reflection of this meaning" (Polkinghorne 2007 p.480). He further suggests that participants' stories may leave out or obscure aspects of the meaning of experience they are telling about.

The stories about people and forest presented in this thesis were mainly told and written in the Thai language. I personally translated all Thai texts into English, a task I found hugely challenging for the meaning was not relevant to grammar, but solely relevant to context. The stories were produced in particular contexts for particular purposes. For these reasons, the narrators attempted to employ terms that would well describe the event and really reflect the narrator's aim. Sometime they used metaphors, which proved difficult because if I translated them literally, they invariably did not make any sense. Throughout this study, I have worked and consulted with my Associate supervisor, who speaks both the English and Thai language fluently.

Conclusion

This study, which is informed by a narrative analytic and ethnographic approach, aims to interrogate the underlying assumptions, motivations and meaning in the storylines about people and the forests that political actors ascribe to them in the context of the community forest movement. The narrative telling is neither amusing nor entertaining, nor is it an exact representation of what happened. Rather, it is a particular construction of events created in a particular context, for a particular audience, for a particular purpose, and to create a certain point of view. To this end, this thesis pays considerable attention to both the cultural and political contexts in which the narrative is constructed. It re-presents the political actors' narratives and, assuming their interpretive authority, extends them beyond their literal and conscious meaning.

Chapter 5

Forests for the People: Forest Officials' Narratives

Introduction

In this chapter I examine forest officials' narratives about people and the forests. As the chapter will illustrate, forest officials constructed stories surrounding forest degradation and the wood and fuel wood crisis in Thailand's rural areas to justify projects that sought to promote forest plantations in village areas. The stories of the wood crisis briefly informed their audiences that the national forest resources were in crisis, a crisis rooted partly in the social problems of the farmers in the forests, who were heavily dependent upon forest resources for their livelihoods. According to these stories the degradation of resources has been inevitable. In the end, they suggested the implementation of village or community forest plantations in order to establish wood stocks for local utilisation.

Since the mid-1970s, forest officials have worked on various projects which have sought to involve the local people in forest management activities. It can be noted here that the projects have been referred to as community forest, but those projects were quite different from the community forest envisioned under the failed Community Forest Bill. These projects included, for example, the Forest Village and Village Woodlot Project, which received technical and financial supported from international development organizations such as UNDP, FAO, USAID and the Ford Foundation. In line with these strategies, it seemed that the forest officials recognized the fact that local people controlled much of the deforested state land and needed it for their livelihoods. Accordingly, the officials suggested that forest resources should be managed to meet the needs of the local people. In addition, they suggested that the strategies deployed should contribute to improving the quality of forest resources. The forest officials acknowledged the local people as the key partners that had the potential to help the Royal Forest Department to restore the nation's degraded forests (Thai Forestry Sector Master Plan 1993). In the early 1990s, forest officials had attempted to introduce an official community forest concept as the national policy agenda. To this end, they

drafted and proposed the Community Forest Bill, seeking a legal tool to promote community forest plantation. In the meantime while this Bill was debated without result, community forestry of different type was implemented under various projects.

Looking back on history, over time Thailand's forest officials have tended to claim exclusive power over the forestlands. Since the 1960s, they have adopted various approaches to forest management and conservation. But, it seems that these previous approaches have to some degree failed to maintain and sustain forest cover. As already discussed in chapter 4, the forest area in Thailand continues to decrease; more seriously, the RFD cannot effectively recover degraded forests. In 1991, it was reported that the department could only reforest 200,000 rai (320 sq km) whereas deforested land covered approximately 66 million rai (105,600 sq km) (Thai Forestry Sector Master Plan, Volume 4, 1993, p. 5). Since the early 1990s, the forest officials have come to realize that protecting forest resources in conservation forests alone will not help them to achieve the conservation goal of 40 per cent forest cover. This is partly because the conservation zones have been already occupied. Some were allocated for utilization purposes in which lands are no longer treated as forest land. Recognizing these facts and limitations, the forest officials turned to strategies seeking the promotion of forest plantation in private and community public lands.

My task in this chapter is to critically examine the official assumptions and beliefs regarding people, forests, and the relationships between them. In the process, I critically examine the official narratives, that is, the official claims about people and the forests formulated to justify the local people's participation in forest resources management projects. Stories of the local people, forest degradation and community forest plantation were found in the RFD's project documents, which sought to promote the participation of local people in the management of forest resources. They generally referred to this as "community forestry". Careful examination of these official claims reveals that whereas the official community forest strategy talked about forests for the people, it was really about people helping with reforestation. In addition, the official community forest strategy was not about rights. Rather, it was about using local communities to achieve the governments' reforestation goal.

Forest Degradation and the Wood Crisis: Officials' Storylines about People and the Forests

In this section, three storylines about people and the forests produced by forest officials are selected for presentation: 1) the “poor” and “illegal squatters” encroaching on forests; 2) the shortages of wood and fuel wood; and, 3) forests as a food bank for local people. These stories were told over different periods of time in order to justify the implementation of projects by the Royal Forest Department. They not only advocated for the promotion of forest plantations in village sites, but were also used to deal politically with different situations related to forest and people conflict.

The selection, collection and presentation of the following three narratives of officials was made to illustrate the changing strategies of forest officers in dealing with the situation of uncertainty related to local people and the forests. Each story was selected to show how the forest officials strategically attempted to cope with the situation of people and the forests which they identified as a major threat to forest conservation.

“Illegal squatters” caused deforestation

The first story about people and forests frequently narrated by forest officials was that the practices of the “poor” or “illegal squatters” in the forest areas contributed to deforestation. This story, which was particularly found in the RFD's project documents (among others) was named *the Forest Village*, a project implemented between 1975 and 1992. The story informed the readers that the local people dispersed throughout the State-claimed forest areas lacked access to government services such as health, education and agricultural extension technologies. Inevitably, they had to exploit and use the natural forest resources to sustain their lives and livelihoods. Relocating these people into “villages” and providing them with “things” was essential to their survival.

The RFD's forest village project encouraged local people who lived in the reserved forests, the majority of whom occupied approximately 20-45 rai per family, to form groups within defined areas categorised as forest villages. These people were poor due to their main occupation being agriculture, and their lack of technical agriculture and modern technologies. Coupled with this was the poor condition of the roads that

made the transportation of products to the market extremely difficult. The relocation of these dispersed families into a new group would take into consideration the old area of settlement ... The project would provide roads, water sources, and basic infrastructure to those people who lived in the forest villages. (RFD 1986 p.5 ; translated from Thai by the author)

The deforestation narrative portrayed the local people as “forest encroachers”, “illegal squatters”, and the “poor”, who had to be rearranged, relocated and educated. These people were mostly dispersed throughout the forest areas rather than concentrated in village communities. The story suggested that the problem of forest encroachment would be alleviated if the local people were provided with things necessary for their survival, especially land and agricultural technologies.

Stories of dispersed farmers living in the forests and causing resource degradation were used to reinforce the various official projects regarding people and the forests, among which was the RFD’s Forest Village Project, which was set up in 1975 and approved by the Cabinet. Theoretically, the RFD forest villages aimed to persuade the villagers to settle down in forest village sites prepared by the Project. This involved the setting up of forest village sites, each complete with infrastructure such as water, electricity and roads, and provision for schools as well as health. The infrastructure was provided without cost to village members. As well, each project promised that families would be allocated 1 rai (0.16 ha) each for building a house and 15 rai (2.4 ha) for planting crops. Members were given usufruct rights to allocated lands which could only be transferred by inheritance to direct descendants; they could not be rented, given away or sold. Theoretically, the project made provision for the allocation of an additional 10 rai (1.6 ha) per household on a communal basis, mainly for the establishment of fruit trees and community forests. Also included in the package of benefits was the provision of knowledge, alternatives and skills designed to help the farmers enhance their income earning capacity such as short course training, farm demonstrations and farmer study tours.

The RFD forest village initiative was partly backed by international organizations. In the early 1970s, the RFD approached the UNDP/FAO for assistance. A project document for a project planning phase (phase I) was later prepared and signed in March

1979 by representatives of the Royal Thai Government, the UNDP and FAO. A pilot project involving “social forestry” and “agro-forestry” was implemented soon afterwards. This was a forest village project in Khao Phu Luang National Reserved Forest, located some 250 km northeast of Bangkok. This government project attempted to consolidate some “scattered homesteads into nucleated communities” (FAO n.d.).

Originally, the forest village system was initiated in 1967 by the Forest Industrial Organization (FIO n.d.) in the northern highlands concession areas. The objectives of forest village establishment were twofold: first, the FIO wanted to control shifting (swidden) cultivation by the villagers who were accused of being forest encroachers. Second, it wanted to create a pool of workers to work on tree plantations. The basic concept was to group the encroachers of a plantation area together in one location and to provide work and living conditions that were sufficiently attractive to convince them to abandon shifting cultivation and join the FIO replanting project work force (FAO n.d.). Although the FIO forest village system had an excellent record both in terms of cost effectiveness of reforestation and of benefits to forest village members, it fell far short of meeting the demand for reforestation and the needs of the rural poor. By mid 1980, FIO forest villages accommodated approximately 2,000 households only (FAO n.d.).

By 1984, the RFD had set up 144 forest villages (77 projects) throughout the country. The population in each village was approximately 150 – 200 families. A total of 23,129 families were allocated land. Of these numbers, 4,865 families were allocated land for housing only, 9,690 families were allocated cultivated land, and 8,574 families were allocated both housing and cultivating land. The total area of allocated forestland was 199,043 rai (31,846 ha) (RFD 1986). The RFD planned to set up 93 new forest villages between 1988 and 1992 for the 30,690 families who had been living dispersed throughout State conservation forest areas.

From my viewpoint, regarding the local people as shifting cultivators who cause deforestation, and attempting to regulate and control them by relocating them into fixed village communities, reflected the flawed assumptions held about forest land occupation and the problem of resources degradation in Thailand. Officials tended to view the farmers living in the forest as the major cause of forest destruction, an assumption that deliberately overlooked the fact that forest lands have frequently been occupied not only

by farmers but by “influential people” from outside of the forestland. In Khao Phu Luang National Reserved Forest, for example, it was found that some forestlands had been acquired by “influential town-based entrepreneurs as a result of debt defaulting” (FAO n.d.). This suggests that perpetrators may have included distant stakeholders who did not maintain a physical presence in the area. Absentee claimants to the land were sometimes more influential in changing land use patterns in the forest areas than the local people. The important point here is that it was not farmers alone who contributed to deforestation.

The claim that employing an integrated land use approach combining food crops and forestry activities constitutes a socio-economically viable stable alternative to shifting cultivation may be unrealistic. In an agrarian society, the most important inputs for farmers relevant to production are land and labour. The size and quality of the land will determine whether each family can or cannot sustain their livelihoods. In the case of the RFD forest villages, each family was allotted 15 rai (2.4 ha). It was assumed that each family would use this allocated land effectively by combining and mixing forest tree species with a diversity of crops in the form of agro-forestry. This new technology of tree-crop planting would contribute to securing the needs of families vis-a-vis producing food, earning an income and sustaining the local environment. In reality, the change from mono-cropping practices to agro-forestry failed to achieve these goals. A study undertaken by FAO in Khao Phu Luang National Reserve Forest pilot project site (FAO n.d.) revealed that farmers in the study areas were still practicing maize mono-cropping for some reason, even though the project attempted to implement crop diversification promotion activities. Maize cultivation continued to be the farmer’s basic enterprise. Farmers in the area faced a huge disparity in income under this scheme of land allotment because enhancement of the income from maize cultivation had been accomplished mainly by expanding the area under cultivation. According to the document: “The increase in level of mean income of this population over the past few years is clearly linked to this practice. It followed then that disparity of income is likewise a direct consequence of disparity in farm size” (FAO n.d. p. 73).

In sum, by telling the story that the illegal squatters were poor and lacked access to government services and infrastructure offered the forest officials legitimacy to relocate the local people, the subjects of deforestation, into proposed village communities and

thereby exercise their authority over reforestation. But, it rarely addressed the on-going livelihood struggles faced by the local people. The official view drew its legitimacy from portraying the local people as shifting cultivators, who had to be regulated and controlled. Concurrently, it portrayed the locals as poor underprivileged people who desperately needed assistance from state development initiatives in order to have the opportunity to enter mainstream Thai society.

The shortages of wood and fuel wood

The second story was the wood and fuel wood crisis story, which informed its audiences that the rural residents in regional Thailand, particularly in the northeast region, experienced acute shortages of wood fuel. This was partly because, as the story illustrated, the region, which is the poorest in the country, had lost its natural forest. The rate of decline and its implications had been the greatest in this region. The story told of the evidence of fuel wood shortage in the northeast region and presented survey information which revealed that 38.7 per cent of the surveyed 25 per cent of the total number of households had to purchase fuel wood for their domestic use. Also, it pointed to the high demand for wood and fuel wood by rural residents in the region.

In 1970, the average consumption of wood fuel per capita was estimated to be 1.23 cubic meters, with the highest consumption in the Northeast. The total consumption of wood for the whole country was over 44 million cubic meters of which more than 50 per cent was wood fuel. (RFD n.d. p.15)

The energy and wood crisis story was recounted by forest officials who employed it to support the Village Woodlot Project between 1981 and 1984, a three year project that received technical and financial support from USAID. In 1979, the Royal Thai Government submitted a proposal for a Renewable Nonconventional Energy Program comprising 14 separate component projects to the US government. The proposed program sought to investigate sources of alternative energy such as biogas and solar wind energies that would contribute to addressing the issue of energy crisis in the future. Wood energy had been recognized as an important source of energy, particularly for peoples in the developing countries. The Village Woodlot was part of a program

which emphasized the establishment of wood farms for energy purposes. Interestingly, the project paid particular attention to the energy consumption of villagers, who mainly depended upon wood from natural forests as their source of energy. In other words, fuel wood as a source of energy was seen as critical to the survival of the rural poor. But, a major concern was that the local people were unable to obtain sufficient fuel wood to meet even their minimum energy needs due to the degradation of natural forest resources adjacent to their villages. So, in response to the locals' needs, the wood lot project was set up, its aim being to develop wood fuel by establishing fuel wood crop farms at the village level. Ideally, the man-made village woodlots were expected to function as a sustained source of fuel wood production for the villagers. Also, it was expected that this intervention would potentially be a source of income generation for the local people in areas where the projects were established.

Technically, the woodlot project was about the official establishment of fast growing tree plantations in village sites with labour input from the villagers. In the process of project implementation, the provincial forest rangers played crucial roles in every step of forest plantation, including site selection and preparation, seedling production, supervising tree planting, providing plantation tending techniques, and controlling wood harvesting. So, what constituted villager input? Basically, the villagers in the project sites were asked to contribute their labour for planting trees, weeding, fertilizing, and creating fire lines. In certain project sites, the fast growing tree species *Eucalyptus camaldulensis* was selected for planting, with spacing of 2x4 m. to be used at all sites of the project. Three categories of land within the villages were identified as plantation sites: 1) public land; 2) temple land; and 3) school land. But, the size of the land area in each category varied in each village. After planting, various plantation tending techniques were applied at different times including weeding, fencing, fertilizer application and fire break construction.

In my opinion, the promotion of fast growing tree species by the project was questionable. In the Thai context, eucalypts are considered an exotic species introduced into Thailand. These trees were new to the majority of Thais, especially the local people. I suspect that few local people knew anything about the efficiency of these trees as fuel wood. This could imply that villagers' participation in the project sites regarding tree species selection was minimal if not zero. The officials claimed that eucalypts were

chosen due to their “superior characteristics” (RFD n.d), which included fast growing, high coppicing power, the ability to thrive in poor soil during prolonged dry seasons, and the ability to tolerate water-logging and salt tolerance (RFD n.d). As may be seen, the selection criteria of the tree species were based upon technical reasons rather than on consideration of the villagers’ knowledge and experience. As a consequence, the villagers in the Project sites were rejected as “managers” of fuel wood plantations. Instead, they were effectively asked to contribute only their labour to plantation-related activities under the close technical guidance of the provincial forest officials. Forest officers at the provincial level played the major role in plantation planning and management. The villagers, on the other hand, lacked knowledge of the newly introduced fast growing tree species.

It may be observed that the Woodlot Project only worked in the northeast region. The narratives of “*esarn haeng raeng*” (dry Esarn) and “*khon esarn yak jon*” (poor Esarn people) played a key role in justifying the implementation of the project in the region. These narratives portrayed the northeast region as “less developed” areas which needed huge development inputs.

It may be suggested that the policy narrative pertinent to rural fuel wood shortages was deliberately constructed to make state forest plantation intervention sound legitimate. Claims that the rural people were facing or would face an energy crisis allowed the forest officers to introduce wood lot plantations into rural areas where lands were controlled and regulated under the State regime. Forest officers expected that this intervention would contribute to increased forest cover if the local villagers in the project sites carried out the planned activities. Under the right conditions, it could possibly achieve the 15 per cent goal of economic forests. However, it seemed that the forest department failed to achieve its goal using this strategy because local villagers opted against village woodlots before the project was completed. Before long, their implementation was phased out.

Forests as Green Food Banks

The third official narrative is about rural residents, food security and tree planting. The “green food bank” narrative informs audiences about the vital role of trees in improving livelihoods, solving economic problems and sustaining ecosystems. By establishing “multi-purposes” tree plantations, officials claimed that rural villagers would have their own sources of food. This alternative approach would potentially lead to solving the economic problems faced by the local people as well as sustain the local knowledge regarding plant utilisation. Officials stated:

The past efforts to industrialise our country nearly completely destroyed local wisdom. At the present time, the Royal Forest Department aims to recover and recreate the local forest community project, which is part of community forest, in order to sustain the remaining local knowledge. The community forest food bank is thus an alternative for people. The RFD hopes that it will contribute to solving the local problems regarding the food needs of the community during the era of promoting a sufficiency economy to struggle with the current economic situation. (RFD 2002 p.3; translated from Thai)

The story explicitly claimed that the local people had been facing economic and cultural crises, partly due to the flawed national development policy that overemphasised industrial development. As a result, local knowledge and wisdom were being eroded and had almost disappeared. In reality, the cultural crisis claims were never supported by factual evidence.

The green food bank narrative told its audiences of the ways in which local villagers had been dependent upon “native plants” (*puk peuan baan*). The importance of native plants to local economics, traditions and culture were highlighted in the story. Native plants not only play a vital role in sustaining local culture, but also have economic value. The story suggested that native plants played multiple roles in the local economy.

Local plants and vegetables are plants that villagers consume in their local culture of consumption, and use for medical, traditions and rituals, and economic purposes ... Various components of these local plants can be used for dyeing clothes, as ties, for wrapping, and weaving into roof panels. The local plants are thus the root of local knowledge in many

ways: [they] include local knowledge of consuming, utilising, and rituals and beliefs that were transferred from previous times. (RFD 2002 p.3; translated from Thai)

Based upon the green food bank narrative, the RFD created the Food Bank Project in 1999, a Project aimed at encouraging local villagers to plant trees, herbs and local vegetables so that they could establish their own forests from which they could collect food and other forest products for household consumption. It was claimed that the project would help to address the local struggle regarding food shortages. Similar to the community Woodlot Project, forest officials prepared a list of tree species which they considered appropriate to address the needs of the local people's food demands. Within the same year of its initiative, more than 400 villages throughout Thailand established Food Banks.

Through their narrating of the green food bank story, the forest officials gained the moral authority to promote community forest plantations in village sites. Stressing the benefits of native plants to the local economy, forest officials implemented the Food Bank Project to promote local villagers' planting of forest trees on private land or on community common lands. But, the official community forestry never mentioned about the rights of local people to own and use resources in the forest. The official community forestry is rather about the promotion of rural people to plant trees.

Rural People and Wood Demands: The Use of Statistics as a Narrative Device

The previous section illustrated the ways in which narratives were deliberately constructed and used by the forest officials to justify implementing various projects on the ground. The nature of the official narratives regarding the people and the forests was discussed. My task in this section is to spell out the strategies and tactics embedded in the official narratives surrounding wood and the fuel wood crisis. I found that forest officials employed numbers and statistics to justify and validate their claims about people and forests and the problems of resource degradation. Based on the figures employed, I argue that the forest officials gained moral legitimacy and received political

and financial support from both domestic and international aid agencies, in the implementation of the so called community forestry projects.

Statistics surrounding wood demands and fuel wood shortages were employed and presented in the officials' narratives. The figures for wood and forest-related product shortages at the village level underpinned the strategy employed by the forest officials to support the implementation of village-based forest plantations. The forest officials noted that the rural peoples' demands for fuel wood and wood for construction had increased over time. In 1980, the National Energy Office stated that the demand for fuel wood and charcoal for rural residents was 0.41 and 0.33 m³ per person per year respectively. It was predicted that the figure would increase each year. As regards the rural peoples' demands for construction wood, the RFD reported that up to 83 per cent of total construction wood usage was attributable to rural people. In 1970, for example, it was reported that 353,000 m³ of construction wood was used by rural villagers (RFD 1986). It was predicted that in the years to come, the demand for construction in rural areas would elevate this figure to 2.86 million m³. According to the narratives it was pointed out that, in addition to their demands for wood as a source of energy and construction material, the rural residents were also heavily dependent upon the forests adjacent to their village for wild food, wild vegetables and medicinal herbs, products customarily found in natural forests. The forest officials pointed out that the rural people tended to spend more time than in the past on collecting forests products from natural forests because they had to go far into the forests to collect them. This was because the forest resources near the villages were degraded. Thus, the reestablishment of forests within the village boundaries was urgently needed.

Since the late 1980s, the community forest approach has become a national agenda for reforestation. The 6th National Economic and Social Development Plan promoted and stressed the importance of community forests as a national strategy for combating the continual depletion of natural forest cover. The Plan suggested the establishment of 50 rai of village plantation in each village, its justification being the rural populations massive demand for timber for house construction and other utilization purposes. In 1970, for example, an official revealed the content of an FAO document which stated that local villagers accounted for 83 per cent of national timber use for construction (RFD 1986). The document further stressed that the figure would increase each year due

to population growth in the rural context. As a consequence, massive numbers of trees in natural forests would be felled and large tracts of remaining forests would be cleared due to the increasing demand for timber. Shortage would drive the local people into the natural forests where timber was available. Inevitably, the natural forest ecosystem would be severely degraded. The officials saw community forest plantations as the solution to deforestation given that the villagers would be provided with sources of timber in their village areas. If the community forest plantation program was implemented, the natural forests would be kept safe. Thus, the official viewpoint was that the only way to protect the remaining natural forests from rural residents utilization and encroachment was to establish community forest plantations in the village areas.

Another key element that characterized the official claim about people and the forests was the labelling of fast-growing tree species as “multi-purpose trees”. These species, the officials claimed, were “multi-purpose trees” that villagers in the project sites could use for fuel wood and as material for house construction. The officials also claimed that fast-growing tree plantations would contribute to environmental rehabilitation. As stated earlier, a list of trees was prepared by the forest department (RFD 2002). The targeted villages could only select from the listed species for planting in village plantations. The forest officials strongly advocated short rotation trees as the answer to the needs of the local people, whose daily lives depended upon “minor” forest products such as small wooden poles for domestic use only.

The RFD prepared a list of 27 tree species it wanted to promote in the community forest plantation. Although the forest officials said that the choice of trees for community forest plantations was contingent on the decision of the local villagers, it seemed that the villagers in the targeted sites had to select trees from the provided list only. Almost all of these species were fast growing trees such as Acacia. Very few were long rotation trees such as teak. The forest officials explained that “the need for wood utilisation of majority populations in the rural areas is the need for small timber for various objectives such as circular poles for construction, making fence, prop, and making handle of tools and equipments. And especially the utilisation for fuel wood and charcoal” (RFD n.d. p.38; translated from Thai). Convinced that the local villagers were dependent upon wood for domestic use, the forest officers came to the conclusion that fast growing trees were suitable because they could be used as multipurpose trees.

The RFD planned to promote the establishment of community forest plantation in two forest categories. The first category, public lands, came under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Interior, which had total authority to control how the land should be utilized. The RFD then sought to promote community plantations in degraded areas within the National Reserved Forests, which were administrated by the 1964 National Reserved Forest Law. The forest officials found that two Articles of the Law, Articles 15 and Article 19, could be referred to as a legal basis for the promotion of state community forest projects. Article 15 addressed logging and the utilization of forest products. This Article allowed the utilization of timber and products in the reserved forests subsequent to the approval of forest officers. Article 19 addressed the maintenance of reserved forests. The Director General had been granted the authority to allow any forest officers to implement activities within the reserved forest areas for maintenance purposes.

In sum, official community forestry placed considerable emphasis on forest plantations, a development strategy which ostensibly responded to the needs of the local people. However, the tree species promoted in the project were initially prepared and recommended by forest staff; and, although the officials claimed that they consulted villagers regarding tree species selection, choice was limited in the main to the rapidly growing tree species stipulated by the forest officials. In addition, the officials tended to promote the community forest plantations in degraded forest areas outside the identified protected areas. But, the forest communities that had been living inside protected areas, were not the targeted villages of the RFD's community forestry projects. The next section will discuss the question of why the official community forest plantations were promoted only in degraded forests within the National Reserve Forest.

Trees for Small People?

Clearly, the official community forest projects tended to espouse the establishment of village plantations in forest areas considered degraded forest, rather than suggesting that local villagers had the capacity to manage the natural remaining forests. Local villagers were encouraged to plant trees: forest officials claimed that the establishment of village-

based forest plantations or “community forests” would help to alleviate the struggles of the rural people regarding wood, fuel wood and food shortages. The point is that the official community forests campaign masks the fact that in Thailand, local people have no legal right to utilize trees and resources in State-claimed forest areas. Issues of tree and resource ownership rights were never discussed or promoted in the official program of community forestry. No one ascertained if the villagers could use the trees in the community forests or to what scale they could use the forest resources, particularly the timber in their community forests. These questions remain unanswered. I suspect that the official community forests approach was employed as a strategy to establish claims over the forest areas adjacent to villages that to date had been managed and cared for by the rural people. This strategy was to contribute to the fulfilling of forest officials’ ambitious goal to increase national forest cover up to 40 per cent of total national land area.

In Thailand, forest officials have struggled to maintain the remaining natural forests and, at the same, to recover the degraded forests in order to achieve their goal of 40 per cent of national forest cover as indicated in the 1985 National Forest Policy. In 1996, when the RFD celebrated its 100 year anniversary, one senior forest officer admitted that the RFD’s reforestation was far behind what they really aimed to achieve. At that time, the remaining forest cover in Thailand was approximately 26.02 per cent or 83,450,623 rai (133,521 sq km) (RFD 1996). The same officer estimated that the RFD required at least 69 years if it was to implement the reforestation activity solely by itself. He accepted that it was very long time. This officer based his estimation on the reforestation rate of 500 rai per official watershed forest unit per year. In mentioning this figure, I have no intention to discuss whether the estimation was correct or not. But, I want to illustrate how forest officials perceived the situation of deforestation and how they evaluated their capacity in the struggle to reforest the degraded areas. Clearly, the forest official recognized their limitations in the implementation of reforestation and the achieving of their goal. It was then that they switched to seriously considering the roles of local people and community forest plantations in recovering the degraded forests.

The promotion of official community forests was permitted under the National Reserve Forest Law B.E. 2507 (1964) Section 19, although neither communities nor community forestry were specifically mentioned. The forest officials used this Section as a legal

framework for implementing community forestry. Briefly, Section 19 stipulates that the Director General may order, in writing, a forest officer to act in a national reserve forest for the purpose of control, supervision or conservation of a national reserve forest.

Section 19: For the purpose of control, supervision or conservation of a national reserved forest, a Director General may order in writing a competent officer or officer of the Royal Forest Department to act in any manner whatsoever in a national reserved forest. (<http://www.forest.go.th/> accessed 5 March 2012; translated from Thai)

This implied that every individual project of proposed under the Law must first receive approval from the RFD. Under Section 19, the main objective of the community forest program is to control, recover and maintain national reserve forested. Regarding the utilization of timber and other forest products in established community forests, an officer may grant permission to a person to undertake do logging or the collection of forest products. This rule, as it appears in Section 15 of the National Reserve Forest Law states:

Section 15: A person may do logging or the collecting of forest products after receiving a license from a competent officer or from time to time with the permission of a competent officer of each national reserved forest. (<http://www.forest.go.th/> accessed 5 March 2012; translated from Thai)

In sum, official community forestry was and is focused upon centralized control over forest plantations, rather than on encouraging localized forest conservation and management in conjunction with centralized regulations. The discussion presented above provides details of this strategy; but in many locations it becomes clear that reforestation with plantations is taking place on preferred agricultural land next to villages, which may be intended to reduce the permanency of settlements in these areas.

Conclusion

Official community forests are about the promotion of local people planting forest trees in village areas: public lands, temple and school areas. The implementation of forestry plantations has been based mainly upon narratives of the wood and fuel wood problems faced by the rural people. It is difficult to deny that the narratives surrounding the wood crisis in rural Thailand helped to legitimize the role and actions of the Royal Forest Department. By claiming the advantage of the community forestry strategies to rural communities, the forest officials gained the moral legitimacy to implement forestry intervention programs. Unfortunately, the forest officials tended to focus implementation only upon degraded forests next to villages. More importantly, the officials avoided mentioning the possible utilisation of timbers and resources from established community forests. Thus, this Chapter argues that the official community forest approach was employed as a strategy to claim back degraded forests and promote village plantations that would recover the forest areas so that the official aim of 40 per cent of national forest cover would be realised.

Chapter 6

Community Rights and Forests

Introduction

This chapter critically examines some narratives related to community rights and forests. My study has found that community rights narratives contain strategic simplifications (Li 2002) which tend to present, somewhat selectively the perceived good of some community stories while strategically ignoring other aspects. Indeed, they deliberately portray the local people as traditional/indigenous communities, imbued with traditional ecological knowledge, who know very well how to make use of and manage the forests resources near their villages sustainably. In the contexts where resource conflict and contestation exist the simplification of the traditional community has played a crucial role in legitimizing the existence of the local people in the State-claimed forests. The community rights advocates have deliberately stressed the issue of rights to live in forests and use NTFPs rather than the right to farm in forests.

In Thailand, a community rights approach to forest management was initiated to counter the century-long State centralized forest management approach which sought to increase national forest cover up to 40 per cent of national land area. Since the mid 1980s, as already discussed in the previous chapter and also in Chapter 2, two major approaches have been employed by forest officials in order to achieve the ambitious goal of forest cover: 1) a reforestation program; and 2) a forest conservation program. Unarguably, both programs have affected the local people, whose livelihoods depend, to varying degrees, on the forestlands located adjacent to the villages. Since the 1980s, two community rights movements have emerged which claim to protect the rights of the local villagers: the first aimed to counter the State reforestation program, which tended to favor large-scale tree plantation by promoting private sector to investment in forestry activity; the second focused upon delegitimizing the expansion of State control over the forestlands by protesting the declaration of the remaining forests as protected areas.

The proponents of the rights-based approach to forest conservation attempted to inform their audiences of the capability of forest communities to conserve and protect local

resource sustainably. The remaining forest cover has been protected by local people, who traditionally depended upon them for livelihoods, not by forest officials (Sanitsuda, *Bangkok Post* 15 December 2005). The proponents portrayed and represented forest communities as traditional communities who possessed local ecological knowledge and had the incentive to manage and conserve the resources on which they and their families depended (Johnson and Forsyth 2002). Unlike scientific forestry, local ecological knowledge is dynamic, responding to changing rural contexts. As such, the community rights to forest advocates suggested transferring decision-making power over resource use and allocation from central government to local community organizations.

During the debate to pass the Community Forest Bill between the early 1990s and 2007, the community right advocates have played a vital role attempting to include the issue of community rights to forests into the Bill. Social actors who were involved in community rights advocates varied ranging from local communities, NGOs, activist scholars and politicians. Their political aim was to promote the legal recognition of local people's rights to manage and control forest resources.

The chapter is structured as follows: first, it presents the relevant narratives produced and employed by community rights advocates; then, it illustrates that, while on the one hand community rights narratives have been used to recast a new image of the local people and forest communities as land pioneers, and not as forest destroyers as State forest officials and conservationists claim, on the other hand these narratives have been employed to play down the State forestry centralization and conservation strategy. And, while this reconfirms the notion that people and forests can coexist sustainably, it was the State centralized approach to forestry that severed the people's traditional links and by extension, put forest communities in an intolerable position. The chapter then identifies and discusses the strategies contained within the policy narratives of community rights to forests. The rendering of forest communities as traditional communities, who had traditional ecological knowledge and engaged in traditional practices which helped to maintain and conserve biodiversity resources, is evident in community rights narratives. Fourth, the chapter attempts to tell the hitherto untold story about the land and agricultural practices in the forests which community rights narratives have failed to address explicitly.

Community Rights Narratives

In this section, three storylines surrounding community rights and forests were chosen to be examined and presented. The first story involves the attempts of community rights proponents in illustrating the uncertainty of national forest policies toward local people. The narrators questioned whether people encroach upon forests or whether the forest policy encroached on local people. The second story, the fight for the forest, told the audiences the ways in which local people (a Karen in this story) fought against State conservation strategies, which sought to take away resource and land from them. The Pachor case, the last story, informed the audiences the negative impacts of State conservation on local people. These people were relocated from their homes and agricultural lands by forest officials, who claimed to protect the upper watershed forests for national interests.

Forests Encroach upon Local People

The claim that State policy, not the local people, has destroyed the forests was commonly heard during the debate to pass the Community Forest Bill. Sanitsuda Ekachai, a columnist of the Bangkok Post, has written many stories claiming the greedy land speculators and corrupt officials sought to exploit forest resources from local people who have to fight to protect their sources of livelihood (Bangkok Post 8 December 2005; 15 December 2005; 10 May 2007). I found that the claim is first made in a book titled *the Study of Conservation Forest Area Demarcation, Protection, and Occupancy in Thailand*. This book, which was edited by Dr Cherm Sak Pinthong, was published in the late 1980s by LDI, a national NGO based in Bangkok. This work was produced with the aim of turning around the dominant explanation for deforestation and emphasized the mismatching of imposed State forestry strategies in the Thai context.

The message conveyed in the book was indeed critical, particularly in the preface written by Professor Yos Santasombat, an anthropologist at Chiang Mai University, who was the Director of the Research and Information Section at LDI at the time the book was published. Yos insisted that the problem with the dominant forest degradation explanation was that it tended to see the local people as the key source of forest degradation. It was blind to other factors including state development projects such as

national timber concessions and infrastructure development, and railways and highways construction as well as the state security policy. According to Yos, one of the most significant factors that contributed to deforestation in Thailand was the failure of State centralized policy pertaining to natural resource management and allocation. As he pointed out, the Thai state claimed absolute power over the forest resources by enacting forestry laws, such as the Forestry Law 1941 and the National Reserved Forest Law 1964. In fact, forest resources have been traditionally controlled by local systems. Under the state property regime, the State granted permission to extract timber from natural forests to elites and influential business men, who customarily enjoyed high economic power in society. During the forest concession era, the State faced difficulty conducting a monitoring system designed to regulate resource use by these concessionaires. This weak State monitoring system saw timber excessively exploited and extracted from natural forests quantities higher than the agreed volume of timber approved in the official documents. Instead of blaming the logging activities, the finger of blame was pointed to the farmers in the forests who were labeled forest destroyers.

In addition, a further state policy problem was clearly pointed out by Yos, who claimed that, in order to make sense of their policy to control and exploit the forest resources, the forest officials kept changing their policy vis-à-vis the local people. For example, the farmers in the forest were first labeled “land pioneers” (*poo buk berk*) at the time when the Thai State had a policy of promoting trade and exporting crop products to foreign countries in order to generate national wealth. During this era, forests clearing for planting crop species promoted by the government was considered a productive activity and an economic development activity that made a significant contribution to national economic growth. But the farmers in the forests began to be seen as “forest encroachers” (*poo bukruk*) when the State changed its role to one of forest administrator and enacted forestry laws regulating the forest resources. As a result, the *poo buk berk*-turned-*poo bukruk* farmers were forced to leave their traditional lands. Moreover, the imposing of these laws and regulations had an additional negative result: it destroyed the customary practices related to resource allocation systems which traditionally functioned in communities to regulate resource access by community members. Unlike the State centralized approach, the local resource management systems never separated use rights from rights to own the resource in question. For this reason, the practices and

State centralized approach have been in conflict from the outset. As Professor Yos writes:

In the past the state never forbade any resource utilization from the forests. The state encouraged villagers to transform forests into agricultural land. As such, villagers could have occupied lands in the forest freely. As for villagers, the rights to occupy land and the rights to use the land were the same thing. Claiming ownership over land was impossible if people only occupied land but never used and benefited from that land. However, since the state enacted the Forestry Law and the National Reserved Forest Law, as a result, the laws separated ownership rights from use rights. The state claimed its rights over forest lands before it had means to utilize it. (Yos 1993 p. b; translated from Thai)

Apart from stressing the inconsistent forestry policy's effect upon the local people, the community rights to forests advocates also claimed that State development policies were a major factor underpinning deforestation in Thailand. One of these development policies was the national forest concession policy. The advocates for community rights claimed that the logging activities not only destroyed the natural forests and timber but stimulated the local people's desire to move into the forest zones and to clear and occupy the forest lands.

The logging concessions which were unenforceable in the past not only destroyed forest trees directly through logging, but also activated and stimulated timber cutting and forest clearing by villagers in two ways. Firstly, if the logging activities happened in areas already settled by communities, the companies would have cut down all allocated trees. And those villagers had to hurry up and cut down trees competing with the logging companies. This is because the villagers thought that those big trees would be cut down and taken away from the area by the companies even though they would not cut them. Secondly, if the concession areas were not yet settled by communities, villagers who followed the logging activities into the remaining forests could clear the forest and turn that land into agricultural lands (Chermsak 1993).

Now, the finger of blame was pointed at the State: it was State policy, not the local communities, that caused forest degradation and facilitated land occupancy by the local people. Unlike the dominant view of deforestation, the new deforestation framing claimed that the problem of deforestation resulted from a combination of factors. The

local people were only one part of the whole process. Claims that the local people caused deforestation could be seen as an unjustified political tactic which tried to render the locals the “scapegoats” of deforestation. Meanwhile, the true underlying causes remained free from open and public investigation. According to Anan and Mingsarn, the deforestation scapegoat discourse was used to legitimize State policy to relocate local people out of the State-claimed forests (Anan and Mingsarn 1995). Obviously, during the debate prior to passing of the Community Forestry Bill, the claim that the local people were deforestation scapegoats was regularly employed by the community forest movement to persuade and mobilize the political support of both the public and policy makers. In a newspaper article published in 2005, Sanitsuda Ekachai (*Bangkok Post* 15 December 2005) expressed her concern regarding the misconception surrounding deforestation scapegoats, as perceived by the Senators, who rejected the people’s version of the CF Bill. Her concern was that “as long as we make the poor the scapegoats of deforestation, the local communities struggle to protect their forest homes will remain an uphill battle”. Sanitsuda questioned whether “our forests can survive state mismanagement and exploitation if we don’t allow people’s participation and public monitoring” (Sanitsuda, 2005).

The Fight for the Forests

The second story is a story telling how local people, the Karen community in this case, were deprived by State centralized forestry policy and how local people attempted to fight back to remain in their ancestral lands. Actually, there are many stories of local people and forest conservation, particularly the stories of Karen ethnic group relevant to forest biodiversity conservation, but the story of Punu and his fellows in Huai Hoy village of Chiang Mai Province was a remarkable one. The tragic story of the suicide in March 1997 of Karen elder Punu Dokjimu, was strategically employed to criticize the dominant state conservation ideology by the proponents of community rights. The story also deliberately rendered local people as forest guardians. In her book titled *Redefining Nature*, Pinkaew Laungaramsri, an anthropologist at Chiang Mai University, devoted the preface to expressing her disappointment with state conservation which, she claimed, saw farmers in the forests living in fear and uncertainty. She writes: “Threats of arrest and resettlement had become an everyday nightmare and an everyday reality.

People were taken to jails when they cut down trees for house building, for fence making, and for rice cultivation. Life became a turmoil” (Pinkaw 2002, preface). Pinkaw goes further saying that in the case of hill tribe people like Punu, whose “choice of freedom had been removed by State conservation, the only way he could remain Karen in soul and spirit, and liberate himself from the authority’s power, was death” (Pinkaw 2002). Indeed, the death of the Karen elder was claimed by the activist scholar to be the result of the State ideology of conservation which attempt to separate local people from their ancestral lands.

Punu was a Karen peasant. In early 1997, he left his mountain homeland of Huai Hoy village, in Chiang Mai province, to join some 20,000 other protesters from the Assembly of the Poor (Karnjariya, *Bangkok Post* 19 June 1997) who were fighting for, among other issues, the indigenous people’s ancestral land rights. Like other hill tribe villages, Huai Hoy was declared to be within a national park. Hoping to reveal the truth about the Karen’s lives and their relationships with the forest ecosystem to authorities in Bangkok, Punu decided to join the demonstration (which lasted for months) outside Government House in Bangkok. In March 1997, Punu had the opportunity to attend a negotiations meeting convened for representatives of the Assembly of the Poor and the Government to discuss issues raised by the protesters. This was his first chance to meet with powerful authorities “who he thought might have some sympathy for his cause if only they knew the truth that Karen people had lived in the forest for hundred years, long before the words protected areas came into existence” (Pinkaw 2002, preface). Unfortunately, the outcome of the meeting deeply disappointed him: he started to realize that his life, and the lives of the Karen, had already been decided by the powerful authorities in Bangkok. After the meeting, Punu was stunned: he felt hopeless. According to Pinkaw, the Karen elder “walked purposelessly out of the meeting room and back [to] his tent. Pati Punu sank into silent grief and deep sadness” (Pinkaw 2002, preface). Punu tried to commit suicide twice: he failed the first time.

The story of Punu was told by a columnist, Karnjariya, as she writes:

Concerned with his mental state and health, his friends asked him to go back to his forest home in the north. Homeward-bound on a train heading North, Karen peasant Punu Dokjimu, 71, was deep in thought. The people of Huay Hoy, his mountain-top forest village in the Mae Wang river basin in Chiang Mai, were facing eviction by the Forest Department. His mind was probably wandering back to his forest home, a place of singing brooks, fragrant soil and vast liberating skies, when the old man jumped from the speeding train to his death. (Karnjariya, *Bangkok Post* 19 June 1997)

Although the reason for committing suicide can only be surmised, it was reported that Punu appears to have “sacrificed himself to save his forest homeland” (Karnjariya 1997). In June 1997, three months after Punu’s death, the Karen farmers of Huay Hoy joined forces with the other hill tribe villages of the Mae Wang river basin to hold a sacred ceremony (Lue Pakha) to protect the forest. Lue Pakha, is a traditional Karen ritual, is performed before each farming season to ask the spirits to protect the forests and curse those who destroy them. Traditionally, Karen farmers perform the ceremony separately in their own villages; thus a combined ceremony was particularly special. One Karen villager claimed that this year’s ceremony (1997) was held in memory of Punu and in gratitude for their ancestors’ wisdom, which had kept the forest intact for generations (Karnjariya 1997). “We won’t let Punu die in vain. We will fight to the death to keep our ancestral home. No government can take it away from us” the same villager, a close friend of Punu, told a reporter. That year, the Lue Pakha ceremony was reported in the *Bangkok Post* 19 June 1997. The heading was “The fight for the forests”. But, in effect this was not a story about Lue Pakha: it contained a key political message. The story was an attempt to convince readers that the coexistence of humans and nature is possible through community commitment and indigenous knowledge of sustainable use of forest resources. “The hill tribe people’s beliefs in animism – that guardian spirits exist in all natural things – have limited their use of nature to subsistence level, thus keeping their ecosystem largely intact” (Karnjariya, *Bangkok Post* 19 June 1997).

Writing specifically of the Karen, Karnjariya quoted a Karen informant: “The life of Karen is closely linked to nature. Our traditional, beliefs and tales all reflect our respect for nature. The Karen’s respect for nature is evident in their farming-related ceremonies

year round to pay homage to the spirits of fire, water, soil, mountain, trees and ancestors to protect their crops and to bless them.”

In terms of resource and land management, a Bangkok Post columnist writes:

Following in their ancestors’ footsteps, the Karen divide their land use into three main categories: sacred, untouchable forests; usable forest; and habitat, which includes farm land. The sacred areas are rain-catchment forests which usually occupy a much larger area than usable forests and farmlands. The mountaintop rain-catchment forests are believed to be the homes of ferocious spirits, and thus, are best left alone. The Karen’s other sacred forests include cemetery forest and *sadue* woods where they hang the umbilical cords of newborn babies and where the trees are prohibited from being felled. (Karnjariya, *Bangkok Post* 19 June 1997)

Karnjariya tends to generalize the success of the Karen communities’ protection of watershed forest, a success rooted in their culture and customary practices, which are handed down from generation to generation. Their community practices are reflected in their culture and community proverbs. For example, a well-known Karen proverb is: “drink from the water, protect the water. Eat from the forest, protect the forest”. This proverb was used time and again by activist scholars and NGOs trying to legitimize their claims to community rights during the national debate on the Community Forest Bill.

It is interesting to note the various stories about local communities and their traditional ways of protecting nature that were published at the time when the Community Forest Bill was generating heated debate among concerned stakeholders. The political agenda in narratives like Karen Punu’s death not only criticized State conservation but also sought to mobilize the political support of the urban people and the public in general. At that time, according to Karnjariya, the government was mulling over the draft Community Forest Bill, which would allow human settlement in national forests if villagers could prove they were forest-friendly. But, while conservationists opposed the Bill, its supporters saw it as a crucial step towards people’s participation in the management of natural resources (Karnjariya 1997). During the national debate surrounding the Bill, community rights advocates believed that the majority of people who lived in Thailand’s urban areas or the so called “middle class” who tended to support people-free parks, labelled the local people “forest destroyers”. The 1997 story

of the Senate's turning down of the community forest people's version illustrated the perceptions of the urban-based people. The majority of Senators vetoed the Bill in the interests of keeping State conservation zones intact for indirect environmental services. They argued that the Bill would facilitate landless, poor people's migration into the remaining forest areas, protected areas, where they would cut down trees to make way for cropping lands. They feared that the Thai people in general would face serious water shortage problems if these watershed conservation forests no longer existed. This perception has dominated Thailand's forestry politics up until the present time.

The Pachor Case

The Pachor relocation project illustrates how forest conservation, and the relationship between the people and forests, was perceived differently by the various concerned stakeholders. In early 1994, the forest department relocated 172 families, 855 people (Benja 1998) of the Mien, Yao, Lua and Lisu ethnicities, all hill tribes, to a site outside of the watershed forest later named Pachor. It was assumed that the relocation of these communities would help the forestry department to function well in its forest protection role. At the time, the Pachor relocation project came to be well-known publicly among Thailand's people because of the contested claims regarding the project's success. The forest officials, on the one hand, claimed their first victory ever: they had relocated people considered "forest enemies" out of the State-claimed forests without violent conflict. On the other hand, there were activists and local NGOs who accused the project of failing to address the issue of land allocation properly. Therefore, they claimed, the project caused more villager poverty than enhancement of community livelihoods.

The forestry authority claimed that the Pachor relocation project was indeed justified because it helped to protect "our" common watershed forests. The forestry department claimed that because the area settled by the hill tribe community constituted upstream forests, in order to protect "our" watershed forests in the national interest, community relocation action was needed. According to the official view, community relocation was imperative if Thailand wanted to conserve its remaining forests for maintaining ecological services, especially water supplies. The State was concerned that Thailand in general – and particularly its lowland farmers and urban-based people – would soon be

facing water shortage problems if forest destroying activities continued in the upstream forest areas. The Head of Doi Luang National Park commented: “This area settled by hill tribes is our Wang upstream forests so we have to move them out (of the forests) in order to maintain our national benefits” (quoted in Benja 1998). In this particular case, the watershed protection discourse played its role in legitimizing and backing up State action on community relocation. As regards the relocation site, the authority prepared approximately 3,000 rai of degraded forest area, then divided the land into a number of smaller plots equal to the number of relocated families. It was hoped that each individual family would receive a piece of land for housing and farming. It was also hoped that by allocating these plots of land, the villagers could enjoy better quality of life, better, that is, than living illegally in the watershed forests. After completion of its community relocation project the forestry department celebrated its successful, peaceful relocation program.

The story of Pachor was told differently by activists. Instead of celebrating the forestry department’s success, one NGO worker based in Chiang Mai, Benja Silaluk attacked the department, accusing the relocation project of exacerbating the villagers’ hardship. She also pointed out that emphasizing forest biodiversity and a people-free conservation approach, rarely protected the marginalized. In support of her argument, Benja employed various data collection techniques: her storytelling style was based solely upon villager perspectives, on the views of those who were victims of forest conservation. She first traced the community’s history. According to Benja, the hill tribe people who were moved out from the forest had been living in the area for more than 30 years prior to the State claiming it as Doi Luang National Park. “Since the first day when the forest officers came into the village and put up the National Park sign as well as establishing an office on community land, these actions turned this small community into encroachers on their own lands” (Benja 1998; translated from Thai). Benja insisted that the case of Pachor represented bizarre and unacceptable State actions. It seemed to her that villagers were being unfairly labeled “forest encroachers”, an accusation used to legitimize State action on community relocation.

Once in the relocation site, the villagers’ struggles became, if anything, exacerbated. This new struggle centred on soil quality and the availability of water for cropping. Benja insists that the authorities failed to keep their promise regarding infrastructure development. Some families received farming plots, but the soil quality was very poor

and not suitable for cropping. The allocated lands were covered with rocks and no irrigation was provided to villager's farmlands.

After the official land allocation project completion, villagers had been facing the struggles heavily. The land allocation was itself problematic. Some families who were allocated the land had been facing the problem of water shortage for their agricultural cultivation. The Mae Or 1 and 2 reservoirs, which the officials promised, these were constructed in order to keep the water for their farming. After the construction was completed, it turned out that water from the reservoirs was allocated to other old villages in the lowland. The irrigation system has no link their farmlands. (Benja 1998 p. 77; translated from Thai)

The story further claimed that community relocation caused other related social problems. Since the quality of the lowland soil was relatively poor, and there was a shortage of water, crop planting and using the land to generate family income was nigh impossible. As a result, villagers were forced to leave their homes to seek jobs in the city for generating income.

Young people have had to leave their homeland and have been seeking jobs in the other big cities since they were children. The young boys sell their labor in gasoline station whereas the young girls worked in restaurants in the city of Lampang. Some had to go to Pattaya, Chon Buri, Songkla where they were offered work in night clubs which are likely dangerous for young girls. (Benja 1998 p. 77; translated from Thai)

Benja argues that human-free conservation failed to conserve and maintain biodiversity and forest resources. She uses a forest fire that happened within the park boundary to illustrate the failure of the forest protective approach, claiming that after the community was relocated, the problem of forest fires in the area seemed more serious compared to the past when villagers were still living in the area.

In sum, the storytelling about the negative impacts of State conservation and the centralized approach to forest management on local lives and livelihoods were produced and told by the proponents of rights-based approach to forest conservation. The narrators attempted to convince their audiences of the failure of State centralization approach in protecting national forest resources. Furthermore, the narratives pointed out the ways in which State conservation strategies deprived local livelihoods. In the next

section I will discuss the narrative strategies employed by the narrators of community rights storylines.

Community and Traditional Ecological Knowledge: the Forest Community Representatives and Strategies

Struggling in securing local lives and livelihoods from State conservation strategies, a group of rights-based forest conservation proponents turned to promote the notion that local communities can play a central role in the management of natural resources (Johnson and Forsyth 2002). The proponents believed that forest communities possess ecological knowledge and incentives to manage and conserve resources upon which they depend. Obviously, the terms “community”, “traditional community”, and “local knowledge” regarding resource uses and management were deliberately constructed. In this section, I argue that these terms had a central role in framing and guiding the direction of political debate over people and forests in the Thai context since the early 1990s.

It is hard to establish exactly when the rights-based approach to forest management first emerged in Thailand. However, the community rights approach was set up to be, on the one hand, an alternative approach to mainstream forestry; on the other, the community rights approach was developed deliberately to undermine exclusive scientific forestry and to change Thailand’s forestry governance from centralized forestry to a community-based approach. Starting in the early 1990s, the terms “community forest” and “community rights to forest” were first published by a group of academics, mainly social scientists who collaboratively conducted action research in the north and northeastern areas of Thailand between 1991 and 1993. This action research project was coordinated by LDI, a Bangkok-based NGO that played a crucial role in coordinating scholars from various disciplines and institutions to work on this project. This scholarly work defined community forest as a social movement or the mobilization of people’s organizations at the community level and/or network level within a particular ecosystem in order to manage and utilize natural resources soil, water and forest where commonly owned by locals (Saneh and Yos 1993). The term “community forest”, in this sense, really emphasizes the role of community organizations in controlling and managing natural resources particularly forest resources. The above group of social science

scholars strongly supported the thesis that by enhancing local organizations' capacities to regulate local resources, the sustainability of resource management and equitable of resource allocation would be achieved.

Indeed, the proponents of the rights-based approach advocated an institutional arrangement in which "local communities" would be granted the rights to manage forest resources. They treated local communities as "groups whose solidarity and membership is based on face to face interaction" (Johnson and Forsyth 2002). They argued that this community unit, unlike similar political administrative units, such as the village, tambol (sub-district) and district, this community unit would be connected through cultural sharing. They expressly advocated that strong and close-knit communities lead to permanent stability for the nation and enhanced well-being for the people. As well, they argued that these communities could organize themselves into effective communities and function to control natural resources utilization if they were recognized legally. The proponents of a community approach suggested that forest communities were dynamic and adaptive to changes (Anan 2002; Saneh and Yos 1993). As Anan writes:

Although they face constraints that cause insecurity and affect agricultural production, villagers in conservation forests have adapted and developed themselves. When agricultural production is not very fruitful due to drought and an absence of development of production potential, villagers in one village studied in a national park of Lamphun began to actively raise cattle. In the past, only a few cows were raised and only as investment. But well-off villagers at present raise a large number of cattle. (Anan 2002 p. 62)

In addition, the proponents maintained that the community was the best sustainable unit for controlling and managing forest resources. The reason is that local communities possess ecological traditional knowledge; so, they know very well how to make use of local resources sustainably (see, for example, Prisana and Montri 1998; Sayamol et al. 2008). Unlike scientific forestry, the community proponents claimed, traditional knowledge is holistic, context-bounded knowledge which integrates both physical and spiritual into a worldview that can be the foundation for resource management. The proponents of the rights-based approach insisted that local knowledge is the product of

careful observation and responses to ever-changing environmental and socio-economic conditions.

Prisana and Montri (1998) classified traditional knowledge regarding biodiversity utilization and management into five categories. It is worth noting here that these types of local knowledge were collected and compiled from the Karen villages in the north of Thailand. The first involved knowledge about the use of local medical plants in the forests. They claimed that villagers not only having knowledge where to collect those medical plants in the forests, but they have knowledge about how to use them sustainably. The second type of local knowledge related to the knowledge of timber harvesting. This kind of knowledge could inform local villagers what and how to harvest timbers in the forests. Knowledge of fishes is the third category. The fourth category of local knowledge is about birds. And the last category of local knowledge concerns plants in the forests.

It can be observed that when the proponents of the rights-based approach talked about traditional ecological knowledge they tended to highlight local knowledge that emphasized forest and biodiversity conservation and traditional agricultural practices such as the Karen rotational shifting cultivation (see Decho n.d.; Pinkaew 2003; Sayamol 2008). These proponents rarely referred to knowledge about commercial uses of resources. Instead, they limited their knowledge claims only to subsistence use of resources.

Johnson and Forsyth (2002) observe why the rights-based advocates considered community, not government or individual, as the choice for natural resource management. The reason is that the proponents believed that neither State centralization nor private property will provide an effective means of conserving resources. According to Johnson and Forsyth, the proponents argued that central government lacks the time and resources to regulate the resources, whereas privatization “fails to address sufficiently the costs of creating and allocating private rights over open-access resources, such as forests and fisheries” (Johnson and Forsyth 2002 p.1593).

In the case of Thailand, I think, the proponents of rights-based approach believed that both forest officials and private sector historically enjoyed the exploitation of natural resources while excluding local people from utilization of local resources. The exploitation of local resources by these external actors not only degraded natural

resources at site level, but also reduced the resource availability to local users and that made local people became more impoverished. From this perception, the rights-based approach proponents advocated for the decentralization of decision-making power from central government to local organizations. However, questions remain about whether and to what extent property rights should rest with the individual resource user as a citizenship.

Since the early 1990s, the pro-community NGOs and POs employed various strategies to communicate with and convince the public that the community-based approach to forest conservation is the best solution to the problem of forest degradation in Thailand. The NFD, for example, conducted a watershed development by community participation project, employing a participatory approach promoting community members' involvement in resource management and planning. Six sub-watersheds in the North were selected to be project sites. Strategically, the NFD wanted to construct a site for disseminating successful stories of participatory watershed management. In addition, connection with the urban middle class was one of its political strategies. During the debate surrounding the passing of the CFB, pro-community NGOs and activist scholars organized community tours, taking the policy makers and city-based people into the villages. In this way, city-based people learned about the villagers' daily lives and saw how villagers interacted daily with the surrounding forests.

Have Rights to Farm Been Included?

It became clear that the proponents of the rights-based approach to forest conservation advocated the rights of local communities to access and manage the forest resources. In the context of resource degradation and rural poverty, community rights are thought to have important roles to play in the ways in which people manage and conserve natural resources and use those resources for their livelihood improvement. Although the proponents were largely of the consensus that community rights can improve resource conservation and local livelihoods, the campaigners tended to overemphasize their right to access and use forest resources but deliberately avoided talking about the right to farm in the forests. As already discussed in Chapter 2, many forest communities, particularly the highland communities, had restricted access to their farm plots in the

forests. But, the issue was rarely addressed in the campaign for a rights-based approach to forest conservation.

Andrew Walker argues that the advocates of the community forest movement in Thailand essentially focused upon securing rights for the local people to forest, but he observes: “It will do little to enhance the tenure security of farmers in relation to agricultural land” (Walker 2004 p.311). According to Walker, the role of agriculture in the upland livelihoods was not explicitly recognized by the campaigners. The issue of land in the uplands was only discussed within the framework of communal land property dominated by the Karen communities. This framework, the author insists, barely responded to the current land use practices and livelihoods in the uplands.

However, one cannot deny the fact that the issue of agricultural land in the forests in Thailand has been the focus of controversial political debate for decades. Local people were historically accused of being “land hunters”, who migrated to the forest areas, cut down trees, burned, and transformed the forest lands into cropping fields (Chermsak 1991). It was rumoured that the farmers in the forests sold the cleared forest lands to outsiders prior to encroaching upon new tracts of forest and repeating the same activity of forest clearance. During the debate on the Community Forest Bill, the story of the land hunters had its effect. Many urban-based conservationists and policy makers feared that the big trees in the fertile conservation forests would be cut down and that the forests would be cleared by local people if the community forest activity was allowed to continue in the forest zones. Again, it was rumored that the hidden agenda of the pro-community group among the community forest advocates was to harvest the timber and occupy lands in the protected areas.

The proponents of the rights-based approach to forest conservation soon realized that the accusation regarding the land hunters had been made by conservationists. Law scholar Charoen Kampeeraphap, who participated in the drafting of the Bill and supported the community rights approach, attempted to explain to the public the intention of the Bill, which aimed to resolve the conflict between local people and the State over the use of forest resources rather than issue land ownership documents. Charoen stated:

The Community Forest Bill has nothing to do with the issuance of land ownership documents. It only involves assuring the right of community to manage their forests, whether they are located in ordinary reserved forests or conservation forests which include national parks, wildlife sanctuaries and watershed areas. (Charoen, interviewed with *Bangkok Post* 19 June 1997)

Throughout my working experience in the north of Thailand, the issue of farming in the forests was central to the NGO advocates. But, the first political priority of the community rights to forests campaign was to advocate the legal recognition of local people's settlement in the forest particularly the settlement of minority groups, such as the Karen, in the highlands. The campaigners suspected that their political aim would be hard to achieve if they included the issue of agricultural lands in the community forest movement. The issue of agricultural lands in the forest was thus kept out from their policy narratives. However, it was evident that in many cases the NGO projects still supported local people to work on lands in the forests. In Mae Tha sub-district of Chiang Mai province, for example, I was asked by a local NGO to provide a training course on GPS usage and mapping techniques for the villagers. The villagers, who occupied some land in the National Reserve Forest, wanted to produce a land-use map that would show details of land occupation and utilization. There were no land documents due to the fact that the lands were located within the State-claimed forest, so it was hoped that the land-use map could be used as a tool to negotiate with the forest officers in the future when the forest land occupation process was introduced. In Thailand, it is common to see local people who live on the fringes of the forest areas occupying tracts of land in the forests. This is partly because in some areas, forest land demarcation by forest officials was implemented just after the settlement of local people in those areas. I will suggest that in general, the conflict between the forest officers and the local people was rooted in farming issues rather than in the issue of forest resources and NTFPs utilization.

As such, ignoring the issue of occupation of forest lands for agriculture during the campaign for a rights-based approach to forest management thus may be seen as part of the tactics employed by the community rights to forest advocates. In the context of the national debate surrounding the passing of the Community Forestry Bill in Thailand, wherein uncertainty, contestation, ambiguity and polarization marked the processes of

policy formulation, the proponents of the community rights approach, in my view, wanted to establish their assumptions, beliefs and knowledge about the positive relationship between the people and the forests⁶. This is partly because a group of community right advocates had already come to the conclusion that the issue of farming in the forest was both very sensitive and controversial in the Thai context. They would never enjoy the passing of the Community Forest Bill if they included the issue in their policy proposal and campaign.

Conclusion

Throughout the struggle with competing claims over the rights to natural forests, the proponents of the rights-based approach to forest conservation depended upon narratives about the impact of State conservation strategies on local lives and livelihoods. By telling these stories, the proponents of the community rights approach could position themselves in the national debate surrounding the Community Forest Bill. In order to delegitimize the State and conservationists' claims over people and the forests, the rights-based approach campaigners deliberately portrayed forest communities as traditional communities who possessed traditional ecological knowledge. The community rights narratives were without doubt selective and calculated. They deliberately refused to talk about the controversial agricultural lands in the forests. Their main aspiration was to secure and guide the political debate in directions that benefited their political ends. Their calculated action leads to a situation in which the serious land struggles faced by the forest communities would not be addressed explicitly in policy.

⁶ Some proponents of community rights have spoken in favor of shifting cultivation, particularly Karen rotational shifting cultivation, but the issue was avoided in drafts of the Community Forest Bill.

Chapter 7

Supermarket of the Poor

Introduction

Thailand's 1997 financial crisis significantly contributed to the concept of forestry for rural development. Responding to national economic uncertainty, the proponents of this concept argued that deforestation and poverty could be combated by a "community forestry" approach, which worked for the benefit of rural residents. This claim was made based upon the observation that the rural people were not affected by the financial crisis whereas their urban counterparts, who were mainly reliant upon industrial production, were seriously hit by this financial uncertainty. Many scholars then came to the conclusion that the former (the rural dwellers) had plenty of resources to rely upon for their survival, both in normal and uncertain times. The story of supermarket of the poor came to play in this context; that is, in line with the claim that forest resources were the safety net for local livelihoods. For example, trees provided fuel and other goods essential to meeting the basic needs at the rural household and community levels. Forests and forest land provided food and the environmental stability necessary for sustainable food production. In addition, forests and forest products generated income and employment in the rural community. Viewed through this lens, clearly forests have played a crucial role in people's livelihoods. The forests were alluded to as the supermarket of the poor because they provided a variety of products such as wild foods, fuel wood, herbs and timber which local people could collect for daily use and household consumption. Unlike their urban counterparts, who buy food and goods from department stores, the rural people go to the forest to collect wild food and other products.

Politically, the supermarket of the poor campaign argues that forestry for poverty alleviation and rural development must be forestry for the people involving the people. It must be forestry which starts with local communities. The campaigners insisted that, for more than a century, forest policy tended to promote resource utilization and management, which favored industrial interests and national development and saw local people and their interests marginalized. This earlier policy had led to a decrease in

natural forest cover, leaving local people trapped in poverty cycles. The supermarket of the poor campaigners sought to shift the forest management approach from conventional forestry towards “participatory forestry” which favored local interests and poverty alleviation.

During the national debate surrounding the passing of the Community Forest Bill, the supermarket of the poor narrative was used to legitimize and justify the presence of local communities in the forests. Strategically, the campaigners for the supermarket of the poor wanted the local use of forest resources recognized by this policy. The narrative of forests as supermarket of the poor goes hand in hand with the community rights campaign. The notion was really popular at that time and became a “political catch phrase” used by people who supported the community rights approach to forest management. The idea was perfectly represented by photos showing how local villagers collected mushrooms and other forest products. Such photos can be found on the book covers, calendar, and posters published by the community rights campaigners.

In this chapter, my argument is that, while the concept of forestry for rural development has to some degree succeeded in legitimizing local use of forest products, it has done less in the area of promotion of commercial resource utilization, particularly commercial aspects of timber utilization by local people. In legitimizing local use, the local people have been portrayed as resource dependent communities, who are heavily dependent upon minor forest products for either domestic consumption or small scale family enterprises for generating income. However, overemphasis on the role of non-timber forest products in local livelihood improvement has had an unintended effect in that it undermined claims for access to valuable resources such as timber and land in the forests. Thus the simplification of the forest as the supermarket of the poor has restricted rather than promoted the alleviation of rural poverty.

The chapter starts by showing the representation of people and the forests – and the relationships between them - within the stories of the supermarket of the poor. It then showcases the attempts of the supermarket of the poor advocates to convince the public and policy makers of the importance of the forests to local livelihoods. After discussing the strategy of policy narrative, I address the elements missing from the supermarket of the poor narrative.

Forests as Supermarkets of the Poor Narratives

This section aims to present different stories relevant to the supermarket of the poor. To this end, four stories have been selected for exploration. It is hoped that these stories will allow readers to comprehend the nature of the supermarket of the poor story. Here, I will briefly present the background of the stories selected for presentation in this section.

In 2000, a national seminar titled “The role of forest resources in poverty alleviation” was convened at PTT main office in Bangkok. The seminar was jointly organized by a network of scholars and NGOs, who supported the notion of forestry for rural development and/or community forest. RECOFTC, the seminar’s organizer, coordinated involved stakeholders to participate in this seminar. At the time, Thailand was facing a serious financial crisis, which had prompted national debate over possible solutions to achieving sustainable development. This national seminar was thus expected to provide a platform from which to discuss the role of forest resources in poverty alleviation. The assumption of the organizers of the seminar was that forests are of economic, social and environmental value, and that sustainable forestry should meet these three goals. As well, they maintained that forests provide wild food, water and materials considered essential to local livelihoods. The notion that forests could help to alleviate rural poverty was clearly spelled out by the seminar organizers. Illustrating the links between forest and poverty alleviation at the village level, six stories about villager’s lives and forest dependency were chosen for presentation at the seminar. It is worth noting that the stories presented constitute an entry point to understanding the supermarket of the poor narrative. I cannot claim that my study covers all of the narratives regarding forests as supermarkets of the poor, but I will incorporate other stories when possible.

Bamboo forest and livelihoods

The role of the bamboo forest in the local livelihoods of Khao rao tien thong villagers was documented and presented at the seminar. Khao rao tien thong is the name of a forest site. It is also the name of a village located adjacent to a forest area located in Chainat province, Central Thailand. Rawee Thaworn (2000), a field researcher at the

RECOFTC, who wrote this story, claimed that approximately 4000 rai of the forest areas are covered by mixed deciduous tree species such as Pai ruak (in Thai) or *Thyrsostachys siamensis* Gamble, the dominant bamboo species covering the area. This bamboo species could generate income for villagers and people from outside of the community for years to come. In the past, the forest resources in the area were degraded due to the forest fires that occurred every year, destroying the plants and trees. In addition, degradation of the forest resources occurred due to overexploitation of forest products by villagers and people from outside. In 1996, several community leaders, supported by a local NGO, started to recover and conserve the forest by managing and protecting forest fires. That year, the forest was declared a “community forest”: 27 community forest committee members were approved to take care of the forest. The committee members were selected from three villages adjacent to the forest including Khao rao tien thong village. Since then, the forest has become the Khao rao tien thong community forest.

Rawee claims that Khao rao tien thong forest does not only help to maintain the functioning of an ecosystem, but is a major contributor to local livelihoods. This forest in central Thailand provides a variety of products essential to the wellbeing of the locals. According to Rawee:

The lowland forests of central Thailand are important for the livelihoods of villagers. They provide (wild) foods including bamboo shoots, mushrooms, (wild) honey, wild vegetables which feed the local people in the central region. Beside that, the forests are “a friend in adversity”. Whenever they are faced with hardship such as natural disasters and rice deficit, many villagers depend upon products from the forests to alleviate their suffering. They sell bamboo shoots and (wild) honey to buy rice for consumption. (Rawee 2000 p. 58; translated from Thai)

The three main forest products of Khao rao tien thong are as follows: 1) mushrooms; 2) bamboo shoots; and, 3) wild honey. Rawee claims that these three forest products benefit the villagers and the local people outside of the community in terms of household income generation. Clearly the forest has economic value for this rural community. As regards mushrooms, approximately 50 per cent of villagers collect mushrooms from the forest (unfortunately the author did not mention the names and number of villagers who collect mushrooms but I assumed that he referred only to Khao

rao tien thong village). It was estimated that each year, approximately 3000 – 5000 Kg of mushrooms are collected from the forest, generating community income equal to 300,000 – 500,000 baht⁷ per year (the price of mushrooms varies but the author calculates at 100 baht per kg). Rawee mentions three species of bamboo found in the area; but, *pai ruak* is mainly utilized by villagers. He writes that while almost every household collects bamboo shoots for consumption, only 50 per cent of the total population collects bamboo shoots for additional family income. Those who collect bamboo from community forest are less likely to suffer financial hardship. Interestingly, Rawee claims that more than 60 per cent of the total number of forest collectors come from other provinces, including Singhaburi, Suphanburi and Uthaitani. He concludes that bamboo forest not only benefits those villagers who live adjacent to the forest, but also people from other areas. Unfortunately, his article failed to provide the amount of income generated from bamboo shoot collection. The number of people who benefit from non-timber forest products enterprises is not provided. The author tends only present the estimated net income that villagers generate from the forest nearby. He fails to state to what extent non-timber products activities contribute to family economic improvement.

The peat swamp forest and the people's livelihoods

Peat swamp forests are not only composed of trees, but there are a variety of living species living in peat swamp forests including terrestrial animals, aquatic animals and amphibians. Due to the unique characteristics of each species in peat swamp forest, their utilization by communities is therefore diverse. (Karnjana et al. 2000 p. 60; translated from Thai)

Peat swamp forest is a natural ecosystem found in the south of Thailand. The diverse characteristics of the forest provide local people with options for livelihood strategies. As suggested above, peat swamp forests contain a variety of plant and wildlife species - various resources that benefit local communities who live adjacent to the forest areas. The role of the peat swamp forest in local livelihoods and poverty alleviation was

⁷ One US Dollar is approximately 30 Thai baht.

documented and presented at the PTT seminar by a group of activists, who claimed that peat swamp forests play a crucial role in local livelihood improvement. This type of forest provides wild food, materials for house construction and additional income for rural people when they face financial uncertainty due to crop production failure and/or natural disasters. The peat swamp forest functions to help in alleviating rural poverty.

Kuan Kreng is a huge peat swamp forest area that covers 3 districts of Nakornsithammarat province. The authors of the paper revealed that, more than two hundred years earlier people started migrating into the area seeking farm land and escaping official harassment. In the past, the area was densely covered by trees and forest. The people used these forest areas as a place where they could escape from state power. The paper revealed that at the present time, the peat swamp forest offers rural communities a number of options for local livelihoods, such as rice fields, orchards, grazing and collecting wild species of plants, fish and wildlife for household consumption and generation of income.

Because of the extensive area, communities surrounding peat swamp forest are having diverse occupations such as practicing rice paddy cultivation in the peat forest, planting orchards, raising livestock, collecting *kra jood* for basketwork, fishing, constructing boats and weaving. Because of a close dependence on livelihood of the forests, the traditional occupations, which depend on resource from peat swamp forest including *kra jood* (local plant) collection and fishing, are occupations that generate a key source of income for community and are occupations that can be carried out all year round. (Karnjana et al. 2000 p. 63; translated from Thai)

Although the authors claim that peat swamp forest provides a variety of wild products for local livelihoods, few products were studied in terms of income generation. It is worth noting here that the authors included a list of forest products which local people collect for their livelihoods. They categorized the forest products into two major categories: 1) plant products; and, 2) aquatic animal products. The plant products comprised timber, wild vegetables and herbs. While the list of plant species of each category was presented descriptively, it was only *kra jood* (*Lepironia articalata*) that was reported in terms of amount of income generated by the local people. *Kra jood* is a native plant species naturally found in peat swamp forest: villagers can freely harvest it

all year round. It can be used as raw material for making products such as mats and baskets, and can generate income for a family at a rate of 150 baht per day. As regards aquatic animal products, Karnjana et al. claim that aquatic animal species such as the snake-head fish can generate community income.

The list of plants, aquatic animals and wildlife species found in peat swamp forest was provided in an Appendix. It contained 10 species of wild food, 1 of herbs, 7 of plants, 17 of fishes and 17 of wildlife.

People and forests in the northeast

The links between local livelihoods and forest resource in the northeast of Thailand were also selected for presentation in the proceedings. In the narrative about the villagers living in Nong reua village, Ubonratchathani province, Dararat Weerapong, an NGO worker at Thailand Environmental Institute (TEI) observed that the locals faced the same financial and family hardship as other villagers in the northeast of Thailand. Villagers were in debt. They could not produce sufficient rice to meet household requirements. Family hardship occurred, partly because of the flawed development policy which reduced rural communities into dependence upon resources from outside communities. Dararat pointed out that, in fact, the villagers of Nong reua village were more fortunate than other villagers in the same region because their village was located near the forests where they could collect wild food, wild herbs for medicines and wild materials for making products for income generation during times they faced financial uncertainty.

Similar to other villages in the northeastern region, the majority of the villagers of Nong reua cultivated paddy field, mainly for subsistence. Apart from rice production, some villagers planted other cash crops such as cassava and kenaf, but the market price of these products fluctuated, particularly that of kenaf. Thus, at the present time, few families continue to plant this crop. Additional income generation outside crop production was crucial for the villagers to earn cash income. Their additional income came from various sources, such as selling handicraft products and employment with

official agencies in the area. Generally speaking, the average income of these villagers is 15,000 – 20,000 baht per family per year.

Collecting forest products is another economic activity for generating family income. In her paper, Dararat alluded to three main forest products which generate income for villagers. The first product was bamboo; wild bamboo is naturally found in the mix-deciduous forests in nearby villages. For years, some villagers had generated income from collecting bamboo culms and using them as raw material for making earthenware steamers (spoutless kettles with holes in the bottom for steaming food). She further noted that villagers generate income from bamboo culm collection (approximately 60 baht per day). Besides bamboo culm collection, making earthenware steamers was a main source of income generation, particularly because the quality of the rice steamers was very good as they were made from good bamboo culms found in the nearby forest. Thus, market demand for traditional rice steamers from this village was high. Within one day, each villager could make 4 to 5 steamers, but specialist villagers could produce up to 25 per day. The price of the steamers varies from 5 to 10 baht per item: the average price was 6 – 7 baht. Villagers could make approximately 2,000 – 3,000 baht per month. Another forest product was *toei* (Pandanus Palm) which could be used for making mats (*seua* in Thai). The price of a mat made from this particular plant species was between 70 to 200 baht depending upon the size of the mat.

Dararat concluded that villagers of Nong reua village have been traditionally dependent upon forests products for their livelihoods. This was because the forests provided timber for house construction, herbs for medicine, material for weaving and food (*pat jai si* in Thai), which was really important for their local livelihoods. As one community leader suggested regarding the relationship between the local people and the forests:

Whatever you want you get. You want rattan you get rattan. You go to cut *toey* you get *toey*. Adding to that you will have food in your hands for sure. Our life is 100 per cent forest based. We hardly depend on anything from outside. We are born in the forest, live in forest, make living in the forest, we totally come from forest. (Dararat 2000 p. 49; translated from Thai)

Dararat admitted that the relationship between the villagers and the forests had gradually changed over time. Villagers today are less dependent upon forests than in the past. However, she claimed that the forests still play a crucial role in the lives and livelihoods of the locals as well as helping to alleviate rural poverty.

Huai Hee community-based ecotourism

The story of how the Karen of Huai Hee village mobilized themselves to conduct ecotourism was selected to illustrate how a remote forest dwelling community successfully generated income from nature without destroying it. Put another way, it attempts to explore the role of upland forests in community income generation. Socially and geographically, Huai Hee village is part of Huai Pu Ling district, Mae Hong Sorn province. It is located in the watershed upland at an attitude of between 800 – 1700 metres. Similar to other upland communities, the Karen of Huai Hee practice rotational shifting cultivation. Upland rice is planted and mixed with more than 40 other species mainly for household consumption (Tawatchai and Pojana 2000). The villagers also raise cattle, and trade them when they urgently need cash, as, for example, when a family member become ill and is admitted to hospital. In order to pay hospital fees, they will sell some of their cattle. In the past, villagers had fewer options for generating family income. According to Tawatchai and Pojana, NGO activists had observed that the villagers of Huai Hee are gradually realizing that there are opportunities for generating income through forest resources in fertile watershed forests that provide opportunities for livelihood improvement.

Although they could depend on resources from forests for livelihoods, contemporary social changes had caused them shortage of income for supporting their children's schooling and for medical treatment. Meanwhile, agricultural production has many constraints because if cultivated area is expanded then more forest will be destroyed. Villagers found that their village had tourism resources which people were getting interested in, namely Doi Pui Luang which was naturally beautiful and located in the upper watershed forest which community had been taking care of and maintaining (Tawatchai and Pojana 2000).

The community agreement on this ecotourism project originated from a community workshop facilitated by local NGO workers at which all community members agreed that community-based tourism managed by the villagers themselves could prove their best option for generating income. The villagers realized that they had both the potential and capacity to manage this type of tourism activity. It was hoped that this tourism activity would become a community business in the near future. Since then, the community-based ecotourism had been launched.

In 2000, a project assessment was conducted. Tawatchai and Pojana reveal that over the course of project implementation between 1997 and 2000, the project has proven successful in at least three areas: 1) community incomes had increased; 2) villagers' participation and benefits had been equitably shared among community members; and, 3) forest biodiversity had increased. They further reveal that the number of visitors to Huai Hee village has increased over time from 42 in 1997 to 397 in 2000. Income from tourism has also increased from 29,400 baht in 1997 to 118,550 baht in 2000. Within 4 years, the community earned a total income of 209,300 baht. Distribution of income was reported. The total income was distributed among 3 groups of people who participated in the project, with 80 per cent of total income allocated to home-stay owners who provided accommodation, meals and acted as guides for the tourists. Fifteen per cent of total income was allocated to members of the Community tourism group and another 5 per cent to the community fund. Details of yearly income and income distribution are presented in the Table below.

As is evident, Tawatchai and Pojana tried very hard to convince their readers of the economic value of forest resources to forest dependent people. They strategically presented the net income earned from ecotourism by local communities and also the income distribution within the community. However, the number of family members who shared the total income is never mentioned. So, who exactly are the people within the community who benefited from these activities? How much income has each family earned each year? And, to what extent has ecotourism activity contributed to alleviating family income poverty? These questions remain unresolved.

Tawatchai and Pojana (2000) suggest that apart from income generation, community-based natural resources management contributed to improving the participation of

community members; and that every household in Huai Hee village participated in community-based ecotourism. Initially, each villager paid 50 baht to become a member. As tourists arrived in the village, each member was assigned specific tasks for hosting the visitors. These tasks were rotated so then each member received an equal chance to participate in the community tourism project.

Table 4: Income Generation from Eco-tourism Activity in Huai Hee village.

Year	No. of visitors	Income (baht)	Distribution of income		
			Member (15%)	Village Fund (5%)	Home-stay Owners (80%)
1997	42	29,400	4,410.00	1,470.00	23,520.00
1998	99	34,950	5,242.50	1,747.50	27,960.00
1999	104	26,400	3,960.00	1,320.00	21,120.00
2000	397	118,550	17,782.50	5,927.50	94,840.00
Total	642	209,300	31,395.00	10,465.00	167,440.00

Source: Tawatchai and Pojana (2000)

In terms of forest conservation, wildlife numbers were increasing and the forests were more fertile compared to the year 1992 when for the first time the community started to mobilize themselves to manage the forests surrounding their village. However, Tawatchai and Pojana fail to provide statistical data related to wildlife changes during this period.

Clearly the four stories presented above represent the forests as the mainstay of the local villagers' lives. The forests are indeed the supermarket of the poor. They are a source of income; they provide a variety of wild foods and different kind of materials for rural people, who are heavily dependent upon them for their livelihoods. In effect, the stories attempted to illustrate the positive inter-relationship between the people and the forests. They attempted to show that while, on one hand rural communities who took care of the forests tended to gain benefit from their efforts, on the other, the forests, in turn, are being protected by rural communities that benefit from them.

However, the above claims about income generation through non-timber forest products enterprises are problematic in terms of methodology. Because the authors made no mention of their field method for data collection, questions arise as to how their information about income generation was collected. It may be that the numbers quoted were deliberately selected for political ends. This questions the accuracy and interpretation of accounts of resources utilization by local communities. Unfortunately, only non-timber forest products are mentioned and legitimized by the stories.

NTFPs: Strategies of Supermarket of the Poor Narrative

From a political perspective, the promoters of forestry for rural development want policy makers to produce policies that allow rural people to access forest resources legally. In doing so, they attempt to recount different stories stressing the positive relationships between the rural residents and the forest environment. Notions such as “forests are source of lives” and “forest is a supermarket of the poor” are in particular highlighted. But, close scrutiny of these narratives reveals the knowledge strategies contained within. These strategies not only play a key role in making sense of the claims, they also persuade the readers to support and agree with the claimed knowledge of forests as supermarkets of the poor. In this section, in which I attempt to elaborate upon the above knowledge strategies, my intention is to show that supermarket of the poor narratives are not just storytelling, but contain certain power in the story production.

Linking poverty with power structure

In their attempts to redefine poverty, narrators claim that an imbalance of power structures produces poverty. It is generally recognized that poverty is a chronic social problem: in Thailand, poverty is on the national agenda. Although it is a global phenomenon, the definition, scope and meaning of poverty vary. At the international level, poverty is often defined based upon the notions of poverty line and absolute poverty. According to the World Bank, the poverty line is the level of per capita consumption that permits the individual to satisfy basic nutritional requirements. The notional poverty line of US\$1 per day is a figure generally used to reflect a person’s

ability to afford a diet sufficient to meet his/her minimal nutritional needs. But, some scholars, who support forestry for rural development, insist that income poverty may not be an appropriate indicator of poverty measurement in the Thai rural context, their main argument being that the wellbeing of the rural people depends upon a combination of various elements in which cash income is only one part. They therefore urge the public to think of the multiple dimensions of rural poverty (Pearmsak 2000) which incorporates both income and non-income elements considered relevant to rural livelihoods. As Pearmsak observes:

In rural society, income is not indicative of whether people or families experience well-being or having good quality of life. Viewing people in rural areas as poor and unhappy based on income or making them happy by increasing income may not be the right approach. Life quality of people in rural areas is composed of various elements such as security in settlement and livelihoods. Communities in remote areas may consider food security and health the greatest matters. The poverty problem therefore can be explained by various factors such as the lack of goods required for everyday life, unequal economic opportunities and development, dependence on others, lack of opportunities to access development resources necessary to support production and collection of food and products for livelihoods. (Pearmsak 2000 p. 12; translated from Thai)

Limited access to resources required for living has become a major feature of the political discourse employed in the campaign for forestry for rural development. This discourse claims that rural communities are poor because they have no power to make decisions or to access the resources they are dependent upon. Professor Nidhi maintains that rural communities have been excluded from forest resources by State conservation and development policy which tends to promote the commercial aspect of resource utilization and exploitation by small groups of elites and the private sector whereas in reality, the marginalized rural poor constitute the majority population. The result is that the rural dwellers, who seek subsistence use of resources are disadvantaged by State policy. As Nidhi writes;

In the past 40 years, Thailand has had a policy which tended to favor the commercial uses of resources, resulting in disadvantage for those people not making use of resources for commercial purposes. Whoever can make use of resources as their commercial purposes gains advantage from the policy because commercial use is supported by state laws, policy and action. The negative result is that people who are not using resources for commercial purposes are disadvantaged, powerless and marginalized. A result is the large scale loss of land. (Nidhi 2000 p. 3; translated from Thai)

Scholars attempt to simplify rural poverty by directly linking it to an imbalance of power vis-a-vis resource allocation. Local resources are plundered by the State, which then produces biased policy that favors the commercial use of forests. Within this situation, the rural people are relegated to the fringe of society and made victims of degraded resources. Inevitably, their fate is to become or remain poor. But, this is too obvious. The claim that imbalanced power structures make the poor is simplistic. Rather than emphasizing income poverty, the proponents of this claim insist that rural poverty is rooted in the imbalance of power structure in forest resources allocation. The extant forestry laws and policies separate the rural people from the forest resources in the process reducing the availability of the forest resources upon which these people depend for their livelihoods. Therefore, the implication is that rural poverty problems would be resolved if the current forestry policy were to be replaced by a new one which promotes people's participation.

In my view, in a context such as Thailand, in which an imbalance of power structure in resource allocation exists, the simplification of poverty and power structure linkages is both relevant and acceptable. However, this claim tends to overemphasize the problem of resource decision making at the macro and national levels. It overlooks the importance of the micro level of resource management particularly at the household level. I agree with the claims that the extant forestry laws and policies in Thailand limit the opportunities for forest dwelling people to access resources for their livelihoods and also that the conventional forestry approach reduces the availability of forest resources upon which the rural people depend, either wholly or partly, for their livelihoods. But, the reality is that not every household directly depends upon forest resources for subsistence. Many focus on agriculture in the interests of generating family income, but,

they still face the daily struggles associated with farming production such as shortages of farm labour, shortages of funding to invest in their farms, and the uncertainty surrounding farm products market prices. These immediate struggles are often more relevant to household income poverty than limited power to access forest resources for consumption. The proposal to change the power structure for accessing forest resources will not guarantee that these daily problems of income poverty will be alleviated.

Constituting forest dependent peoples

The forestry for rural development advocates invariably argue that rural peoples rely heavily upon forests for their livelihoods. The strong and positive relationships that obtain between rural communities and the forests are highlighted in the storytelling by proponents, as evident in the previous section. In his recent book, Dr Somsak Sukwong, the former Director of RECOFTC, claims that, in Thailand, in excess of 60 per cent of the total population - or approximately 38 million people - base their household economies upon agricultural production. Approximately 20-25 million⁸ still rely on forest resources for their livelihoods (Somsak 2007). In Khao khad village in the east of Thailand, for example, all of the villagers exchange forest products for rice as they have no available land for planting rice. Somsak (2007) identified three broad types of forest dependent peoples: (1) people who mainly rely upon forest resources for subsistence purposes. Although these communities can generate income from the forests, the proportion of income generated is very small; (2) communities who mainly generate income from agricultural production but seek income from forest products as an additional source. In these forest dependent communities, people are likely to collect forest products after the harvesting season. Villagers gain additional income from selling forest products; (3) people who realise half of their income from forest-related activities.

It may be suggested that the notion of forest dependent peoples has been deliberately constructed as a response to the narrative in which local communities are labelled forest destroyers and excluded from accessing the forest resources they depend upon. As discussed in Chapter 2, Thailand's existing forestry laws separate forest from local

⁸ Please note that the number of forest dependent people and the concept of forest dependency are contested. See Fisher et al. (1997)

communities and grant absolute management power to forest officials to control and regulate forest lands. Under these circumstances, the notion of “forest dependent people” is strategically employed to illustrate the mutual relationships between the local people and the forest ecosystem. As the narratives show, local people depend upon forest resources for their livelihoods. At the same time, the resources are protected by the local communities. Separating people from the forest means separating them from their sources of livelihoods, including water, wild food (plants and animals), materials and a variety of goods from the forest.

I agree that the relationship between the people and the forest exists particularly in rural contexts. In Huai Kaew village, for example, I found at least one family that mainly depends upon forest resources for generating income. Many depend to various degrees upon forest resources for their livelihoods. However, this portrayal of a forest dwelling community rarely reflects the actual people-forests relationship. It is likely that the forest dependent people’s notion tended to selectively present a variety of forest products upon which rural peoples depend for their livelihoods. It tends to emphasise only the perceived positive relationship between the people and the forest environment and seems blinded to the fact that a number of rural people use land inside the state forests for farming. This de facto land utilization is illegal according to existing forestry laws. Approximately 20 families in Huai Kaew village occupy land both inside and adjacent to the “community forests”. This land occupancy is recognized by the villagers themselves. My discussion with some of these de facto land owners revealed that they wanted to obtain land documents mainly for security reasons. Surprisingly, accounts of forest dependent communities rarely represent rural peoples’ dependence upon forest lands for farming. Farming in the forests, and commercial and mono-cropping in particular, rarely find reference in narratives recounted by proponents of the forestry for rural development approach.

Non-timber forest products listing

Forestry for rural development proponents repeatedly claim that non-timber forest products (NTFPs) play a crucial role in supporting the livelihoods of many rural people. Also, the narratives attempt to show that NTFPs are an important means of generating cash income. The promotion of income generation through non-timber forest products

enterprises has become one of the strategies of the campaign. The proponents of forestry for rural development tend to classify NTFPs into five categories: (1) wild food products (plants and animals) including shoots, mushrooms, honey and insects; (2) fibre products, in particular bamboo, rattan, leaf and stem fibre, and certain grasses; (3) extractive products including gums and resins, tans, dyes and essential oils; (4) non-food products including live animals, feathers, lac and sericulture; and, (5) medicinal and aromatic plants (Olsen et al. 2001, Somsak 2007).

The listing of non-wood species in the supermarket of the poor narrative was a calculated action. In Thailand and elsewhere, timber is an extremely valued resource. The market demands for timber never decreased which explains why the market value of timber remains consistently high. People, especially state officials, consider timber the key and valuable resource for income making. Recognizing this, the proponents of the forestry for rural development choose to present to the public that local people need only non-wood species for their livelihood options and for generating income. They deliberately avoid mentioning the fact that timber utilization has been part of local livelihoods for centuries. The reason was, in Thailand, timber cutting was perceived as forest destruction. If required to elucidate, they may only mention that timber utilization by local people is solely for subsistence and domestic use.

Dove, whose observations are based upon his research in Indonesia, argues that local people are generally allowed to access only low value products whereas high value resources are kept for external interests (Dove 1993). He further argues that a list of forest products which the community advocates wanted to promote in the local context for an alternative income source, includes all of the products that the broader society is prepared to allow the forest dwellers to use. The more valuable products including trees for timber or pulp, valuable hardwood, gems and other minerals - which are of particular interest to external countries - were excluded from the list. He claims that this kind of strategy tends to strengthen the position of outside interests and weaken the position of the forest dwellers.

Fisher et al., who suggest that NTFPs promotion bears some of the characteristics of a “cargo cult” (Fisher et al. 1997), note that the great emphasis on the potential of non-timber forest products for income generation tends to overlook the limitations of such

products. In fact, the real value of non-wood forest products is relatively low. Also, NTFP promotion tends to hide the fact that local people lack control over timber, which could, if it were available to them, change their economic status in a substantial way. Fisher (2000) points out that local people living in and near forests rarely control timber which is a genuine high value forest product.

Using Income as Narrative Device

The supermarket of the poor narrative, where detailing the amount of income local people generate from the forests, suggests that forest-based incomes are major contributors to livelihoods for people living in and near forests. The amount of income local people generated from the forest was thus collected and presented illustrating how great forest resources contributed to local economy. In Pred Nai village, for example, villagers dependent upon harvesting mangrove crabs can earn as much as five hundred baht – approximately USD 12 – per day from crab collecting (Kaewmahanin and Fisher 2007). In another example, Thung Yao village, a member of the women's group claimed that the community forest can generate 998,785 baht per year (Supara, *Bangkok Post* 14 April 2002). This figure was calculated based on the quantity of forest produce villagers, particularly women, collect from the forest annually.

The presentation of income figures in narratives is partial. The community forest advocates never show to what extent the income from the forests contributed to alleviate poverty. They generally just present only the total amount of income, but rarely examine the equity and distribution issues involved. Aspects of the distribution of income between rich and poor families, between direct and indirect forest dependent people, and between community leaders and ordinary villagers have generally neither been raised nor discussed in the narratives. The big questions are: who are the real beneficiaries of the forests? Do the poorer villagers really benefit from the forest resources? Do forest resources really contribute to poverty alleviation? And, whose poverty problems have been solved?

Have Valuable Resources Been Included in the Campaign?

In previous sections I have examined the storytelling of supermarket of the poor and its knowledge strategies. It may be suggested that the supermarket of the poor is a policy

narrative promulgated to illustrate the positive contribution of forest resources to rural livelihoods in the context of forestry policy reform. In a more strategic sense, the supermarket of the poor narratives are used as a means of persuading policy makers to develop natural resource policy which allows local stakeholders to participate in decision making processes pertinent to resource allocation. In the interests of achieving political ends, a number of knowledge strategies have been employed to make sense of uncertain, complex and contested claims of people and their forest relationships. Somewhat obviously, the supermarket of the poor campaign has tended to over-emphasize the value of NTFPs to rural livelihoods. It has attempted to simplify any suggestion that non-wood products-based income generation can provide a positive incentive for sustainable use and by extension contribute to conservation. In certain political and social contexts, the strategic simplification of forest resources and poverty reduction can be used to legitimize and justify the use of non-wood resources by local communities.

Is timber included?

But, what is the status of timber in the supermarket of the poor storytelling? This is a crucially important question given that, as discussed earlier, the proponents of this narrative claim for the role of forest resources in poverty alleviation. Some also claim that forests and trees can benefit the poor by reducing vulnerability and risk and protecting people from becoming poorer by serving as “safety nets” during lean seasons. As well, they provide opportunities for people to become “better off”. It is generally recognized worldwide that timber is a major source of commercial forest income (Fisher 2000). However, it seems that the role of forest trees in poverty alleviation has rarely been mentioned in forestry for rural development campaigns. Somsak (2007) strongly suggests that timber and logging activities are not the priority in the promotion of community-based forest management programs. He points out that social outcomes and community learning outcomes are considered more important to community forest implementation. Somsak (2007) states:

In community forestry, trees are not the main emphasis. Timber cutting is mentioned as a channel to introduce conventional forestry into community forestry capacity building in order to improve yield and quality. This is because the forests have potential for better management. But community forestry tends to consider social objectives more than

timber. It is not only managing natural ecosystems for goods and a variety of services, but it aims at social outcomes, especially the strengthening of communities. Community forestry activity is therefore building peoples' capacity to learn about ways to live with nature sustainably. This is considered to be the main achievement of community forestry. (Somsak 2007 p. 144; translated from Thai)

At the policy level in Thailand, timber utilization by forest dependent communities is definitely prohibited. The version of the Community Forest Bill passed in 2007 and declared invalid in 2008, which was the only hope for supporting local community resource use, clearly states that timber utilization must be limited. The policy makers were still reluctant to allow local people to access timber resources freely, particularly in protected areas. Article 35 of the 2007 Bill clearly indicates that harvesting timber is prohibited in community forests located in protected areas. The utilization of timber within community forests located outside of protected areas is subject to community forest rules and regulations and must be carried out in accordance with the ordinances of the Community Forest Policy Committee. The approved Bill states as follows:

It is prohibited to log in a community forest which is located in a protected area, and in the conservation zone within a community forest which is located outside a protected area.

Logging, or harvesting timber which has been planted by the members of the community forest in the utilisation forest area, [in the case of] a community forest which is located outside a protected area, may be permitted according to need, and specifically for use in the households of the community forest members, or for public activities within that community. All of this shall be [carried out] in accordance with the ordinances of the Community Forest Policy Committee. The collection of non-timber forest products in the community forest shall be in accordance with the ordinances of the Community Forest Policy Committee. (Article 35, The Community Forest Bill 2007)

It may thus be suggested that the forestry for rural development approach advocates access by rural residents only to "low value" forest products for subsistence and domestic use. The proposed approach, by focusing its attention on NTFPs, makes no provision for poorer families, who lack farmland and mainly depend upon forest products for their livelihoods. It does not ensure an amount of income sufficient to support their family needs. The claim that forest resources could play a crucial role in

poverty alleviation is somewhat unrealistic. Some forest products, such as bamboo shoots and mushroom, are in demand for market sales so these poorer families can still collect these products to sell to generate income. However, non-wood based income generation has its limitations. First, the market value of these products, bamboo shoots, for example, is relatively low. Huge efforts involving labor are needed in order to capitalize on this particular forest product enterprise. Second, product availability is limited, both in terms of quantity and harvesting time. For example, bamboo shoots are available in the forest only during rainy season. Finally, it is increasingly found that forest dependent families are now facing very strict village rules on forest product collection which apply at the village level. Village regulations are set up to protect forest resources and to maintain forest yield. For example, in Huai Kaew village, the rule states that bamboo shoot collection is prohibited from 1 October until 31 May annually. Villagers are not allowed to collect bamboo shoots from the forest during this period. This implies that opportunities for making income from the forest are fewer than in the past.

Conclusion

It is clear that NTFP-based income is the main contributor to the livelihoods of some rural people, but it is doubtful whether the approach taken by the forestry for rural development advocates has helped the “direct forest dependent” people to gain access to the valuable resources yielded by the forests, particularly timber. The forestry for rural development approach advocates the use of non-timber forest products for both domestic and/or commercial use. Big trees can be conserved and maintained in the forests if villagers are restricted to generating income solely from non-wood products. The major questions which remain are: why is logging not allowed and promoted in the context of community forestry? Why do the promoters of the forestry for rural development campaign claim that timber is of less relevance to local livelihoods than non-timber forest products? My fieldwork suggested that timber should be relevant to local livelihoods. A directly forest dependent villager in my research site (Huai Kaew) told me that he still wanted to utilize timber for generating income but he cannot do it because it is prohibited by community forest rule (see Chapter 9).

Chapter 8

“No forest, no water, no lives”:

The Dark Green Conservationist Narratives

Northern watershed forests are at risk from the settlement of highland people who grow cash crops on the mountains. They clear the forests to plant vegetables, thus damaging the sponge effect of the watershed. Rivers downstream are dried up as a result. Moreover, the chemical fertilizer and pesticides that were widely used upstream also contaminate downstream rivers. (Suchira, interview with Bangkok Post 19 June 1997)

Introduction

My task in this chapter is to present and examine the policy narratives of the watershed crisis as narrated by the network of “dark green” conservationists. The watershed crisis narrative as evident in the quote above tells the public how upper watershed forests, the proclaimed natural sources of water supplies, are threatened by the highland farmers who inhabit these particular forest areas. During the era of Community Forest Bill consideration, the story of the watershed crisis played its legitimating role among conservationists who claimed to speak for biodiversity protection and the conservation of watershed forests on behalf of other Thais. Also, the watershed crisis story greatly helped the conservationists to mobilize the political support of the public and policy makers. Their aim was to discourage support for legal recognition of local villagers in the protected areas. During the conducting of the national public hearing on the CFB from 1996 onwards, the story of the watershed crisis was repeatedly told by the network of conservationists. The environmentalists repeatedly told the public that the hill tribes were encroaching upon the highlands and causing an environmental crisis. The political aim of the dark green movement was to delegitimize the legal claims of the local people’s rights to resources in State-claimed conservation forests. In addition, this study found that the watershed crisis story was a deliberate simplification. It tended to portray

the highland farmers (and their livelihood practices) as environment destroying agents, who should be evicted from the sensitive ecosystems they had illegally encroached upon. At the same time, it deliberately avoided talking about the historical aspects of these people, who were historically marginalized and ignored in the processes of State claims to resources in the highlands.

Soon after the national public hearing of the Community Forest Bill in April 1996 revealed an agreement allowing community forests to be set up in protected areas, the movement commonly referred to as the “dark green” conservationist network emerged. The emergence of this movement was first coordinated by the Dhammanaat Foundation, a local NGO that advocated in favor of a pristine wilderness and people-free protected areas. Later, it was reported that over 31 organizations had joined the movement, transforming it into a conservationist/environmentalist network. The political goal of this loose conservation network was to campaign against the legal setting up of community forest activities in protected areas. Since 1996, the network of dark green conservationists has actively participated in various political events related to debates over people and the forest and the Community Forest Bill. For example, they frequently submitted open letters to relevant committees and individuals involved in the process of CFB consideration, providing these policy makers with stories about watershed crises and the negative link between highland farmers and the environmental crisis.

The backgrounds of the members of the dark green conservation network are highly diverse, ranging from individuals, people’s organizations, NGOs, scholars, forest officers to policy makers, and, their contributions to the policy debate over people and the forest are equally diverse. Beginning in 1996, the Dhammanaat Foundation played a key role in organizing and coordinating other like-minded individuals and organizations to advocate their policy campaigns and activities. Among other important NGOs that played a major role in the policy campaign were the Green World Foundation and Seub Nakasatien Foundation, two Bangkok-based NGOs. During the national public hearing on the CFB, the leaders of these organizations actively defended the notion of people-free parks. One example was Ms Rataya Jantaraten, the Secretary of the Seub Nakasatien Foundation. Scholars from the Forestry Faculty at Kasetsart University and

forest officials also played key roles in the debate by providing technical information regarding the ecological roles and functions of the highland forests and ecosystems.

In this chapter, I first provide examples of the various narratives related to the watershed crisis and the negative impact of the farmers involved in the crisis. The contexts wherein the stories were produced and the social actors, who were involved in the narratives' construction, are addressed. Then, I analyze the strategies underlying the dark green narratives, which helped to fulfill the confidence of the public and policy makers, enabling them to relate the narratives in the public and policy arenas. I then discuss what is eluding the eyes of the conservationists regarding the watershed crisis. In other words, I identify issues which have been deliberately hidden, ignored and omitted from the conservationist narratives.

“Dark Green” Conservation Storylines

In this section, two storylines told by “dark green” conservationists are examined and presented. Briefly, the stories of watersheds in crisis informed their audiences that watershed forests are damaged by the hill tribes and their commercial agricultural practices. They explicitly expressed their concerns that the degradation of watershed forests would lead to the shortage of water and thus would result in increased deaths from flooding. These stories have been told repeatedly by the group of conservationists during the debate to pass the Community Forest Bill since 1996.

Declining watershed forests

In 2005 and 2007, when the Parliament was about to consider the subject of community forests, a former Dean of the Forestry Faculty, Kasetsart University, Professor Niwat Reungpanich, wrote an open letter to the Minister of Natural Resources and Environment and the prime minister. In the letter, he expressed his concern about the anticipated decline in both quality and quantity of watershed forests that would surely occur if community forests were legally set up in the protected areas. In this letter, the author urged the rethinking of community forests and protected areas and suggested that the promotion of community participation in reforestation under the project of community forests was urgently needed, but such activities should be carried out in

degraded forests outside of the State-claimed protected areas. The policy implication was that the protected areas should be kept free from harmful activity and direct use by local people. They should be managed in the national and public interest and not for the sole benefit of the local people.

Professor Niwat began his letter by pointing out the trend of forest cover in Thailand over the last 40 years. He then attempted to link the role of watershed forests with economic development and national security. He showed that Thailand's forest cover had remained at approximately 80 million rai or approximately 25 per cent of total national land area. The government planned to conserve the remaining forests by declaring them conservation forests. Approximately 45 million rai would be allocated to national parks, and 25 million rai to wildlife sanctuaries. He estimated that approximately 52 million rai were classified as watershed class 1 (AB). Sometime they could overlap with areas designated as national parks and wildlife sanctuaries. These watershed forests, he further claimed, were very important to the majority of Thais, who still require water flows from watershed forests for their cropping and agricultural practices. As well, water is essential for urban-based people and factories requiring water for domestic and manufacturing activities. The author's concern was that the lives of the majority of Thais would be affected by the continual decline of natural forests. State action was desperately needed to reverse the trend of forest decline. Professor Niwat wrote:

Upper watershed that classified as 1A watershed is the most important conservation areas. The cabinet issued the resolution that prohibited the use of these areas for other purposes, but keeping for upper watershed forests only. If necessary to use, it must receive the cabinet approval case by case. This is because upper watershed forests are very important in economic, social and national security particularly in Thailand where 60 per cent of farmers are still practicing agriculture and huge demanding of water usage. Industrial factories and urban communities in lowland parts of river basins all need to depend on water from upper watershed forests. (Niwat 2005 p.138; translated from Thai)

The letter continually informs the readers that lands in protected areas, especially in watershed forests, are not suitable for agricultural production purposes, the reason being that watershed forests are marked by thin deep slopes and soil layers making the land prone to erosion. The story insists that utilization of lands in watershed areas is hardly sustainable. The author then warns that destruction of watershed forests will become a common occurrence if community forest activities are allowed to be set up in protected areas legally.

The 1A watershed areas which considering its capacity, are ecologically fragile and unsuitable for agricultural land or settlement. Its dangerous for both people who living within and mass public in lowland areas. The utilisation of soil, water and forests in the areas that unsuitable is unsustainable use and resulted in the damage of ecosystem and environment. (Niwat 2005 p.138; translated from Thai)

In conclusion, the story proposes solutions to the problem of people in the protected areas. First, it reaffirms the promotion of community forest activities in degraded forest outside of the protected areas. The network of conservationists agreed with the concept of people's participation in forest resource management primarily in the form of reforestation outside protected areas. They made reference to the 40-50 million rai of degraded forest outside of the conservation zones where community forest plantation could be promoted. The local people and their allies could seize this opportunity to prove that they had the capacity to manage and reforest. But, the conservationists argued, why had the local people and the NGOs that supported the community rights approach to forest management never acknowledged the viability of degraded forests; why do these people want to set up community forests in protected areas where fertile forests exist? Was there a hidden agenda? Professor Niwat asked. Lastly, he proposed "joint protected areas management" whereby collaboration between park officers, local residents and other stakeholders would be promoted. Instead of granting rights to local residents, Professor Niwat suggested, the forest department had the authority to appoint selected community leaders and villagers to be "forest officers"; who could carry out the tasks of protecting and guarding the forests. Professor Niwat wrote:

If you concerned about conservation forests demanding participation in forest maintenance, the officials can appoint you as officials which recognised by law. If you wanted to utilise (resources) in protected areas, by now the government ordered the Sukhothai Dhammathirach University to revise the existing forestry laws which will make zoning that allow people utilise resources in conservation areas. Regarding local communities living in conservation forests including upper watershed forests, the government has made allowances. No one will push you out. Only disagreeing with the enactment of the law recognized the presence of people living in ecological fragile zones that both dangerous for themselves and impact on the others. (Niwat 2005 p.140; translated from Thai)

The rivers are drying up

The Hmong are causing water shortages in the lowland farms ... The excessive pesticide application among highland farms has made the water unsuitable for domestic consumption... We should protect the rights of those who follow the law, not those who endanger the environment, particularly our precious watershed forests. (Suppradit, *Bangkok Post* 20 July 1997)

The second story told the readers about a case that happened in Chom Thong district, Chiang Mai province. The lowland farmers, who depended upon the downstream flows of water for their livelihoods, claimed the rivers were drying up and that the cause lay with the hill tribes who lived upstream. The story showcased the concerns of conservationists. Dr Suchira Prayoonpitack, a sociologist from Chiang Mai University and a member of the Group for the Protection of the Watershed Forest of Chom Thong district, claimed that the ethnic group, the Hmong of Baan Pakluay (see Chapter 10), and the farmers who lived and farmed in Doi Inthanon National Park, had destroyed the upstream forests. For this reason, the group called for the termination of all village activities in these areas. As well, they urged the Forestry Department to enforce the forestry law strictly against forest encroachment.

It is clear from the above stories that, the emergence of the dark green conservation narratives has countered the legalizing of community forests in protected areas. They argue that allowing people to live in the forests will only accelerate the process of destruction. And, they insist that the theory that man can co-exist with nature hardly applies in actual situations. The pristine nature of the forests, they argue, is highly sensitive to human disturbance, so, all human activity should be banned. As one of the ecologists claims, “it’s too dangerous. Pristine forest can withstand little disturbance. In any circumstance, man’s activities must be prohibited. We are talking about the importance of biodiversity. I don’t think that we can keep mosaic of plants if villagers are allowed to cut trees or collect herbs” (*Bangkok Post* 2 June 1996).

While the narrative of watershed crisis rejected the notion of community rights, it agreed with promoting a park-based approach to natural resource conservation. Ideologically, the dark green conservation narratives are rooted in two overlapping concepts. First, the conservationists based their stories on a wilderness ideology which favors the purest in nature and sees the presence and greed of humans as a major threat to nature. This school of thought strongly believes that compromise between humans and nature is impossible. In the words of Plodprasop, a former Forestry chief: “Only wild animals can keep the forest intact, not man” (Plodprasop interviewed with *Bangkok Post* 7 June 1999). This ideology has been found mainly in stories constructed by the Dhammanaat Foundation. Second, the conservationist narrative was influenced by the notions of carrying capacity of the forests; utilization associated with economic development activity is accepted if proven to have minimum effect and sustains resource usage. This narrative employs a carrying capacity strategy in planning natural resource management. In line with this strategy, the maximum amount of farmland allowed to remain in forest areas is determined according to each forest’s carrying capacity. Two observations are distinguished here: first, it is solely the “experts” who claim the right to resource allocation and planning; second, some critics pose the question: Can one really assess the site’s carrying capacity on the ground? This practical question remains unresolved.

Prior to the dark green conservation movement, Thailand saw the emergence of two conservation movements in the 1960s. The first focused on the enactment of the

National Park Act 1961 under which Khao Yai, Thailand's first National Park, was gazetted. A year earlier the Wild Animals Reservation Act was passed (1960). This protected areas approach to conservation claimed to be the "backbone" strategy for natural resources conservation. The ICEM (2003) report states:

PA [Protected Areas] are at the heart of a nation's natural resource conservation strategy. Conserving natural resources is vital in maintaining the productive potential of the national economy. For example, maintaining forest cover is a key to conserve[ing] national water and soil resources – fundamental assets for agricultural and industrial production. Conserving pristine habitats has direct economic implications for national revenue generation from tourism.(ICEM 2003 p.13)

It is clear that the primary objective of the PA system was to conserve biological diversity and critical habitats in the national interest. Between the 1980s and 90s, Thailand's PAs, including National Parks, Wildlife Conservation Areas, Forest Parks, No Hunting Areas, Botanical Gardens, and Arboretum increased rapidly. As of 2006, there were 397 protected areas with a total coverage of more than 18 per cent of the Kingdom's total land area (ICEM 2003; FAO 2010). Unfortunately, some scholars claimed that the park-based approach to conservation had resulted in intense conflict between the RFD (the assigned authority controlling the areas) and local farmers, whose livelihoods depended mainly upon the resources within the protected areas.

The second conservation movement involved the politics of environment (Hirsch and Lohmann 1989; Hirsch and Warren 1998) and emerged in the early 1970s. This movement aimed to prevent the destruction of natural resources and environment by development projects and policy mainly driven by the State. The most remarkable environmental movement was the 1980s Nam Choan Dam protest, which saw an alliance of conservationists, local residents, journalists and scholars ranged against the construction of a Dam by EGAT in the Western Forest Complex of Kanchanaburi province. Hirsch and Lohmann stress that environmental politics in Thailand at that time focused upon conflict between the mainstream development ideology, promoting dams and forest plantations, and the livelihoods of the poor. It was about resource

exploitation on behalf of development by ‘elites’ on the one hand, and the poorest of Thailand’s rural dwellers on the other (Hirsch and Lohmann 1989). Taken this way, the conservation movement equated with a social movement against poor livelihood-based resources attributable to mainstream development caused destruction.

The dark green conservation group shared some of the concerns of the State conservation ideological movement, but it differed sharply from the earlier 1980s Thai environmental politics, even though all parties advocated in favor of nature protection. Politically, the emergence of the dark green movement in part represented middle class environmental interests, which sought to protect watershed forests, wildlife and biodiversity. In addition, the dark green movement’s goal was to motivate both State officials and policy makers to take action to protect the upstream forests that fed the lowland farmers and Bangkok-based residents as well as industries, and to relocate the upland communities who were seen as destructive resource consumers. The conservation narrative thus served the interests of the conservationists and helped to legitimize the plan for relocating upland communities formulated by State officials and policy makers.

In sum, the dark green conservation narrative is a narrative of crisis. It is, in most cases, an explanation for the contemporary environmental crisis that links the degradation of the natural world with human activity and exploitation. Conservation narratives invariably describe how natural resources such as forests, wildlife populations and biodiversity are exploited and threatened with extinction by economic development activity. The stories mainly originated from a group of ‘conservationists’ who deliberately constructed and communicated their stories strategically in the hope of achieving their political objectives. These conservationists tended to claim that local communities and their livelihood strategies were natural enemies of ecosystems, who ignored the intrinsic value of nature, engaged in environmentally irresponsible practices, and were illegal forest encroachers.

Fragile Watershed and Greedy Highlanders: the Narrative Strategies

The previous section describes the emergence of the dark green conservation narrative, its characteristics and objectives. Clearly, the dark green conservation narratives not only legitimize and maintain the conservationists' position in the policy debates, but also contain political goals. They aimed to persuade and motivate policy makers to realize the negative impact of highlander communities' activities on upstream forests and people's lives. But, in order to achieve the goals, the dark green narratives required some knowledge strategies and practices. One of these was the constructing of the idea of ecologically sensitive watershed, that is, the rationalization of the upstream forests as sensitive objects that needed protection from human activity. The second was the knowledge strategy that portrayed the highlanders and their livelihood systems as destructive communities, who should be targeted for eviction. The last knowledge strategy was their claim that the forest lands, as public goods, belonged to every Thai citizen, not only to the communities living in or nearby the forest areas. Some conservationists asked: How can illegal forest encroachers gain legitimacy to manage and own forest land when innocent forest protectors, who live outside of the areas, are excluded? In the following section, I illustrate these three main knowledge strategies.

Constructing the ecologically sensitive watershed

The dark green conservation narrative pictured and presented the ecologically sensitive upland watershed as a location that should be protected from human extractive activity. These areas, as presented in the narrative, are usually located in high mountainous areas, are marked by deep slopes with very thin soil layers, slopes that are subject to natural erosion. Furthermore, the areas are home to wildlife, plants, and biodiversity, all of which have intrinsic value in their own right. More importantly, the areas are a major source of water supply for lowland farmers, urban people, and the industrial sector downstream. Thus, upstream forests and classified head watershed forests should be kept intact.

In Thailand, national efforts to establish watershed forests and their classification can be traced back to 1990. Critical to this documentation was the Watershed Classification Committee which established categories of land use characteristics and measures that applied in each of the categories. The Committee was appointed by cabinet. Its key task was to classify and categorize land use throughout the country. Thailand's land use was accordingly categorized into 5 watershed classes based mainly upon physical criteria defined and selected by the Committee members: watershed class 1 (A, B), to watershed class 5. This classification later became a national "standard", guiding and assessing land use suitability in Thailand. According to new categories, watershed class 1 (A, B) is considered the most sensitive ecological zone as 60 per cent of the area is very deep and sloping, and still covered by dense forest particularly in 1A watershed areas where fertile forests still exist and are maintained.

The watershed system was introduced into the national political debate by conservationists who supported community-free protected areas in late 1990s. At the time, the draft Community Forest Bill (the Suanbua version) achieved in-principle approval by parliament. However, the so called "dark green" conservation group, which comprised 31 conservation organizations, did not see their interests sufficiently represented in that version. They later formed a loose network, campaigning for their own political agenda which emphasized their conservation objectives. By referring back to the legal watershed class, conservationists attributed watershed class to their political campaign. They highlighted ecologically sensitive areas located at altitudes above 700 meters, containing slopes greater than 20 degrees and subject to heavy rainfall. The highland watershed was thus considered a place sensitive to human extractive activities and subject to natural erosion.

In addition, the conservation narrative reconfirmed beliefs about the vital ecological functions of upstream forests, claiming that upland forest catchments acted as "sponges" that helped to maintain the quantity of water flows downstream over time. The following quotes explicate this view:

Imagine forests as huge sponges soaking up the rain and storing it, releasing a little at a time. In a well forest watershed, annual rainfall is trapped and then released slowly but surely over time, replenishing the ground water and keeping the streams and rivers flowing through the dry seasons. This

constant supply of clean water running to streams and rivers is vital for replenishing the homes of their myriad creatures. (Jarit 2008 p.18; translated from Thai)

Suchira Prayoonpitack, a sociologist from Payap University interviewed by a newspaper, said that “several decades ago, fertile forests served as natural water catchments and reservoirs. These catchments prevent floods during the rainy season, and are a source of water during the dry season” (Suchira interviewed with *Bangkok Post* 19 June 1997).

In short, the dark green conservation narrative highlighted the importance of protected forests and their ecological services to the wellbeing of the people. As well, it stressed the complexity of the protected areas, insisting that they were very sensitive to all development activities. Thus, if possible, all economic-related activities should be limited: only conservation-related activities should be implemented in watershed forests.

Destructive Resource Communities

The second strategy of the conservation narrative denounced forest communities as incapable and destructive of resources. This claim was promulgated by Thai society and the country’s educational system for decades. Controversial discourse such as *chao khao tum lai paa* (hill tribes destroy the forest) and *rai ru’an loy tum hai pu khao hua loan* (shifting cultivation causes a “bald” mountain), among others, have been found in subjects related to natural environment taught to primary school students. Thai students who hope to get a good mark have to answer either “hill tribes” or “shifting cultivation” to the question what is the major cause of deforestation in Thailand. For decades, local villagers - particularly the hill tribes - have been portrayed as drug traders, as a threat, and as forests destroyers (see Forsyth and Walker 2008). The claim has been historically used as part of the hostile and aggressive tactics used by government authorities to legitimize their use of violence when forcing forest dependent

communities from their land. There is evidence that during the campaign for the Community Forest Bill, the dark green conservation group explicitly employed the notion that hill tribes destroyed the forests to justify their political campaigns and practices. They claimed that the farmers in the highlands destroyed the upstream forests to satisfy their material desires which were fueled by television and radio advertising. According to their own claim, the highland farmers had to change their farming methods so as to increase their income generation. Extra money was needed to meet high expenditures on materials, and little thought was given to possible negative impacts on the environment and on human health. As one lowland farmer interviewed by the *Bangkok Post* said: “The Hmong are now richer than many lowland farmers. In Baan Paa Kluay, they buy pickup trucks, deposit cash in banks and buy longan orchards. The money comes from the sale of cabbages and flowers” (Supradit, *Bangkok Post* 20 July 1997). Another said: “They can afford to trade old pickup trucks for more powerful models every two years” (Supradit, *Bangkok Post* 20 July 1997). In short, the group of conservationists tried their best to elaborate a story suggesting that the forest dependent communities were no longer subsistence economies. Rather, they were commercial farmers who both consume and degrade the natural resources.

In addition, resource use and strategies such as wood collections for fuel, timber cutting and non-wood collection from the forest, were viewed as destructive. In addition, cash crop plantations such as corn and cabbages were seen as land-consuming practices never welcomed by natural ecosystems. Environmentalists saw the direct use of natural resources as a major threat - an activity that resulted in natural resource degradation. And they strongly believed that the local villagers were usually dependent upon resources directly, and likely to engage in destructive use.

Forests are Sombat khong paendin

The term “*Paa-mai pen sombat khong paendin*” is another discourse found in the dark green conservation narrative. Literally, it means “the forest is the property of the earth”. In Thailand, *Satarana Sombat khong paendin* legally refers to every kind of property - moveable or immovable – that has been reserved for common use or is only used for

public benefit. This common property cannot be transferred to any single individual owner unless it has specific legal designation. The term covers various properties including bare land, government houses and offices, and lakes and streams. In the dark green conservation narrative, however, the conservationists use it narrowly to refer to the remaining state protected areas. They claim that less than 18 per cent of remaining forests, particularly watershed class 1A, have been preserved only as headwater forests. These upstream forests are really important and linked to economic and social development as well as to national security issues. This is because the areas provide a water supply for more than 60 per cent of Thai farmers, the industrial sector and urban communities, who mostly depend upon the water that comes from upstream protected areas. Since watershed forests serve the national interest, all Thai citizens should be afforded equal opportunity to participate in any decision making related to the areas.

Clearly, the conservationists' rationalization of the watershed as a public treasure has at least two political implications: first, it explicitly promotes state-owned property, but rejects the community rights approach to natural resource management; second, it supports the notion of public participation in protected areas management, in which joint committees of stakeholders are established at different levels from local to national. The forest communities and their representatives are invited to join the established committee. The logic of a watershed as a public treasure argues that the interests of the public are excluded if forest communities are given legal control over protected areas. The conservationists feared that forest communities living in the highland would encroach upon upstream forests and cut down trees in their own short-term economic interest without considering the national wellbeing.

In sum, conservationist narratives deliberately portrayed the highlands as sensitive ecological areas and pictured highland farmers as resource hungry. The stories particularly used the Hmong hill tribe and their commercial agricultural practices as an example illustrating how farmers in the highlands destroyed "our" common watershed forests. The watershed crisis storylines indeed stigmatized the picture of hill tribe, shifting cultivation, and watershed forest degradation in public and particularly in policy making arena. In the next section I will point out and discuss the issue that a group of conservationists tended to refuse to talk about in their storylines surrounding

watershed, highland farmers and forest resource degradation. I will examine the underlying political aspirations of the construction of watershed crisis.

What Is Missing From the Conservationist Narrative?

It becomes clear that a group of conservationists attempted to delegitimize the indigenous and traditional forest communities' claim to community rights to forests. In doing so, the conservationists constructed a story of watershed crisis which demonstrated the degradation of watershed forests and shortages of water that originated from highland farmers and their agricultural practices. The climax of the stories was the policy proposal that urged the State to consider the relocation of highland farmers, particularly the Hmong hill tribes, out of the watershed forests. When a group of conservationists realized that their proposal regarding the relocation project was impossible, they switched their political campaign to promote a policy that restricted resource use and legal resource claims within the protected areas. Since 1996, a group of conservationists led by the Dhammanaat Foundation has supported the notion that man cannot co-exist with nature. To this end, they disagreed with the proposal to allow the legal establishment of community forests in the protected areas. The conservationists strongly advocated that pristine forests should be kept safe and away from direct utilization by local people. They held that wilderness forests were "out there" and that they functioned to store water resources for all Thai interests. My argument here is that the conservationist narrative overemphasized the ecological functions of the highland ecosystem. They blamed the highland farmers and their agricultural practices for causing highland degradation, but deliberately ignored the historical aspects of highland development. The contemporary land use pattern in the highlands is in part the result of previous development policies.

In Thailand, "highland colonization" (Delang 2002), which started in the mid-1950s, has been held responsible for the degradation of forest resources in the highland. This process has been characterized by various factors. First was the surge in demand for highland cash crops for export for the feedstock industries in Japan and Taiwan after the end of World War II. Among particular cash crops of the north were maize and

soybeans. The growing of cash crops for export required the lowland farmers to cut down trees and turned the forest lands into agricultural lands. When land in lowland started to become increasingly scarce, “they had to move up into the hills to find unclaimed land to clear and farm” (Delang 2002 p.487). In the 1970s, Thai government policy was to build roads into the highland forests as a measure to deny territory to people who were opponents of the military regime at the time. In fact, in the early 1970s, the highland forests had become a refuge for members of the Communist Party of Thailand. The road network was essential for facilitating the colonization of the highlands by the Thai state (Delang 2002). These activities inevitably caused loss of forest cover in the highlands.

From the 1980s on, the Thai state turned its authority to promoting a policy that aimed to stop land colonization in the highland and to restore the highland ecosystems. Delang (2002) observes that State policy regarding highland development changed very quickly for two reasons: first, communism in Thailand ended in the early 1980s when the military declared that the insurgents had been defeated; second, industrialization saw Thailand change its development strategies and import substitution policies (Delang 2002). Since then, the Royal Forest Department, along with other government agencies receiving technical and financial support from international aid agencies, has played a key role in reforesting the highlands. As a consequence, land use and the lives of the people in the highlands were altered by the State development strategies.

As already discussed in Chapter 2, debate has surrounded the controversial issue whether local people have been encroaching upon the forests or whether the people have been encroached upon by the State conservation strategies. During the debate, the pro-community advocates repeatedly referred to the 1973 speech of His Majesty King Bhumibol, in which the King described the process as encroachment by the authorities:

It seems rather odd for us to enforce the reserved forest law on people in the forest which became reserved only subsequently by the mere drawing of lines on a piece of paper. The problem arises in as much as with the delineation done, these people became violators of the law. From the point of view of the law it's a violation because the law was duly enacted. But according to natural law the violator is he who drew the lines, because the people possess the right to live. Thus it is the

authorities who encroached upon the rights of individuals and not the individuals who transgressed the law... (H.M. The King of Thailand 1973)

Not surprisingly, these conservationists, who disagreed with the idea of community rights to forests allowing the establishment of community forests in the protected areas, attempted to avoid mentioning the history of highland development in their storytelling. Instead, they only talked about the physical and ecological function of upstream watershed. The reason for this was that they aimed to shift the national debate from a rights-based approach to wilderness conservation and, in many cases, strongly believed that the upstream forests should be kept away from human activity. Thus, they rejected all proposals that allowed human activity in these ecologically sensitive zones.

Conclusion

Disagreeing with the notion that people and the forests can co-exist and with the community rights advocates, a group of conservationists employed a watershed crisis storyline informing the public and policy makers about the degradation of the upper watershed forests caused by the highland farmers and their resource-consuming agricultural practices. In their storylines, they portrayed the highland farmers and their agricultural practices as “destructive agents”. The narrative of watershed crisis was used to justify the policy proposal for relocating the highland farmers out of the watershed forests. Furthermore, it was employed to justify the conservation intervention implemented by the conservationists and forest officers. Conservation intervention inevitably restricted the lives of the local people in the highlands. This study ascertained that the dark green watershed crisis storylines contained some degrees of narrative strategy which avoided to mentioning the history of highland development, the hope being to shift the national debate over people and the forests in the highlands from a rights-based approach to an ecologically-based orientation.

Chapter 9

Paa Chumchon Huai Kaew

Introduction

In previous chapters, I explored the four main policy narratives surrounding people and the forests: forests for the poor, community rights to forests, the supermarket of the poor and the conservation narrative. These narratives were deliberately produced in order to legitimise and justify the claims regarding the relationship between local people and the forest environment made by the various groups of political actors who were involved in the processes of community forestry development in Thailand, particularly in the debate about the Community Forest Bill between the early 1990s and 2007. By telling these stories policy actors aimed to support their political position and social space in the debate surrounding the passing of the Bill. However, as discussed in the earlier chapters, each policy storyline strategically represented the forest communities' response to the narrator's beliefs, assumptions and knowledge regarding the relationships between the local people and the forests.

This section explores the “local” narratives surrounding the local people and the forests: the Huai Kaew community forest. During the debate surrounding the passing of the CFB, the Huai Kaew narrative was deployed as an example of a success story by the network of pro-community advocates. During the campaign, the story of Huai Kaew was regularly referred to as an iconic case study demonstrating the ability of forest communities to defend their livelihood resources. It was repeatedly presented to illustrate the ways in which the local people effectively protected forest resources from destruction by greedy land investors. In 1989, with the collaborative effort of the local peoples, the RFD granted 1500 rai National Reserve Forest to villagers under the “community forest” project.

My intention in this chapter is to illustrate how people, forests and the relationships between them have been portrayed within the local narrative of the Huai Kaew community forest. This narrative is based upon my ethnographic work and oral accounts

and documents pertaining to Huai Kaew village. My aim is to illustrate the ways in which the notion of “community forest” has been politically constructed and deployed in this village. In addition, I will show how this limited notion of community forest became a “narrative trap”, that is, the resource users themselves restricted their own access to forests resources.

Huai Kaew is a forest community located in Mae On district, approximately 55 km from Chiang Mai city. In the past the Huai Kaew villagers’ livelihoods were solely based upon the forest resources adjacent to the village. Nowadays, it is only the villagers living adjacent to the forest who still depend upon forest resources directly for generating cash income, collecting fuel wood and grazing areas. Some villagers have occupied lands in the forests.

In February 1989, the Royal Forest Department granted 235 rai of forest land adjacent to Huai Kaew village to the wife of an MP, Mrs Pramern Shinawatra. The project was approved following the spirit of the 1985 National Forest Policy, which aimed to increase national forest cover up to 40 per cent of total national land area. The concession made for the Mae On degraded forest in effect was a contribution to the official goal of forest conservation. However, the Huai Kaew villagers argued that those particular pieces of forest were the source of their livelihoods and their watershed forests. They had been dependent upon these resources for decades. The villagers then started to fight the private project in a bid to defend the forests they laid claim to. Many protests and demonstrations were organized when the land investors started to work in the forest site. In December 1989, after nearly a year of protest, the Huai Kaew villagers claimed victory over the private investor after the RFD ceased land leasing and granted them 1600 rai of national reserve forests under the Huai Kaew community forest experiment project.

Since that time, the Huai Kaew community forest has become a “model” which has ignited and inspired the initiative of community forests in other local communities throughout Thailand. Between 1990 and 2002, a number of local communities visited the village to observe how the Huai Kaew villagers managed their forest resources in the form of community forest (Village headman, interviewed 17 February 2010). During that time, the Huai Kaew community forest became the standard example for

people interested in community forests. The Regional Community Forestry for Asia and the Pacific (RECOFTC), which conducted international training courses related to community forestry, for example, took participants to the site as part of its training. Huai Kaew community forest has been used as a study site for officials too. At present the forest officials carry out experiments on biodiversity monitoring in the community forest. This means that the site has been recognized by front line staff. But, in the debate over CF Bill, high ranking officers disagreed with the idea of transferring rights to the local community, so the positive story has never been told by officers.

Today, visitors to Huai Kaew recognise the good progress of the community forest. It was hard to imagine that approximately 20 years ago, the forest area was denuded and prepared for plantation by land investors. The community forest area contains an abundance of trees. The community constructed fire break is clearly visible with no sign of forest having been burnt. And community regulations are in place, having been legalised by the Huai Kaew Tambol Administration Office.

However, my ethnographic research suggests a rather different story. I found that direct resource users had restricted access and utilisation of resources in the community forest. Resource utilisation was allowed only for subsistence purposes. This led to tensions in the village between the community forest committee and resource users. It seemed that the concept of community forest adopted in Huai Kaew was based upon a set of narratives and statements by officials surrounding people and the forests, statements and narratives that rarely reflected the dynamic nature of the forest community.

The chapter begins by discussing the history of Huai Kaew village from the time of settlement. It then explores the contestation over forest land and the mobilization of the villagers to end the lease of that forest land. This is followed by examination of the establishment of technical community forestry within the village context, and an analysis of what has been deliberately excluded from the storyline of the Huai Kaew community forest. In conclusion, the side effects of these locally constructed narratives on the local people regarding resource access are discussed.

Huai Kaew: A Changing Forest Community

In the late 1980s, Huai Kaew came to be known publicly by Thai society as an iconic case study whereby local people successfully defended forest resources from exploitation by an influential politician in Chiang Mai. During the national debate to pass the Community Forest Bill, Huai Kaew was repeatedly referred to by the pro-community advocates to illustrate the capacity of local communities for forest resources management and conservation. I personally came to know Huai Kaew as a place where forest dependent villagers commonly managed and regulated shared forest resources equitably. During my working time at RECOFTC, I met the community leader and villagers from Huai Kaew many times at conferences and workshops relevant to community forests, held both in Bangkok and Chiang Mai. The villagers were invited to participate in these seminars so that they could tell the story of the resource struggle in Huai Kaew. The story of Huai Kaew community forest was told regularly, convincing audiences that local people were capable of protecting and taking care of forest resources. The Huai Kaew storytelling was deliberately undertaken in order to provide the public with a concrete example of a “community forest”, in the process of contributing to solving the conflicting debate over whether people and forests could co-exist. This is one reason why I chose Huai Kaew to be my study site.

I first entered the village for fieldwork on 21 November 2009. I observed that the Huai Kaew villagers were relatively wealthy compared to other forest communities I had visited in Thailand. The village was well organised: the houses were relatively new and some of them were fenced. I noted a school and temple in the village and the road access to and inside the village was in good condition. The villagers owned and used motorcycles for travelling to the fields and to the city. Within the village, there were many stores selling food, drinks, vegetables and other products brought from the city. The newest store looked very similar to the “seven-eleven” stores in terms of the products it sold and the shop setting. Also, near the village was a tourist resort owned by a family who came from the city. This family also opened a gasoline station in the village. Looking around the fields, I noted that villagers had planted garden trees and many of villagers had turned their paddy fields into garden tree plantations. Along the road heading towards the village, there were a number of garden tree shops selling forest tree species and garden trees mainly to urban visitors. My preconceptions of the

forest community were really challenged by what I had seen and the villagers I met. My observations told me that they were not forest dependent villagers.

According to documents and interviews, the Huai Kaew villagers had settled in the area nearly 100 hundred years ago (Salisa 1994; interview 21 November 2009). The first group of Huai Kaew villagers to migrate to the area came from nearby districts in Chiang Mai province, such as Doi Saket and Sankhamphaeng. Others came from other provinces in the north of Thailand, for example, Lamphun, Lampang and Kampangphet. The main reason that motivated the villagers to move into the area was to seek new land for cropping. The first group of villagers to arrive settled on the flat lands along the Mae Lai River. They cleared the forest surrounding their settlement and transformed the forestlands into cropping lands. My observations and interviews revealed that migration into Huai Kaew village occurred continuously until recently. Due to land limitations, the newcomers have had to settle in areas close to the forests, such as the Hua Doi hamlet. But, because this area has been classified as state forest, land documents cannot be issued and private ownership cannot be granted. Thus, the villagers who settled in Hua Doi hamlet have no legal claim to the land. In Huai Kaew, it is estimated that approximately 50 per cent of the total population occupy farmland in State-claimed forests (Salisa 1994).

The majority of villagers have settled along the road alongside the Mae Lai River. The village is surrounded by farmlands. The main farmlands are to the north, west and south of the village, and were registered by the Land Department. Crop production in Huai Kaew is solely dependent upon water from the Mae Lai River, which originates from upper watershed forest approximately 10 km upstream from the village. Traditionally, the villagers set up the Muang Fai system (a traditional local irrigation management institution) to allocate water resources among villagers who share the same river. This traditional water management still persists and functions effectively at the present time.

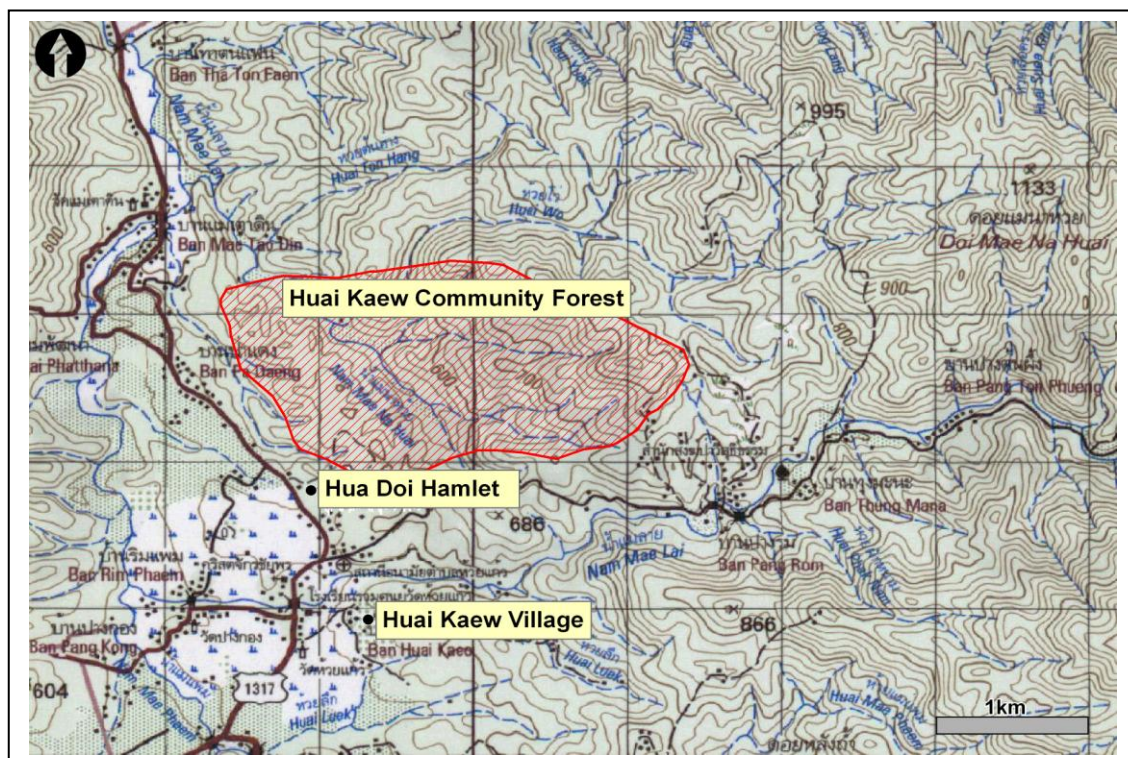
Prior to the 1990s, the villagers of Huai Kaew maintained subsistence and forest-based livelihoods. Most of the villagers depended upon forest products and resources from the nearby forest for their survival. Thus, the forest adjacent to the village played a vital role in local livelihoods. Rice growing was for domestic consumption. After the rice was harvested, the villagers used the land for planting crops such as tobacco and

soybean. They earned cash incomes from selling these crops. Crop production, however, was limited to the rainy season. In addition, cropping could not be done on a large scale due to land limitation and transportation capacity. For this reason, the villagers had to depend upon forest products for their family incomes and sources of livelihoods. One villager said that 30 years ago, nearly every family entered the forests to collect bamboo shoots, mushrooms, wild honey and timber. The forest products collected and harvested were used for both domestic consumption and commercial purposes. More importantly, at that time, logging in the nearby forests was a major source of cash income. During the dry season, after the crops were harvested, the villagers of Huai Kaew entered the forests and cut down the trees. Loggers stayed in the forests for several days processing the timber, which was then transported by bicycle to the market in Doi Saket and other nearby cities. However, the amount of timber traded was limited by the capacity for transportation. At that time, most villagers relied upon their bicycles to carry the timbers to the market.

Huai Kaew community forest, which is located next to Hua Doi hamlet in the north, was officially set up in late 1980s by the RFD. The area is covered by mixed deciduous tree species, including teak. Bamboo is the dominant species in the forest area. During my stay in the village, I asked one of my key informants to take me into the forest. My objective was to see the forest condition and I wanted to see the areas that the RFD granted to the private land investor under the forest concession project in 1989. The area had since become covered by bamboo forests and big trees, but evidence of land preparation could still be observed. According to a key informant, the community forest was relatively fertile and there were many big trees in the area. One thing that really surprised me about Huai Kaew community forest was the role of the forest officials in community forest management. I observed that the forest officials had played a vital role in controlling community forest activity. I noted a group of villagers making a fire break around the community forest. The RFD had allocated money to each village close to the forest areas to create fire breaks. In Huai Kaew, eight villagers were hired to work as “forest fire guards” for six months between November and April. The key informant who escorted me to the community forest insisted that the fire break was a waste of money and useless. “If the forest fire is really to happen, those fire breaks cannot stop it”, he said, pointing to smoke rising from a forest fire burning within the community forest boundary.

Since the early 1990s, the community livelihoods have changed, becoming increasingly diversified. Logging activity has been totally banned since the community forest was established. The community forest committee has introduced strict rules forbidding cutting of timber in the community forest. And all loggers were ordered to stop their illegal activities. Later, farmers who owned farmland started planting garden trees for sale to mainly urban people, signalling a new source of income and livelihoods in Huai Kaew. Many replaced their paddy rice fields with the garden trees as a source of family income. The villagers in Hua Doi sought work as day labourers. They continued to collect seasonal forest products but, once again this kind of activity was restricted by the community forest rules. For example, bamboo shoots could not be collected during the eight month period beginning in October and ending in May. This rule was only recently introduced in 2005 by the Huai Kaew Tambon Administrative Office. It is worth noting here that the new rule regarding the use of resources in community forest were not introduced by the community forest committee, but were imposed by the TAO. The community forest, among other projects, became a new factor that contributed to the changes in the livelihoods of the forest community.

Figure 2: Map of Huai Kaew Village, Hua Doi Hamlet and Huai Kaew Community Forest, overlaid on a 1:50,000 topographic map.



When I conducted my field work in Huai Kaew, I stayed in Hua Doi hamlet. Hua Doi, which is located approximately 1 km from the main village, is home to 20 households who migrated into the village later than the majority of villagers. All of the land in Hua Doi belongs to the State forest, so the villagers who live in this hamlet have no legal documents for their land. During my stay in Hua Doi, I got to know and interview many of the villagers, who joined the protest in the late 1980s. I discovered that many of the villagers of Hua Doi occupied farmlands in the nearby forest. Most owned no farmland outside of the forest. Forty five years ago or more, they used to use the land in the forests for planting upland rice and maize, but they had to stop these practices when the RFD declared the forest to be reserved forest in 1965. The villagers of Hua Doi hamlet are relatively poor compared to their neighbours in the main village. Usually, they have relied heavily upon forest product collection for income generation. Also, they seek to sell their labour, both within and without the village. Some try to rent land from their neighbours in order to plant cash crops, but are finding that land to rent is getting harder, partly due to the limited amount of land in the village. The land owners themselves want to use their land for cropping. My sojourn in Hua Doi, allowed me to observe and learn about the politics of resource utilisation in Huai Kaew community forest.

The focus in the next section is upon the historical aspect of resource contestation in Huai Kaew since the late 1980s. These events are important because they proved directly relevant to the livelihoods of the Huai Kaew villagers.

“Our Forest Livelihoods”

In the late 1980s, readers of the Thai press became familiar with stories of resource conflict between influential land investors and local people. One particular story attempted to inform its readers about how Huai Kaew villagers fought back and tried to defend their livelihood resources from greedy businesswomen, who sought to exploit State forestland resources in their own private interests. The story, on the one hand, attempted to illustrate the failure of the centralised forestry approach which tended to favour private interests. On the other, it attempted to portray the local people as being dependent upon forest resources to meet their subsistence demands. In other words, the forests were the source of their subsistence livelihoods.

Huai Kaew village was surrounded by forests which were the subject of contestation between the different parties who had various interests in the forest. Traditionally, the Huai Kaew villagers were dependent upon forest resources for their livelihoods, that is, for forest products such as wild food, for income generation, grazing areas, farming lands, and, water for agricultural practices. Since the early 1900s, when the village was first established, forests had been the source of their livelihoods.

In 1965, the RFD declared the forestlands adjoining the village Mae On National Reserve Forest. This official declaration altered the ways in which villagers used the forest resources. For example, cutting timber was declared an illegal activity and prohibited. Villagers were only allowed to collect non-timber forest products such as mushrooms and bamboo shoots. One villager elder explained that forest officers and soldiers came to the village to inspect the forests and to police resource use, particularly timber cutting by the villagers. The reality was that the villagers had no idea if the forestland from which they collected forest products had been declared national reserve forest or not. They had little perception of what a national reserve forest was in actual fact. They later realized that their utilization of the forests was illegal when they were informed by forest offices who explained the National Reserve Forest Law to them. The Law indicated that official permission had to be obtained before the villagers accessed resources within the forest boundary of the national reserve forest. However, the villagers continued to enter the forest to collect seasonal non-timber forest products.

Thus, even though the forest areas adjacent to the village were now under State property control, de facto forest resource utilization by the villagers continued to be practiced in Huay Kaew. The villagers still collected mushrooms, bamboo shoots, and other forest products from the forests, either for domestic consumption or to sell into the market. In addition, they raised their cattle in the forests. This ensured that the cattle would not damage their crops during the wet season. Some villagers occupied land in the forests, particularly flat land, for cropping, mainly for paddy rice fields. So, despite the forest area having been declared State forest, the villagers still claimed these lands as their farming lands.

In February 1989, the Royal Forest Department granted a forest concession to Mrs. Pramern, the wife of Chiang Mai MP, Surapan Shinawatra. At that time, Surapan was deputy Communications minister. While holding this post, he lobbied for a number of projects (Usher 2010), one of which was a concession for 235 rai of “degraded forest” in the Mae On National Reserve Forest for the purposes of establishing a forest plantation project. The project was approved on the justification of reforestation. The renting out of “degraded forest” to private investors, who were able to invest in forest plantation, was seen as, a state forestry strategy that would achieve the ambitious goal of 40 per cent forest cover.

After gaining permission from the RFD in February 1989, Mrs Pramern sent her workers to the area with tractors and other equipment. It was then that the conflict between the Huai Kaew villagers and the forest renter started when workers started to fence the concession area. “They [workers] didn’t allow us to get into the forest to collect forest products”, one villager informed me. The workers used tractors to prepare the ground for tree planting. Meanwhile, some of the extant big trees were felled. When the villagers saw their forests being destroyed, they became very concerned, fearing that the land investor was robbing them of their “sources of livelihood”. The villagers’ movement against the forestland concession in Huai Kaew started in March 1989. In the first stage, the villagers submitted petitions to involved official agencies at the local level, that is the Tambol Council, District Office and the Chiang Mai provincial office, but their complaints went unheard by these agencies. Later, the villagers were able to file their complaint with Prime Minister Chatchai Choonhavan, when he came to chair a Cabinet meeting in Chiang Mai in June and September 1989. But, even though the villagers tried many methods and strategies, no action was taken by the officials to stop the land concession project. In mid-July 1989, a group of villagers and their supporters decided to stop the project by physically occupying the concession areas. They duly demanded that the workers stop their work. The conflict became intense and saw three villagers and one student leader arrested. They were accused by investors for trespassing on Ms. Pramern’s property. Those arrested were taken to the police station in San Kamphaeng district. But, even more seriously, a few days after the villager leaders were arrested, Nit Chaivanna, a local schoolteacher, mysteriously died, presumably murdered, in his house nearby Huai Kaew village. Nit had led the villagers’

protest against the forest concession. His murder heightened the tension among the villagers.

Not surprisingly, the nature of the conflict over the disputed land between the villagers and land investors changed entirely. The investors now referred to the state forestry policy of reforestation to support their claims. One project manager claimed that the project not only helped to revive the degraded forest environment but also contributed to increasing job opportunities for the villagers. They expected to hire up to 160 people per day. In a newspaper interview he stated:

The project will plant fruit trees such as mangoes, jack fruits and bamboos. The reason for choosing mango was because the area was upland. Mango will have fruits late than usual so the price will good. Now that already planted including 18000 of mangoes, 1500 of bamboos, 350 of teaks, and 8000 coffee seedlings are in line to be planted... This project created many jobs for villagers who were hired from the beginning of May. Each day dozens of people are hired and more than 160 persons per day. These villagers are poor that come from village no. 3, 4, 5, and the Cooperative Village no. 4 and 6. Only labour cost that project already paid was approximately 400,000 baht. (Khao Siam 21 July 1989)

By contrast, the Huay Kaew villagers claimed the forests as their source of livelihood. They accused the private investors of destroying watershed forest, the source of their livelihoods. The villagers and their allies attempted to inform the public that investors had not only used 235 rai leased by the RFD but had illegally felled trees outside of the area. One villager representative stated:

Mrs Pramern Shinawatra rented 235 rai of the National Reserve Forest land in Huai Kaew sub-district from the RFD in order to plant fruit trees. This caused the plight of villagers because they have been depending on this area for upper watershed forest, source of natural food and grazing areas... At the same time, the workers and tractors remain working everyday to prepare the ground that caused many impacts namely that forests were destroyed, wastes were thrown into rivers and paddy fields of villagers, destroying sources of wild foods and grazing areas. Beside this, expanding the areas beyond the granted concession areas as well (*Daily Matichon* 20 July 1989)

Obviously, the notion of a “forest-based livelihood” has been deliberately used in the storyline of Huai Kaew community forest. The term presumed that these forest dependent communities mainly relied upon forest resources for their livelihoods. The forest was unarguably a natural source of food for the local people. However, the claim of forests as livelihoods reified the view that local use of forest resources was for subsistence only. According to this view, villagers collected and harvested low value products from the forest, such as mushrooms and bamboo shoots, solely for household consumption. The utilisation of high market value products, especially timber, from the forest for commercial purposes, was rarely represented in the story.

The Invention of Huai Kaew Community Forest

In the past, our village didn't have community forest. It was reserved forests. Who wanted to cut down tree they came to cut it. When whoever came to cutting down trees, we cannot warn them not to. But when it was community forest, if there is anyone came to cut down trees we can warn off the ones that did. Community forest is the forest of villagers, not belongs to individual. We conserve it for next generation. (Noi Sommee, interviewed 19 February 2009; translated from Thai)

The term “community forest” came into use in Huai Kaew in the late 1980s to deal politically with the forest land dispute which later became of national interest. Immediately after the end of the conflict, the RFD declared 1600 rai of Mae On National Reserve Forest to be an experimented project for the Huai Kaew community forest. This official declaration turned forests as sources of livelihood into “community forests” and transformed the forest community into a community organization, which was expected to act as a forest regulator. However, the invention of the Huai Kaew community forest was directed by the notion of forest-based livelihoods.

On 26 December 1989, only three days after the RFD Director General, Mr Phairote Suwannakorn, visited Huai Kaew village, the RFD issued details of the experimental project involving Huai Kaew community forest. During his visit, Mr Phairote received a proposal from a group of villagers and their supporters, who wanted the disputed land to be managed as a “community forest” project. The proponents strongly believed that the forest resources would be protected from any destructive activities, particularly private

investment projects if the resources were managed in accordance with the proposed approach. Having noted the conflict in Huai Kaew, they doubted if forest resources would be kept safe under the State approach to forest management. As one student representative said “the area should be developed into a community forest which villagers can use and help preserve, as they have done for long time” (Bangkok Post, 20 December 1989). From the proponents’ perspective, the community forest was seen as traditional forest resource management, which has been practiced by the local people for generations.

One villager observed, however, that the term “community forest” was very new to the villagers of Huai Kaew. They had never heard it before. At the time, when the community forest was about to be established, villagers were sent to attend workshops relevant to community forests in Huai Hong Krai Development Studies Centre, Chiang Mai. The staff of Northern Development Foundation came to organize the workshop in the village in order to facilitate the villagers learning about the concept of community forests. As regards the villagers, their major concern was who would own the forest resources. They were afraid that the resources would fall into the hands of other influential people, and that the villagers would have no rights regarding resource allocation.

The community forest declaration was not the RFD’s initial choice. At the outset, the RFD wanted to declare the forest area a protected area such as watershed forest or national park. According to the watershed classification system, some areas were already watershed forests so there was no need for legal action vis-à-vis those areas. The RFD planned to annex only areas located outside of the watershed as part of the national park. Mae On National Reserve Forest in Huai Kaew was connected to Sri Lan Na national park. But, the villagers’ representatives, students, and NGO workers disapproved of the idea of forest conservation. They demanded a new forest management approach that would welcome the participation of the local people and public in the decision-making process of forest resources allocation. Supported by media and the public in general, the RFD shifted its focus to the villagers’ proposal regarding community forest project.

After ensuring that the granted 1600 rai of forest land would be managed properly, the central RFD ordered the Chiang Mai Regional Forest Office to prepare the community forest experiment project for Huai Kaew village. The Regional Forest Office was required to conduct a forest area survey, and to coordinate the setting up of a community forest related organization at different levels ranging from village, sub-district to district level. The very first activity of the community forest experiment project was to form and set up a committee, which was to be sub-divided into four sub-committees 1) the Operational Committee; 2) the Directive Committee; 3) the Consultative Committee; and 4) the Community Forest Committee at village level. The village community forestry committee was separate from the village committee set up for general village business. These committees were appointed officially by the Chiang Mai governor. Each committee comprised various committee members and was mandated differently. For example, the Operational Committee was mandated to work closely with the village forest committee surveying forest boundaries, providing training and knowledge relevant to forest resources conservation and management, and coordinating with other committees. The Operational Committee members mainly came from various government agencies related to forest management, agricultural offices and the land department. Only one member was appointed from an NGO in Chiang Mai.

Community forest committees and regulations were also set up in Huai Kaew village. Members of the community forest committee were selected by the village committee and the Huai Kaew Tambon Council. The list of committee members was forwarded to the District Office and the Provincial Office respectively, in order to gain official approval. The processes were coordinated by forest officers from Chiang Mai Regional Office. The Huai Kaew community forest committee comprised 13 members, who came from Village Number 4, Huai Kaew village, and Village Number 5, Mae Tao Din village. At the village level, the committee was mandated mainly to manage, recover and monitor forest management activities within the community forest boundary. The community forest committee was required to define and set up rules and regulations relevant to the village's utilisation of the community forest area.

Setting up of the community forest regulations was simple. The regulations emphasised resource protection and control of forest product utilisation. Timber cutting and logging

were entirely prohibited for the five years from 1990 onward. The regulations attempted to direct resources utilisation of the community forest resources into two opposing categories: conservation and economic. This form of resource utilisation originated from the forest officials, who, in line with the 1985 National Forest Policy, separated forest lands into protected and economic forests. In Huai Kaew, the forest officials attempted to impose the idea onto the community forest committee to produce regulations that would lead to the achievement of the conservation goal. As the RFD director general observed:

The use of Huai Kaew community forest can be divided into two ways that are conservation forest and utilising forest. "Conservation forest" will be preserved for watershed where timber cutting was prohibited absolutely. But entering the forests for collecting forest products, collecting wild food and grazing was allowed. The "utilising forest" can be used for collecting forest products, wild food such as bamboo shoots, mushroom, jam and grazing. And the request for timber cutting for house and school construction is allowed only one new house per family, but have to request and get permission from community forest committee prior to cutting down trees. (*Thairath* 26 December 1989)

The processes related to community forest management in Huai Kaew village were facilitated by NGO workers led by the Northern Development Foundation. The process employed was known as the participatory learning process. The main objective of this process was to build up the local people's capacity for forest resources management. A study tour to other community forest sites, such as Thung Yao community forest in Lamphun, was conducted. Participatory tools and techniques, such as villager's workshops, were initiated when decision-making related to community forests was required. In addition, villager representatives were encouraged to participate in national seminars and workshops at which they could relate and share experiences regarding forest conservation with local people. One villager of Hua Doi hamlet, who used to join the protest, said that the period 1990-2002 marked the peak time of the Huai Kaew community forest. Not only were the villagers sent to learn, but many groups of villagers from different villages and government officials came to the village to learn how the Huai Kaew villagers had mobilised and organized themselves to regulate forest resources.

In reality, the community forest establishment in Huai Kaew was based upon bureaucratic processes. The appointment of community forest committees at various levels required official approval. In addition, community forest rules and regulations were directed and guided by forest officials. As well, it may be suggested that the community forest in Huai Kaew was an “experimental project”⁹. The term “experiment” was employed by the RFD to make possible its implementation which sought to promote participatory forest management activity in Mae On National Reserve Forest. This trial technique allowed forest officials to voice their ideas and strategies relevant to community forest management to the village without any changes in the existing forestry regulations and laws. This meant that the villagers were granted responsibility for forest management only, but their legal rights to forest resources remained unchanged. The community forest area remained under the National Reserved Forest regime, according to which forest officials held exclusive rights to resources.

The Community Forest and Livelihoods

There is no doubt that, since 1990, the forest resources have been in the hands of Huai Kaew villagers under the community forest approach. For over twenty years, the community forest committee and community regulations have played a vital role in controlling villagers’ utilization of resources within the community forest area. The community forest was based upon the statement regarding forest-based livelihoods which viewed forest resources as sources of local livelihoods. Unfortunately, it tended to focus only upon subsistence livelihoods. My study found that forest dependent villagers were allowed to use forest products mainly for domestic consumption. Commercial use of forest resources in the community forest area was restricted by the community forest regulation, which had only recently been regulated by the Huai Kaew Tambon Administrative Office (TAO). My task in this section is to illustrate the side effects of the notion “community forest”, which was narrowly and strategically invented on a particular set of assumptions surrounding people and the forests relationship, on the lives of resource users.

⁹ This was under Article 19 of the National Reserved Forest Act.

In 2005, there was an attempt to institutionalise the community forest regulation of Huai Kaew. The institutionalisation of community forest was initiated and facilitated by the Huai Kaew TAO. In Thailand, according to decentralisation policy, the TAO became the key local government actor in development and planning strategy at sub-district level. This local government unit is indeed required by the policy to implement various tasks ranged from infrastructure development, education, health to community welfare. The management of natural resources and environment is also a mandate of the TAO as indicated in the policy of decentralization. In this regard, the TAO was granted rights to produce such sub-district level regulations relevant to natural resources and environmental management. However, the latter task was assigned as an optional mandate which implied that TAO has full rights to decide if it would like to implement that task or not. In Huai Kaew, the interests of the TAO in community forest management came because some TAO members were members of the community forest committee in the village they belonged to. Thus they proposed to have sub-district level of regulation on community forest which regulated all villages under the administration of Huai Kaew sub-district. After going through the processes of regulation production, the Huai Kaew TAO officially declared a sub-district regulation on community forest and environment. The regulation comprised 12 rules relevant to resource utilization, protection and maintenance. The detail of regulations is presented in Table 5.

Obviously, Huai Kaew community forest rules really emphasised resource protection. Looking at all these rules, it seems clear that the community forest committee wanted to protect resources within the community forest and to keep forest resources safe from the utilization of villagers. In addition, it is clear from the rules that forest resource users were allowed to collect forest only for household consumption. For example, the first rule indicates that timber cutting for trade is entirely banned. Timber utilization is allowed only for domestic use and this utilization requires permission from the community forest committee. This implies that timber utilization from community forest area depends on the consideration of the committee. Basically, the committee would approve how much timber could be cut on the basis of family need. Likewise, the amount of bamboo utilization was fixed. Each family was allowed to collect a certain and limited volume of bamboo that would be enough for domestic consumption, from the committee's perspective.

Table 5: Huai Kaew Community Forest Regulation. (Translated from Thai)

<p>The regulations on stewardship of natural resources, environment management, and social harmony of Huai Kaew sub-district, Mae On district, Chiang Mai province</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Selling timber is prohibited, but villagers can collect dead wood for fuel2. Cutting trees in community forests is not allowed, except in special cases when permission has been obtained from natural resources and environmental management committee. Special cases: if a house was burnt, a new house for a new family, old and unstable houses3. People from other sub-districts are not allowed to collect bamboo from the community forest4. Sub-district residents are defined as those with house registration in the sub-district. NTFP: Bamboo shoots collection is allowed 100 kg/day/family5. Bamboo use in community forest: maximum 100 clumps/year/family for all types of bamboo6. Forest fires not allowed without permission7. Not allowed to cut off tree bark or any actions that caused death of trees8. Making charcoal and use of live trees for firewood is not allowed unless permission is granted by the committee9. Hunting by outsiders is not allowed in the community forest10. No poisoning or electrocuting fish in public streams11. No taking rocks, soil and sand out of the stream or public area without getting permission from the committee12. Not allowed to collect bamboo shoots between 1st October and 31st May

It can be observed that the adoption of the conservation narrative into community forest practice was closely linked to the conservation movement which has been promoted in Thailand since the post-logging ban in late 1980s. The century long history of forest logging in Thailand provided unwelcome experiences to Thais who tended to view resource utilization, particularly logging, as the symbol of forest destroying activity. In Huai Kaew particularly, villagers had experienced conflict with a private investor who sought to cut down big trees in the claimed community watershed forest. At that time, they blamed and accused the investor of being a watershed forest destroyer. So when

Huai Kaew received the forest land from forest department, they just wanted to avoid those activities which they used to perceive as forest destruction. One former member of Huai Kaew community forest committee said that in the first five year of the community forest project, the greatest difficulty for the committee was to encourage and to motivate loggers in the village to stop logging in the 1600 rai community forest. At that time, these loggers resisted the ideas of the committee who wanted to stop logging activity in the forest.

In addition, it seemed to me that forest conservation became a new identity of local communities who lived in or near forest areas. This new identity of conservation has been promoted nationwide through the community forest awards. The Green World Award Project, for example, has been awarded local people who take care of their environment and forest resources. The Project was launched in the late 1990s, with financial support from the PTT (the new name of Petroleum Authority of Thailand). A one to two days award ceremony and seminar is organized every year in order to present the award to forest communities who have been selected by the Project committee, to be the winner of the year. The Green World Award Project was known by Huai Kaew villagers. The Head of Huai Kaew TAO said, someday soon, that he will nominate the Huai Kaew community forest to be candidate of this project. He feels confidence that Huai Kaew has high potential to win the award.

Inevitably, the overemphasis on conservation of Huai Kaew community forest has brought tension into the village between the community forest committee and direct resource users. The most serious tension happened recently concerning the measure for bamboo shoots collection. As indicated in the community forest rule, the committee wanted to implement the seasonal closure on bamboo shoot collection. Bamboo shoot collection is not allowed between the first of October and the end of May. From the committee's perspective, the seasonal closure would allow the regeneration of bamboo forest since some shoots left over from the harvest would have a chance to grow. The committee learned this seasonal closure technique from Khao Rao Tien Thong community forest in Chai Nat province in central of Thailand. The rule was applied and enforced in Huai Kaew community forest only in 2005.

The proposal and enforcement of seasonal closure of bamboo shoots has been contested by direct resource users particularly villagers in Hua Doi. These villagers claimed that the newly imposed rule shortened the duration of bamboo shoot collection which inevitably decreased their family income. They also claimed that the collection of bamboo shoots by villagers never contributed to degrade bamboo forest. Noi Sommee, a member of Hua Doi hamlet explained that each bamboo species has a different life cycle. The bamboo would die naturally when it comes to its life cycle. She confirmed that bamboo forests in Huai Kaew community forest never reached a situation where all bamboo forest died at the same time throughout the forest. If it had happened, it was not of relevance to the ways in which villagers collected and harvested bamboo shoots from the forest. It is a natural phenomenon. Actually, Noi is heavily reliant upon forest products in the forests. During the bamboo shoot season, she can earn up to 200-300 baht per day from selling the bamboo shoots. From her perspective, the community forest committee members are no longer dependent upon the forest products for livelihoods, thus they do not care how the rule would affect forest resource users like her and other villagers in Hua Doi.

Another conflicting idea surrounding resources utilisation between forest committee and resource users involves the use of timber in community forest. Since the community forest was established in early 1990, timber or logging was definitely prohibited. The rule clearly indicated that logging in the forest was banned for five years starting from the first day of community forest establishment. It seemed that timber utilisation would be reconsidered after five years of implementation. However, the recent rules redesigned in 2005 still maintain the idea of timber utilisation restriction. The rule allows only the utilisation of timber for domestic purpose. One member of the community forest committee expressed his concern that if committee allows villagers cutting down timber, then it would bring difficulties to the committee in order to control the utilisation of timber by villagers. It would lead to an uncontrollable situation.

I found out that villagers in Huai Kaew really were confused by the community forest rules particularly the rules regarding timber utilisation. Although the rule indicates that timber utilisation is allowed for domestic consumption, in practice the procedure for requesting timber is not clear. One key informant, Sao Kothong expressed his concerns regarding the unclear and very strict regulation on timber utilisation. Sao wanted to

rebuild his old house and he needed at least three pieces of timber from the community forest. Due to the unclear and confusion of regulation in practice, he thought the committee never allowed cutting of trees in the community forest, so, he decided not to submit the request to the committee.

It is worth noting here some reasons why the community forest committee members and the villagers in Hua Doi were different in terms of the access to decision-making power. The main reason would be relevant to the changing role of Tambol Administrative Organisation (TAO) in regulating and controlling natural resources at local level. As mentioned earlier, the TAO has played a key role in regulating the rules regarding resource use since 2002. But, the members of TAO rarely depended on resources in the forest for their income generation. Instead, they have been relying on cash cropping such as from tree gardens. As such, they were likely to favour the concept of forest for watershed and biodiversity conservation. One TAO member said that the forests should be preserved for our next generation. Another reason would be relevant to the role of forest officials in promoting the management of community forests. It was obvious that the forest officials were likely to contact the official village leaders such as the village headman who no longer depended on forest resources directly for livelihoods. The village headman then invited other villagers who shared the same background and views to form the community forest committee. In the process, the consultation with forest dependent villagers in Hua Doi hamlet rarely occurred.

Responding to strict regulations on community forest, direct resource users turned their claims to the narrative of people's participation. They claimed that the current community forest committee members rarely represented direct resource users' interests. They pointed to the background of the 15 committee members. Most of them are actually rarely dependent on forest resources for livelihoods. There are only 2 representatives from Hua Doi. When I stayed in the village, I heard a rumour about corruption. Villagers in Hua Doi rumoured that the current committee was formed in order to receive a budget from the RFD. In 2002, the RFD had a policy to support the community forest project by allocating a budget of 100,000 baht to village, but this required the community organization to manage the allocated budget. However, villagers in Hua Doi said that they had no idea how that budget was spent or on what activities. The committee never reported to villagers.

In addition, direct resource users based their claims on forest zoning. They suggested that the community forest should be divided into two zones: conservation and utilisation zones. It seemed the current management of Huai Kaew community forest is based on one zone - that is conservation. But, the zone for utilisation was excluded. Back in the early 1990s, the idea of community forest zoning was proposed by the RFD. However, the idea of zoning was hardly implemented on the ground since the RFD never mentioned the suitable proportion between conservation and utilisation zones. It seems the idea of separation between conservation and utilisation appeared in the rules and regulations regarding resource utilisation, but it never happened in practice.

Conclusion

Looking back, the technical community forest approach was granted to Huai Kaew villagers who fought to defend forest resources from the destruction of a private investor. Since the late 1980s, the Huai Kaew community forest has become an iconic case study illustrating the success story of community based natural resource management. The story of Huai Kaew was spread out and was used for political campaign on community forest movement in Thailand. The invention of community forestry offered local people the opportunity to regulate and to control forest resources. In the context of resource contestation, the term “community forest” indeed helped the forest community to gain legitimacy over the private sector to control and manage local resources. However, the idea of community forest which has hardly freed them from the conservation paradigm has led to a situation where direct resource users and their interests in forest utilizations were excluded. Villagers were presented as depending on forest for subsistence. The community forest then became a tool of forest conservation which responded to state conservation goals rather than the improvement of local livelihoods.

Chapter 10

Hmong Baan Pakluay

Introduction

In Baan Pakluay, they buy pickup trucks, deposit cash in banks and buy longan orchards. The money comes from the sale of cabbages and flowers. One even lent about two million baht to a lowlander. (Thong-in Namthep interviewed with Bangkok Post 20 July, 1997)

Pakluay village was my second village case study. During the debate about the Community Forest Bill since the mid 1990s, the story of the Hmong of Pakluay village was repeatedly recounted by opponents of the CFB as an iconic example of people as forest destroyers. Unlike the villagers of Huai Kaew, the Hmong of Pakluay were often portrayed as a resource consuming community habitually careless of the environment. The story was mainly told by the conservationists, who supported the idea of people-free protected areas. In the story, the Hmong farmers of Pakluay village were accused of being the major cause of the water drying up in the lowlands in Chom Thong district. The water quality had deteriorated due to excessive pesticide residue. The network of conservationists accordingly proposed the relocation of the highland farmers out of the watershed forests.

My intention in this chapter is to present the ways in which the Hmong farmers responded to the conservationists' accusations. The focus is upon the strategies and narrative tools employed by the Hmong farmers to deal politically with their uncertainty about continued residence. Also, I discuss how these strategic actions created opportunities, but also limitations for the Hmong farmers to access resources, particularly farmlands in the highlands.

The Hmong have been considered by many Thais and government officers to be alien and threatening shifting cultivators. Thai mainstream environmentalists denounced the hill tribes' traditional agricultural practices, claiming they destroyed the upper

watershed forests, reduced the amount of water available for irrigating the lowland farms, polluted the streams and rivers, and contributed to the flood problems in Thailand's central plain. Conservationists stressed that these environmental problems had to be resolved quickly, otherwise there would be no watershed forest left. Once again, they pointed the finger of blame at the hill tribe farmers arguing they should pay all conservation costs. The Hmong attracted their share of blame, mainly because the conservationists considered the highland farmers' cabbage plantations land-consuming and stream-polluting. This was partly because they considered that cabbage plantations required a large amount of land and that the farmers used excessive amounts of chemical fertilizer and pesticides. Among other hill tribe communities, the Hmong gained top priority for relocation from the watershed area. In 1989, the Thai Cabinet approved the relocation plan that ordered the eviction of the villagers from their community to a relocation site in a degraded national lowland forest in Chom Thong district. Fortunately for the farmers, the cost of relocation was much greater than the authority had anticipated. Thus, the relocation plan was shelved.

Hmong farmers were far from passive agents. My ethnographic study reveals that in the context of uncertainty and insecurity of settlement, the Hmong of Pakluay village constantly adapted conservation narratives and strategies to their community context. They wisely learned to employ available environmentalist strategies in order to reconcile with the powerful forces that sought to evict them from their village. However, the conservation strategies effectively silenced the commercial viability of agricultural production in Pakluay.

The chapter commences by describing Pakluay village. I commence the first section providing an ethnographic account of the Hmong farmers and their village environment. Then, I discuss outsiders' views of the Hmong. This is followed by a discussion of the conservation strategies adopted by the Hmong of Pakluay. The last section discusses what has been silenced in the Hmong strategic conservation narrative and explores the side effects of these strategic actions on the highlanders' livelihoods.

Pakluay: A Hmong Village

I entered Pakluay village in October 2009. The village is located on the top of mountain within the Ob Luang National Park in Maesoi sub-district of Chom Thong district, some 75 kilometres southwest of Chiang Mai city.

Pakluay is home to the Hmong. Hmong farmers first migrated into the area in the 1930s, initially settling in the Huai Manao area, approximately 10 kilometres north of the current village location. In 1974, the villagers decided to move to the current village location so as to shorten their walking distance to the city. In 1996, the Minister of Interior registered Pakluay as a village officially under the Maesoi sub-district administration. At the present time, there are 800 people, from 164 households living in the village (village headman, interviewed 10 January 2010).

The Hmong of Pakluay were traditionally pioneer swidden agriculturists, who practiced fallow cultivation with two important crops – opium and upland rice. The upland rice was planted mainly for household consumption purposes whereas opium was among the main products for trading purposes. In Pakluay village, prior to 1980, the crops were mainly planted in two areas: the first was Doi Liem, which is located near Huay Manao at an elevation of approximately 1300 to 1600 metres, suited to planting opium. The second main area was located near the present village site of Khun Mae Soi. In this area, the elevation was suited to growing upland rice.

Crooker (1988) observes that there were several reasons why opium was the primary cash crop in the Hmong village economy in the north of Thailand. The first reason involved the net incomes generated from opium growing, net incomes that were higher than those from all of the other traditional cash crops. Second, opium was more transportable than other crops, including potential new crops. And, finally, it was a familiar, hardy crop, less perishable than most others and readily stored because of its low bulk and weight. Crooker also suggests that the most important reason for favouring the production of opium was that it required little or no capital investment. A combination of all of these reasons together saw Crooker conclude that opium was the main choice of the Hmong farmers. In addition, the geographical setting was a very significant factor. The Hmong villages were located at an elevation of between 700 and

1500 metres, suitable for growing opium poppy which is generally grown between 1000 and 1500 metres (Crooker 1988).

Later, however, the production system in Pakluay changed, mainly due to State policy on drug control. Prior to the mid-1950s, opium plantations and trade were legal in Thailand. In Chom Thong district, opium parlours, usually owned by locals, were frequently found at that time. After 1959, however, opium became illegal, with opium trading now being seen as a threat to national and international security. Since then, the Hmong and other growers have been considered a threat to the nation. The government started to regard the Hmong and other *chao khao* as problems in a way it had never done before (Renard 1994). In an attempt to stop the opium production, government policies, measures and agencies were set up to deal with the Hmong and other opium growers. This set the tone for international crop replacement aid. The first project, implemented by the U.N. Fund for Drug Abuse Control, commenced in northern Thailand in 1973. Later, the Highland Agricultural Marketing and Production Project (HAMP) was introduced into the north of Thailand where Pakluay village was set to be, among the others, a targeted site of the project. This project was implemented in Pakluay village between 1980 and 1984. Since 1984, another project, the Thai-Norwegian Church Aid Highland Development Project (TN-HDP) has continued to work with the Hmong farmers of Pakluay village. By 1985, some opium crops were being destroyed in Pakluay. The government requested villagers to replace their poppy farms with cash crops, such as fruit trees, flowers and cabbage, and, within three years, opium cultivation had ceased almost completely. Only small plots where people cultivated poppy for their own use remained. The newly introduced cash crops were being promoted and experimented by that time. It seemed that cabbage realised an income comparable to that from opium, but it required large plots of farm land. To grow cabbage on a large scale required the use of pesticides and new watering schemes. In addition, stone retaining walls had to be built and gravity sprinkler systems installed in order to secure the sources of water for cropping.

From my observations, at the present time, the Hmong farmers are planting a variety of cash crops, including cabbages, flowers, beetroot, Chinese cabbages, potatoes and fruit trees, such as longan and lychee. Recently, some villagers started to plant coffee, which had been promoted by the Royal Project. Normally, the farmers grow cabbages every

season and plant other commercial cash crops after they finish harvesting these crops. For example, they start to plant cabbages in June and harvest them in early September. After the first round of harvest, some continue to plant cabbages while others may plant potatoes. Cabbages have been, and remain, the main cash crop for every household. Upland rice is not grown in the village because the village is located at an attitude in excess of 1000 metres and thus is not suitable for rice growing. The land in Pakluay that could grow upland rice was taken by the Dhammanaat Foundation who turned their farmlands into reforestation project site since the late 1980s.

In Pakluay, it is common to see Hmong landholders owning one or two plots for cash crops and at least one permanent orchard. But, this family level land use pattern is changing due to the land shortage. Hmong farmers of Pakluay started changing the orchard plots to other cash crops, such as cabbage and flowers. For example, as one key informant explained, his family has two plots of farmland. The size of each plot is approximately 5 – 6 rai. Prior to 1986, his family owned another plot, but it was taken by the reforestation project of Dhammanaat Foundation. Since then his family and other villagers have not been allowed to use that land for growing crops. In order to deal with land scarcity, this farmer cut down lychee trees in his farmland which he wanted to use for growing cabbage. This was partly because lychee plantations no longer produce a good return in terms of income. Because the quality and quantity of the products are poor, they cannot be sold on the local market. And, he needs more land for short-term income producing crops such as cabbages.

Farmland in Pakluay village is de facto owned by families, with individual households managing farm plots as private property. In Pakluay, the household is the unit of decision-making regarding many aspects of farmland utilisation. But, in the final analysis, the use of farmland has to follow the regulations set by the forest officials. For example, villagers are not allowed to use fire for clearing their farmlands and chemical application to farm plots is restricted. Selling land to outsiders is entirely prohibited. At the present time, Pakluay has no form of common farmland management. Common lands have been found in residential areas. There is an agreement in place between the forest officials and the villagers regarding common land in the village. These lands will provide housing areas for new families who want to move out from their parents' homes.

Because the Hmong village is located within the State-claimed upper watershed forest areas at altitude between 1300 and 1500 metres, it is relatively isolated from infrastructure development policies. The road to the village is very sloping and the condition of the non-asphalt road is very poor. The village is only 24 km from Chom Thong district, but it is a two hour drive. Notwithstanding, the villagers have to use this route for transporting their crop products to the market. In addition, the electric grid system is not linked to the village. Pakluay villagers receive no electricity services from the Thai government. Nearly every household has had to install a solar cell system in order to generate electric power for their electronic devices such as TVs and lights. Although the solar cell systems were supported in part by the government, the villagers have had to invest in power storage so that they can use power during the night. The village headman lamented that this was because they are a Hmong hill tribe and bemoaned the fact that government policy treated the Hmong differently from their lowland Thai counterparts in terms of opportunities for development. I observed a government primary school in the village where parents could send their children to receive basic education. However, the claim about the absence of development by the village headman and Hmong farmers in Pakluay may refer to other aspects of development besides education.

In the view of the local officials the issue of unequal development has nothing to do with ethnic bias. The officials explained that Pakluay is located in a conservation forest – Ob Luang National Park – so, by law, development in this village has to be limited to certain level in order to conserve natural forests and biodiversity. The narrative of subsistence economy plays its role in the explanation provided by the officials, who seek to control and limit the growth of the village in the forest areas. Their major concern was that improvement of the road condition and the introduction of electricity would facilitate increased demands for resource utilisation. As such, development of villages in the forest areas had to be limited.

The explanation of local officials regarding the possible impacts of highland development on biodiversity conservation does not surprise me. As a former social activist who advocated for the Community Forest Bill, I heard this kind of narrative very often. In several occasions during the debate over the Bill, forest officials and environmentalists expressed their concerns that biodiversity and forest resources would

surely be destroyed if the forest communities, particularly highland communities were given access to full development. This leads to the proposal to limit the degree of development for local communities inhabiting in watershed forests.

Pakluay as a Contested Landscape

In every respect, Pakluay is a contested terrain. For decades, the peoples and landscape of Pakluay have been subjects of development and conservation paradigms that have attempted to transform peoples' lives and landscapes to fit their beliefs, assumptions and knowledge regarding highland development. For policy planners, Pakluay represented a threat to national security. The production of opium was seen as a threat to be outlawed and replaced by a lawful production system. Traditional shifting cultivation was considered to be a major contributor to forest degradation in the highlands. In more recent times, commercial cash crop production has been criticised by conservationists as an environment destroying activity¹⁰. This section aims to briefly present the historical background of the programs and projects which have sought to change the lives and landscape in Pakluay village. Providing historical information will help the reader to understand contemporary resource conflicts in this area.

The first attempts to transform the Hmong farmers of Pakluay began in the 1980s. As discussed in part in the previous section, the Thai government, together with international development organisations, attempted to transform the Hmong farmers from opium growers into legal, highland farmers. The opium replacement projects, HAMP and TN-HDP, were introduced and implemented in Pakluay between 1980 and 1984. The main objective of these projects was to replace opium plantations with other crops. In this way, many cash crops were introduced into the village. Hmong highland farmers were encouraged to transform their cropping system from opium production to introduced cash cropping. Five years after the projects commenced, the opium plantations in Pakluay had been replaced by vegetable production and orchards.

The Hmong of Pakluay adapted to the new system of cash crop production within five years of the initial promotion of the development project, the reasons being that the new

¹⁰ It is ironic that cabbages were promoted by the government as a substitute for opium.

pattern of cropping was recognised by state officials and the introduced crops were marketable. However, with time, the Hmong farmers required larger areas of land for growing introduced cash crops in order to secure the desired level of family income. In addition, the production of cash crops required more inputs, such as chemical fertilisers and pesticides, and water for maintaining vegetable and fruit tree production. This led to conflict between the highland farmers, the conservationists and the lowland farmers, who were afraid that cash crop production would lead to the destruction of resources in watershed forests and cause shortages of water for people downstream.

The conservationist movement for relocating the Hmong farmers of Pakluay out of the watershed forests commenced in 1985. In 1985, the northern Thai farmers had faced a serious drought. In Chom Thong district, it was reported that the problem of water shortage was particularly serious. Farmers in the lowland lacked water for cropping and household consumption. After a discussion among villagers, a group of lowland farmers agreed to undertake a survey of the watershed forests. They assumed that the drying up of the water in the river was linked to the destruction of forestland in the upper watershed. Led by a Buddhist monk named Phra Phongsak, a group of lowland farmers walked up the river and discovered that the forest at the top of the river had been cleared to plant upland rice and cabbages by the Hmong farmers of Pakluay. Subsequently, a group of lowland farmers asked the Hmong to stop planting crops in areas they claimed to be the upper watershed forest of Maesoi. In 1986, the lowland farmers, supported by Phra Phongsak and the Dhammanaat Foundation, erected a 14 kilometre barbed wire fence to separate the Hmong village on the one side from the upper watershed forest on the other. Somewhat remarkably, the fence was painted the same colour as the Thai national flag. After the establishment of the fence, the Hmong farmers stopped planting rice in the watershed forest area. Then, the Dhammanaat Foundation initiated a number of projects related to reforestation into the area, some of which were supported by foreign companies and international development agencies. During the dry season, the villagers in the lowland were employed as guards to monitor forest fires. Planting trees and preventing forest fires were the main activities of a group of conservationists from the lowland.

The efforts of the lowland farmers and conservationists in Chom Thong from the mid-1980s onward led to the restriction of land utilisation in Pakluay village. The villagers

were no longer allowed to use the farmland in the Mae Soi watershed forests. A group of lowland farmers and conservationists claimed that these areas were upper watersheds of the Maesoi, Mae Tim and Mae Pok rivers. These rivers, which flow into the Maesoi River, have been feeding lowland farmers for decades. Basically, the Hmong farmers had been planting cabbages and upland rice in the Maesoi watershed forest, an area in which villagers should only have grown upland rice according to the opponents of the Hmong. But, finally they even had to stop growing rice when the lands were taken away by the conservationists who turned them into reforestation sites.

The conflict between the Hmong farmers of Pakluay and the group of lowland farmers and conservationists was re-ignited when the Prime Minister Chavalit Yongchaiyuth's Cabinet issued the resolution in April 1997. The Cabinet resolution temporarily allowed the forest communities to stay in the conservation zones. As well, it ordered the official processes to prove if the farmers had been living in the forest areas prior to the State demarcation. The resolution disappointed the network of conservationists in Chom Thong, who declared that the Cabinet resolution would lead to forest encroachment in protected areas. They accordingly protested for the cancellation of the Cabinet resolution. One villager recalled that, at the time, because many roads were blocked by a group of conservationists protesting the government, farmers of Pakluay and other highlanders in Chom Thong were prevented from travel to the city for weeks.

From the Hmong farmers' viewpoint, the conflict between the conservationists in the lowland and the Hmong ethnic people has no real relevance to environmental disaster. It was mainly rooted in nationality and ethnic bias. "They (lowlanders) saw us as not being Thai, or holders of any kind of land rights", explained the village headman. The same villager indicated the barbed-wire fence built by Phra Phongsak and his supporters, every single cement pole of which was painted the same colour as the Thailand national flag. "The people who stayed in the other side of the fence are identified as Thai, but we are not", the village headman commented. From the highlander's perspective, the lowland farmers saw them not as Thais as they were not Buddhist. Also, the Hmong engaged in shifting cultivation and cabbage plantation, which the lowlanders deemed different from their agricultural practices, which they identified as "Thai" agriculture.

The struggle over resources and land use in Pakluay became even more complicated when the forest areas in which the village was located were turned into a national park. In 1991, the RFD declared the National Reserve Forest in Chom Thong to be Ob Luang National Park. The official declaration, which lacked prior community and stakeholder consultation, culminated in a situation in which some local communities were left inside the national park boundary. Even though their village had been officially registered, the utilization of land use and resources by the villagers of Pakluay had been restricted by the National Park Law, which saw use of the land and resources become illegal. This additional complication led to confrontation between the local villagers and the national park officers. Some villagers were arrested by the frontline forest rangers, who accused them of being forest encroachers.

By now the status of Pakluay village was really ambiguous. It had been registered as a village by the Minister of Interior since 1996, but at the same time, it was located inside a national park and watershed area. Park law played a crucial role in the control and regulation of resource utilisation within the village. In line with the National Park Act, individual or private land holding in protected areas is entirely prohibited. In addition, the villagers had no land documents. Thus villagers of Pakluay continued to face an uncertain situation. In the next section, I examine the ways in which the Hmong farmers attempted to adapt the available conservation discourses and actions to their village practices. Those strategic actions were intended for use as legitimating tools claiming traditional rights to lands and resources.

Becoming A Conservation Community

Confronted by problems of settlement and land insecurity imposed by the conservationists, the Hmong farmers of Pakluay strategically adapted the available conservation activities for use in village. “Hmong are forest conservationists”, one Hmong villager said. This section aims to provide three examples of environmentalist strategies adopted by the Hmong of Pakluay: (a) mapping of traditional land use, (b) *buad paa*, (forest trees ordination), and (c) participatory land use planning. These narrative strategies were employed by the Hmong farmers of Pakluay in order to respond to the conservationist claim by denying that they were forest destroyers.

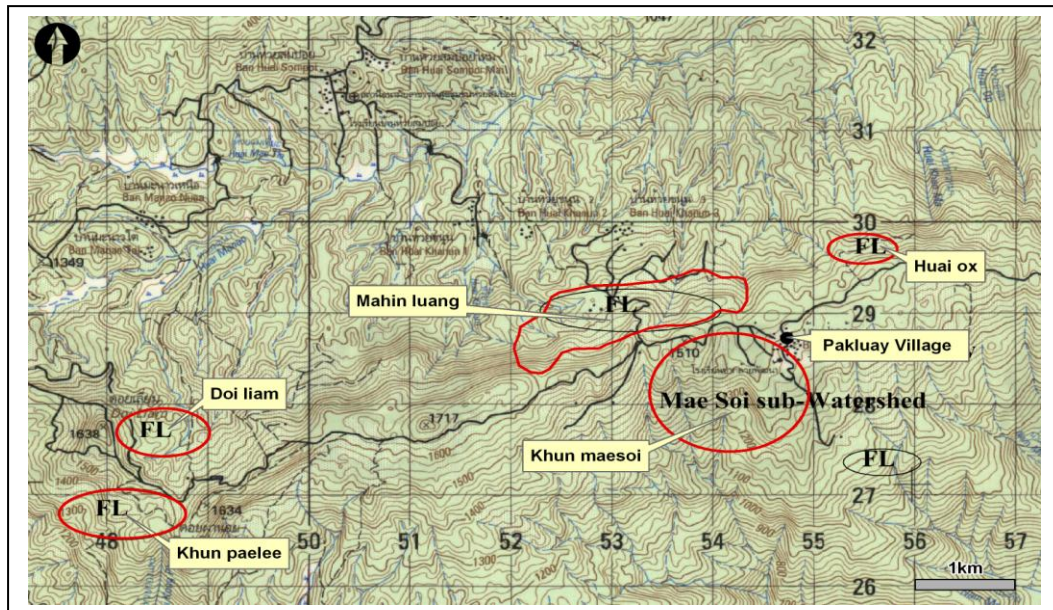
Mapping of traditional land use

Amid the serious resource conflict and contestation, the Hmong farmers in Pakluay employed a sketch mapping technique to communicate and represent their interests and territory. This sketch map told the story of the history of land use and the conflict that occurred in the past. The community resources and land use sketch map served the critical function of claiming and protecting community/traditional lands rights. The simple sketch map was intended for use as a political device to bargain with, to inform the external powers who wanted to take the land away from villagers. The community land use map played a crucial role in facilitating and guiding the distant powers to understand and see the village geographical setting and the relationship that obtained between the Hmong farmers and the land.

An official attempt to map land use in Pakluay started in 1990. Around that time, the Chom Thong district officers, together with other related agencies, came to survey land use within Pakluay village. This was partly the result of the Cabinet resolution taken earlier in 1989 which demanded intensive land use control. The survey team revealed that the Hmong farmers mainly used the forest land in two areas, Mahin luang and Doi liam (as shown in Figure 3¹¹). They also reported that approximately 27 families (115 people) used the land in Khun paelee area which was considered to be the upper watershed of Maesoi River. Two years later, an agreement on land use between the District and the villagers was reached and signed by the concerned parties. According to the agreement, the Hmong farmers were asked not to expand their farming land beyond the agreed boundary. The district officers tended to overemphasize that this applied to existing or actual farm plots, ignoring fallow land.

¹¹ The boundary of the agricultural plots (FL) has been delineated by the researcher, based on approximate boundaries as identified by local villagers.

Figure 3: Map of Pakluay Village and the location of areas with agricultural plots (FL), overlaid on a 1:50,000 topographic map.



In the late 1990s, an attempt was made to produce a community land use sketch map of Pakluay. This “counter-mapping” (Peluso 1995) was intended for use as a tool to defend and reclaim the traditional land use that had been disrupted by conservation strategies employed by the Dhammanat Foundation. The process of counter mapping was led and facilitated by the Northern Development Foundation. Other scholars and local NGOs joined in the process to support community mobilization. In the counter sketch map, more details were added. Whereas the earlier official map had only shown the actual farmlands, the new version of the community sketch map included the “old” cropping plots, which had been turned into reforestation sites regulated by the network of conservationists. It attempted to show both “actual” and “old” farm plots. Five areas of the villagers’ cultivated lands were identified including Mahin luang, Paelee, Kew-omting, Huai ox, and Khun maesoi. This later sketch map unfortunately did not identify the exact boundary of each plot. In addition, the map attempted to illustrate where the Hmong farmers had lost farmlands due to the implementation of conservation. The 14-kilometres line of barbed wired was highlighted using red colour. Interestingly, the area of *paa chum chon* (community forest), which was located close to the village, was included in the community land use sketch map. I found out later that that community forest was part of the forest area managed by villagers of Huai Kanoon, a neighbouring

Karen village next to Pakluay. The term “*paa chum chon*” was coined by community supporters, who organised the production of the community land use counter map. The term was never used by the villagers themselves (village headman, interviewed 12 January 2010). In sum, the counter map was produced to represent three different types of community land use including the residential area, actual and old farming lands. Also, it included the forest areas ostensibly managed and protected by the villagers¹².

Harris and Hazen (2006), argue for the “power of maps”, claiming that maps are neither neutral nor unproblematic with respect to representation, positionality, and partiality of knowledge. In Pakluay, the community land use map was used as a communicative tool informing and educating outsiders who visited the village. The colourful black-board size map was put on the wall in the village information centre. This strategic representation aimed to help the viewers to understand land use and the resources regulating system as they pertained to the Hmong community. Coupled with the map, the centre displayed a collection of exhibits relevant to various community activities, such as environmental protection and conservation, tree planting, and tree ordination (*buad paa*). These exhibitions informed the viewers about the relationship between the Hmong farmers and their forest environment. During the intense conflict that erupted over the water issue between the lowland farmers and the villagers of Pakluay in the late 1990s, the map representation played a crucial role in asserting the villagers’ claim to the land.

Buad paa (forest trees ordination)

The Hmong farmers of Pakluay conducted tree ordination ceremonies (*buad paa*). Although some claimed it was a Buddhism-inspired ritual, the non-Buddhist villagers of Pakluay practiced it in their community. The ritual, which was conducted four times between 1996 and 1997, covered approximately 500 rai of forest (village headman, interviewed 2 March 2010). The participants who attended the ritual varied in numbers and ethnicity. Most importantly, the District Head of Chom Thong joined in the ritual with the villagers of Pakluay. In Thai society, this ritual is perceived as demonstrating the people’s capacity to manage the forest resources and contest negative stereotypical

¹² Unfortunately I was unable to obtain a copy of the counter map.

perceptions of the hill tribe people and the forest dependent communities. The practice of *buad paa* deliberately aimed to rebuild the Hmong stereotype of forest destroyers in the new image of environmentally responsible people.

Historically, forest ordination, as a national event designed to celebrate the 50th anniversary of His Majesty King Bhumibol's accession to the throne, was implemented between 1997 and 1998 (*Bangkok Post* 23 February 1997). It was collaboratively conducted among the Thai citizens as a mark of respect for their beloved King. The organizing committee came from various backgrounds ranging from community representatives, monks, public intellectuals, media, politicians and NGOs. The project, which aimed to ordain 50 million trees, was implemented to protect and maintain the natural forests. It took a form of a socio-political commitment of concerned people to forest conservation. The local people, the key actors, were expected to implement and maintain the project. Forest ordinations equated with tree and forest protection by the local people. Strategically and geographically the project of forest ordination was conducted in nine mountainous provinces of northern Thailand, namely Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai, Lamphun, Lampang, Phayao, Nan, Phrae, Tak, and Mae Hong Son. It was in these provinces that many local people faced forest land disputes as approximately 34 million rai out of a 64 million rai total were classed as high and forest lands. The project was coordinated by the Northern Development Foundation (NDF).

Isager and Ivarsson (2002) note that tree ordination is generally part of the process they call "counter – territorialisation". Building on Vandergeest and Peluso's concept of territorialisation, they argue that the community enactment of the tree ordination ceremony was a tool to counter the territorialisation of the Thai state by reasserting local identities and environmental responsibilities. The political aspiration of this action was to contest the public depiction of the hill tribe peoples as "enemies of the nation" (Isager and Ivarsson 2002).

The Hmong farmers in Pakluay used the forest ordination ceremony as a tool to legitimize their presence in the claimed conservation forests. As already stated, the Hmong farmers were accused of being "forest destroyers" by the conservationists. They were to be evicted from their forest homes on the basis of the conservationists' claims regarding their utilization of pesticides that polluted the rivers. On the one hand, the

political aspiration to deploy *buad paa* aimed to delegitimize the claims made by the conservationists. The farmers wanted to rebuild a new image, to portray themselves as an environmentally responsible community and forest conservationists. On the other hand, the ceremony was a symbolic means of asserting their right to be able to live in their present location. Thus, forest ordination became an important tool for the Hmong villagers to use in their struggle to claim land and security of settlement. In this case it could be said that ritual can be seen as a visual narrative.

Participatory land use planning

Between 2004 and 2008, the so called people's participatory approach to protected areas management was introduced in Pakluay and nine other national parks as well as in Thailand's wildlife sanctuaries. The implementation of the participatory approach to protected areas planning gained financial support from DANIDA through the Joint Management of Protected Areas (JoMPA) project. Overall, the project aimed to strengthen the participation of various stakeholders in biodiversity conservation and livelihoods improvement. In other words, the achievement of conservation and development was deemed the ultimate goal of the project. In Pakluay in particular, the main objective of the project's implementation was to resolve the long history of resource and land use conflict between the Hmong farmers, the lowland farmers, the conservationists and the forest officers. The two main activities at village level were 1) land use planning and 2) the establishment of local resource institutions.

As regards land use planning, the project employed high technology map making, including 1:4000 aerial photos and GPS to produce the fixed community land use map. The villagers were consulted during the process but had limited power to negotiate with distant stakeholders. For example, the de facto land owners were asked to participate in the process of land use demarcation, to inform and guide the map producing team regarding the boundaries of their cropping lands. Unfortunately, it is likely that cropping lands that had no trees in the fields were considered by the farmers to be cropping land whereas the fallow lands were ignored by the distant stakeholders.

At the outset, the village rules and regulations regarding forest resource control were set up relatively simply. They only covered three main themes: 1) resource utilization in the forests; 2) forest fire control; and 3) agricultural lands expansion. Regarding resource utilization, timber cutting and wildlife hunting in protected forests was prohibited. The collection of products such as fuel wood and medicinal plants for domestic consumption was possible but timber cutting for house construction had first to gain the approval of the forest committee prior to the felling. The villagers were asked to be vigilant and prevent forest fires. As well, the villagers were responsible for constructing a fire line every dry season. Lastly, the expansion of farmlands was not allowed. Since 2004, however, the village rules and regulations regarding resource use have been modified and adjusted, a process facilitated by the Joint Management of Projected Areas project. Although the content of the village regulations differed little from the earlier version, the new village rules seemed more focused upon conservation, with emphasis on forest resource protection rather than on the promotion of sustainable resource utilization by local communities. For example, the first rule indicated that timber cutting for trading purposes was prohibited. Whosoever broke the rule would be fined 5000 baht per tree.

In addition, a forest committee was established within the village. It comprised 15 members, who had gained the support of fellow villagers at the village meeting. The forest committee, which was formally recognised by the Maesoi Tambol Administrative Organization and the head of national park, was expected to monitor and inspect community members' resource usage.

At the present time, local institutions are playing a key role in controlling and monitoring the local utilization of resources. Although the forest committee has been granted limited authority by forest officers, it actively polices the resource utilization of fellow villagers. Like forest officers, the forest committee in Pakluay monitor if any villagers are expanding their farmlands into the forest areas, cutting down trees without having first gained approval from the committee, and/or lighting forest fires. The most serious problem within the village, one that causes tension, is forest encroachment. According to the village rules on resource management, the villagers in Pakluay are allowed to farm their crops within plots under existing cultivation, but utilization of fallow land was prohibited. Notwithstanding, some villagers still claim the fallow land

as their farmlands. In 2006, one Hmong farmer felled trees on fallow land claiming he wanted to use the land for cropping. The committee disagreed with him and warned him to stop cropping in that area. The issue was brought for discussion at a village meeting but could not be solved, the main reason being the shortage of land for cropping. Unable to solve the dispute, the committee proposed informing the forest officers. This deterred the villager who agreed to cease felling the trees on fallow land. The letter to the park officer was never sent.

Beyond the village territory, the Hmong farmers of Pakluay village also joined the watershed network. The Maetia-Maetae watershed scale network was established in Chom Thong in 2004 as a platform from which concerned stakeholders, particularly local communities whose livelihoods heavily depended on rivers and forests, could share and exchange knowledge. Members of the network included both lowland farmers and highlanders. One of the main duties of the watershed network was to solve land and resources conflict. In December 2007, for example, it hosted a meeting in the district office. Relevant stakeholders were invited to attend. The stakeholders could be categorized into three groups: 1) local community representatives; 2) key stakeholders at district level such as the district head, TAO, the park officer and the sub-district head; and 3) supporting organizations such as the Dhammanaat Foundation, the Rak Thai Foundation and representatives from the forest department in Bangkok. The aim of this meeting was to achieve mutual agreement among the stakeholders regarding land use zoning and planning at the village level. Villages, who were watershed network members, brought the land use map scale 1:4000 provided by the JoMPA project, to present at the meeting. This land use map had been charted by the park officers, network representatives and villagers through a process of what was termed “participatory land use planning”. Generally, the map showed the settlement boundaries, cropping land locations, and community-managed forest areas. On the right hand side of the map, there was a list of key stakeholders, who were expected to sign as witnesses to the agreed land use plan for the targeted villages. The headman of Pakluay village took the map of his village to the meeting where most of the stakeholders added their signatures to the map, but one signature was missing, that of the Chom Thong district head.

The three conservation strategies employed by the Hmong of Pakluay emphasised forest conservation, and were deployed to communicate to “outsiders” the new image of the Hmong committed to the conservation of resources in the highlands. All of these strategies combined to demonstrate the Pakluay Hmong’s adaptive potential for conflict resolution and tactical compromise. However, they avoided the topic of commercial highland agriculture, a controversial and contentious issue. In the next section I discuss the impact of these strategic actions on the Hmong farmers’ livelihoods.

New Image of Conservationist and Dilemmas

Over past decades, the Hmong have been negatively stereotyped as forest destroyers, making it hard for them to be considered acceptable in the contemporary era of biodiversity conservation. For this reason, the Hmong and other hill tribe groups have increasingly faced both internal and external conflict both with state agencies and with the conservationist network. In a bid to counter the conservationists’ claims, the Hmong farmers of Pakluay adopted conservationist strategies into their way of life and presented themselves as conservationists. This has not only helped them to survive under duress, but has also helped them to live their lives peacefully. As the village headman said: “We feel life is more secure, now that we no longer have to worry about crackdowns and forced eviction” (interviewed 12 January 2010). It seems that their contemporary land use and scale of crop productions have been deemed acceptable by the conservationists. The application of conservationist strategies in the day-by-day lives of the Hmong farmers in Pakluay has helped to secure their settlement and farming in the claimed upper watershed forests. The fear of eviction has gone. Nowadays, the Hmong farmers in Pakluay no longer need to hide their farms from public view as they did in their opium plantation days. In this respect, their new image as environmentalists is really benefiting the Hmong farmers and other highlanders.

However, the success of their new conservationist image has depended upon strategic construction of an environmentally responsible community image, but it deliberately refused to tell the story of shifting cultivation and the Hmong’s commercial agricultural practices. Thus, their land use struggles in the highlands remain on-going.

Historically, the Hmong farmers in Pakluay and elsewhere in Southeast Asia practiced “pioneer shifting cultivation” (Fox et al. 2000; Schmidt-Vogt 2001). Within this practice, a piece of primary forest was cleared, burned and cropped, often intensively, with two crops (maize and opium, for example) in one year. After a few years, the field was abandoned. The village typically packed up and moved to a new site after 8 to 10 years. However, swidden agriculture has been historically viewed as an environmentally destructive form of agriculture by policy makers, conservationists and the general public, who view swidden farmers as “forest eaters” whose unending search for new forests to clear has been a major contributor to forest degradation and deforestation (Fox et al. 2000). In response, many governments have attempted to stop shifting cultivation by implementing community relocation programs intended to convert swidden agriculturists into farmers practicing permanent agriculture.

Prior to 1985, the Hmong farmers of Pakluay practiced pioneer shifting cultivation, for commercial purposes. But, finding it impossible in the new site, they changed their farming system to “rotational shifting cultivation” that is with short cultivation and short fallow periods. Before 2004, the villagers owned two to three plots of farmlands, some of which were left fallow for number of years to allow natural regeneration. During the process of community land uses demarcation led by the JoMPA project, villagers attempted to negotiate with the national park officers and watershed network representatives who came to conduct land use mapping. The Hmong farmers wanted to own the “secondary forests”, to claim them as part of their land use system. Unfortunately, failing to understand the significance of these agricultural systems to the highlanders and highland ecosystems, the forest officers refused to allow the villagers to use the fallow land.

Although the fallow land was excluded, the Hmong farmers of Pakluay, the village committee in particular, agreed upon the land use map. From my observations, their abandoning of pioneer shifting cultivation did not mean that the Hmong farmers intended to disregard the significant role of this production system. Rather, it was a calculated action. The villagers realised that the root cause of the conflict between them and a group of conservationists lay in the latter’s perception of shifting cultivation and its impacts on environment and highland ecosystem. As suggested earlier, the Hmong farmers were historically forced to relocate outside of the watershed forests. Their

traditional practice of shifting cultivation was seen as a major cause of rivers drying and of the water shortages in the lowlands of Chom Thong district. In order to avoid new public attention, the Hmong farmers deliberately concealed the story of shifting cultivation when promoting their new image as an environmentally responsible community.

This new image, however, failed to address the challenges and difficulties facing by the Hmong farmers of Pakluay. Their access to fallow land was still restricted. These lands were now classified as ‘forests’ belonging to national park. In the village, the boundary line between the farmlands and the forests were clearly drawn and fixed. Once the lines were marked by GPS and located on the village land use map, the cement poles were driven in to mark the boundary line. The boundary was then fixed. Any expanding of the cropping areas beyond the boundary line signified forest encroachment. Villagers called these lands fallow lands (*rai lhao* in Thai language). After 2004, with the implementation of the JoMPA project, the lands were separated from part of the villagers’ farmland. These farmlands, which had been left for some years for regeneration purposes, were now seen as secondary forests in the eyes of outsiders, particularly the forest officers. Since then, the villagers have not been allowed to use these lands. One Hmong villager said pointing to the forests connected to his farmland: “That was our cropping land, we can’t use it now” (interviewed 28 February 2010).

Faced with farmland shortage, the Hmong farmers of Pakluay then sought to rent land from neighbouring villages and lowland farmers in Chom Thong on a seasonal basis. One Hmong villager, for example, went to rent land for growing rice from lowland farmers in Hangdong. This family used to own 3 plots of farmland in Pakluay but one plot of approximately 6 rai was taken by the Dhammanaat Foundation under the reforestation project. Now, he only owned enough land to grow cabbages and cut flowers for his family income. But, his family wanted more land for growing rice for household consumption. So, in 2009, they sought to rent 5 rai in the lowland, approximately 25 kilometres from his village (interviewed 27 February 2010).

Renting farmland from outside the village helped the Hmong farmers to some extent to cope with the problem of land shortage, but, this alternative option sets some adverse conditions for the villagers. The land owners in the lowlands tended only to rent their

less fertile land to the villagers. They kept the good and fertile land for their own use. Then again, not every family could take advantage of this alternative option. Only Hmong farmers who owned a private pick up vehicle could avail themselves of it. The transportation of crop products to their village located up hill coupled with poor road conditions was costly. So those Hmong villagers who had no pick up could not afford to rent the land outside of the village to grow crops.

Conclusion

The Hmong farmers of Pakluay village were targeted of development and relocation. In the mid-1980s, they were promoted by international development aid agencies and Thai government to change from illegal opium growers and shifting cultivators to cash cropping. The cash crops such as cabbage, flowers and fruit trees were experimented with and promoted in the village. Their cash cropping was later were seen as an environmentally destructive practice by lowland farmers and conservationists. The Hmong farmers and their current agricultural practices were blamed as a major cause of rivers drying up and river pollution. In the late 1980s, the conservationists and lowland farmers forced them to stop planting cash crops in upper watershed forests and also proposed that the State should relocate these farmers out of the watershed forests. The relocation plan was prepared and approved in principle by the Cabinet, but the relocation project was not implemented for technical and financial reasons. However, the lives of the Hmong in Pakluay and their utilisation of land and resources in watershed areas have been restricted since then. Struggling with settlement security, the Hmong farmers of Pakluay learned to adopt available narratives and conservation strategies to recast themselves as conservationists. These strategies included traditional land use mapping, *buad paa*, and participatory land use planning. Although those adopted narratives helped to justify and legitimize the living of Hmong in upper watershed forests, it effectively silenced the commercial viability of agricultural production in the highlands.

Chapter 11

Conclusion: Storytelling and the Politics of Forestry Decentralisation

“What matters is not so much the stories you tell as the extent to which the stories you tell resonate with the stories your audience already knows”. (Polletta 2008 p.30)

Introduction

In the previous chapters, I presented various narratives about people and the forests in the context of the community forestry movement in Thailand. This thesis argues that the advocacy for community forestry and storytelling about people, forests and the relationships between them cannot be considered separately. As Chapters 5 to 8 show, social actors produced various narratives about the relationships between local lives, forest resource dependence and environmental degradation. Each narrative was employed to justify, legitimize and position different claims about people and the forest relationships in the national debate to pass the Community Forest Bill since the early 1990s. Chapters 9 and 10 show some of the ways in which local people, or the “subjects of narratives”, told their stories. The main conclusion derived from these Chapters is that the subjects of the narratives were themselves active storytellers. Members of forest communities, where they were facing struggles over their rights to resources, deliberately produced and adopted storytelling as a political device to renegotiate and reclaim their rights to forest resources. In every case, a common feature of the narratives was to legitimise the political claims made by the various groups of political actors.

Four main points will be discussed in this chapter in addition to the final concluding section. First, I briefly revisit the people and forest narratives, their narrators, narrative strategies and the political aspirations that drove the production of the storylines. This first section aims to demonstrate that the storylines were constructed in response to the beliefs, assumptions and knowledge of the various social actors, and were told either consciously or unconsciously to reflect these beliefs, assumptions and knowledge about people and forest relationships. Then, I show how the material relationships between the

people and the forests came to be affected by the narratives. Following this, discussion turns to the ways in which actors, particularly the “narrative victims”, employed available storylines to balance dialogue on conservation. After that, it highlights the nature of the people and forests narratives which in many cases were omitted from the storytelling. This was not simply because the narrators could not provide evidence or information: it is part of the narrative strategies that they used to shift the debate or course of action to reflect the selective nature of the narratives. In the conclusion, policy implications and some considerations for future research are briefly discussed.

This chapter aims to discuss the move from a narrative legitimacy perspective to the interplay between policy narratives and material impacts. The narratives not only helped to legitimate the political claims of the political actors in the national debates over people and forests, but contributed to creating and shaping the ways in which the local people - the subjects of the narratives - interacted with and maintained their right to use and access their natural environment. I argue that people and forest narratives are multiple and diverse: the various narratives have played their roles in assigning meaning to people, forests and the relationships between them. In addition, this chapter discusses the storylines about people and forests constructed by local people who were the subjects of the policy narratives. The “victims” of the narratives have actively produced storylines and adopted the available narratives in order to counter the dominant explanations about people and forest relationships. The local narratives, to some degree, have contributed to the national narrative about forest livelihoods, even to the development of the concept of community forestry, as in the case of Huai Kaew.

Multiple Narratives and Multiple Meaning about People and Forest Relationships

The preceding chapters show that there are four main narratives at the macro or national level about people and the forests. The variations in the storylines forest reflect the variation of assumptions, beliefs and knowledge regarding the interaction between humans and nature as well as the political agendas of the political actors who were involved in the national debate over the people and forests issue. Each group was likely to tell stories to make sense of their claims. Each storytelling was simultaneously imbued with the particular meaning assigned by the various social actors.

The production of narrative is about the creation of meaning through the use of language. The political actors involved in the national debate on the Community Forest Bill actively constructed their stories to assign meaning to the local people, forests and their relationship as subjects of controversial debate. The local people, particularly the farmers in the forests and their agricultural practices, were assigned multiple meanings, both positive and negative. They were variously labelled “forest encroachers”, “forest dependent communities”, “traditional communities” and “shifting cultivators”, terms which contained different meanings but each referred to local people whose livelihoods depended heavily upon forest resources.

The role of language in politics has been observed by scholars including Fischer (2003), who argues that language is a critical aspect of a political situation. Through language, political phenomena are interpretively fitted into narrative accounts that supply them with social meaning acceptable to particular audiences and their ideologies (Fischer 2003). Fischer insists that what people experience in political events is the language, not the events themselves. The language portrays the meaning of the events.

It is worth stressing here that language has played a vital role in the creation of narrative meaning. In the context of the uncertainty surrounding the policy debate about people and the forests, policy actors deliberately employed terms that aimed to persuade the public and policy makers to view the people, forests and the relationships between them in ways they specifically wanted. In other words, the narrators tended to employ terms with which their audiences were already familiar. For example, conservationists were likely to construct their stories based upon terms such as “shifting cultivation” (*rai lu’an loy*) and “forest encroachers” (*pu-bukruk paa*)¹³. This is partly because these terms have long been familiar to Thais because the education system in Thailand has portrayed shifting cultivation as a main cause of deforestation. Because these terms have very negative connotations in Thailand, their use in the narratives swayed particular audiences to form equally negative perceptions of the local people, to accept the stories without question. The term “shifting cultivation”¹⁴ has been stigmatized and widely

¹³ *Pu-bukruk paa* literally means people who intrude into the forest area

¹⁴ The recent counter-narrative use of “*rai mun wian*”, or rotational farming, is used to avoid this pejorative association. Shifting cultivation can have more neutral connotations in English in which the really negative term is “slash and burn” agriculture.

recognized in Thai society, particularly among urban-based people, as a negative activity threatening natural forest resources.

The multiple views about the relationships between humans and nature underpinned the various policy proposals regarding people in the forests. For example, the watershed crisis narratives tended to ground their storytelling in the notion of carrying capacity and wilderness, which depicted humans as environment destroying agents. The conservationists argued that people and forests cannot co-exist. In their view the local people - the poor and greedy – set out to exploit the region’s natural resources in order to fulfil to their short term economic needs, with little regard for environmental protection. They thus advocated the separation of the local people from the natural ecosystems, particularly from the conservation forests, which were treated as sensitive ecological zones. In addition, they proposed a human-free protected area approach, which favoured the role of State officials in protecting and managing natural forest resources. The nature-oriented advocates agreed with the notion of people’s participation in managing and, especially, restoring degraded forests through reforestation, but they strongly opposed the idea of promoting the legal recognition of community rights to forest resources.

The “forests as the supermarkets of the poor” storytelling tended to present the positive relationships between the rural poor and the natural resources in local landscapes. In this view, local livelihoods and local resources were interdependent. The rural villagers traditionally gained benefit from the forests adjacent to the villages so they have been protecting those resources for their livelihoods. The campaigners proposed the empowerment of the rural people to protect and manage forest resources in particular sites. The notion of “community empowerment” thus played a major role in the “forests as supermarkets of the poor” narrative.

Unarguably, the multiple narratives about people and the forests served multiple political agendas vis-à-vis people, their aspirations and their interaction with the forests. In effects, the creation of narratives aimed to mobilize political support for particular action-taking and to immobilize the political opposition (Fischer 2003). When the forest officials wanted to promote village plantations in order to recover degraded forests, they resorted to storytelling of the wood and fuel wood crisis. This kind of story not only justified the implementation of officials’ reforestation projects on the ground, but

attracted technical and financial support from like-minded international aid agencies. In addition, by portraying the wood shortages and the resource crisis as sources of social and political insecurity, the forest officials gained the political support of the Thai army who were keen to combat all “enemies” including poverty and environmental crises considered threatening to the national security. On the other hand, the proponents of the rights-based approach simultaneously produced community rights to forest narratives to downplay and delegitimize the State’s centralization approach. The community rights narrative thus played its role in supporting the political campaign for forestry decentralisation and community-based natural resource management.

The narratives about people and forests were products of interaction among various stakeholders and social actors, whose roles were varied and tended to overlap. They could not simply be grouped into fixed social categories such as NGOs, academics, officials or policy makers. In truth, it was hard to generalise about which organizations these social actors represented. For example, political actors involved in the production of the watershed crisis or the “dark green” conservationist narratives came from various backgrounds, either as individuals or organizations. Among them were scholars from the Forestry Faculty of Kasetsart University, NGO workers such as the Dhammaanat Foundation, forest officials and community representatives. These social actors connected with each other via their shared assumptions, beliefs and ideologies regarding humans and nature. In sum, storytelling is an important aspect of a political debate involving conflict. By telling stories, political actors assigned meaning to the people and their relationships with the forest environment, making it the subject of political debate. The multiple meanings allocated to the people and the forest relationships reflected the multiple views, assumptions and ideologies the involved social actors. In effect, these multiple meanings served the various views and political agendas. In the next section I will discuss the side effects of these multiple meanings and their ramifications for the forest communities.

Local Narratives and Material Effects

In the previous section I discussed the multiple meanings that the social actors allocated to the people and their interaction with the forest environment through their policy narratives. In this section, I will discuss some of the ways in which local lives and

landscapes have been shaped, conditioned and restricted by storytelling. I argue that narratives can shape “reality”; or, in other words, they can have material consequences. As this section will show, the relationships between people and forests have been partly shaped by how the local people attempted to represent themselves through their storytelling in response to the policy narratives at the national level. The discussion in this section is informed by my two research case studies in Huai Kaew and Pakluay villages.

In contexts wherein resource contestation between outsiders and local people occurred (as in the case of Huai Kaew presented in Chapter 9 and Pakluay in Chapter 10), local villagers tended to resort to storytelling. They used stories as communicative tools to inform the public of the significance of forest resources to local livelihoods. They repeatedly claimed that the forests and forest products contributed to improving local livelihoods, and that they were heavily dependent upon these resources, both for domestic use and economic purposes. Stories about local livelihoods and forests not only informed the public about the ways in which local people interacted with forests, but also helped local people claim back resources from the State and outside powers, who sought to exploit and gain benefit from the State forests.

Not surprisingly, the local narratives tended to portray the local communities as resource guardians with the capacity to maintain and protect local resources from any destructive activities. As discussed in Chapters 6 and 9, the proponents claimed that, because local communities had traditional knowledge regarding forest use, they knew how to use resources sustainably. In addition, the narrative informed the audiences that local institutions such as traditional ecological knowledge, local organizations and village resource regulations played their roles in maintaining and protecting forest resources effectively. This narrative strategy aimed to build public trust and to give policy makers confidence in local communities and institutions as forest guardians.

The local narratives about people and forests in some ways contributed to the community forestry movement that sought to empower local communities to own and manage local resources. The forest land conflict in Huai Kaew triggered the people’s movement that urged the forest officials to transfer resource use rights to the local people. The story of how the local people protected forest resources from exploitation by land investors in Huai Kaew was repeatedly told to reconfirm the possibility of a

community-based approach to forest resource management. The national claim about forests for livelihoods partly originated from and was linked to the local claim.

However, there was a gap between the local narratives and the reality. What was claimed about local institutions in the narratives was not necessarily the reality in the villages. So, the proponents were required to develop the necessary institutions and enforce them in order to prove that the local community had the capacity to manage forest resources more effectively than the State and private property regimes. This action contributed to compromising the ways in which local villagers accessed and used resources in the forests. In Huai Kaew, the regulations concerning resource use were only introduced when the RFD declared a community forest in late 1989. Prior to this time, villagers had almost free access to the use of resources including timber in the forest even though the forest lands were supposed to be regulated under the National Reserved Forest Law, because law enforcement was far from implemented effectively at the forest site level. After the community forest was introduced, however, resource utilization within the village was adjusted and restricted by the community's own forest regulations. For example, timber cutting was entirely prohibited. The collection of bamboo and bamboo shoots from the forests was also limited and, resource use within the villages was monitored by the community forest committee. It may thus be said that what the forest dependent people actually did, and how they interacted with the forest resources was conditioned by the storytelling about people and the forests that they told themselves.

However, the committee members and villagers whose livelihoods no longer depended upon forest resources tended to tell a different story from those who remained more forest dependent. Rather than telling about forest for income generation and subsistence livelihoods, the committee members and associate villagers were likely to talk about the environmental functions of the forest ecosystems, particularly the role of forests as sources of water for cropping and consumption. This group of villagers favoured conservation narratives that aimed to keep the forests free from direct use by other villagers, who were, in fact, their neighbours.

In Pakluay, the Hmong farmers' lives and agricultural practices were constrained by both the imposed and the adopted conservation narratives. The conservation narrative, which emphasized biodiversity conservation and the ecological function of the highland

ecosystem for environmental services, led to restrictions on local people's resource utilisation in the highlands. By telling the narrative of watershed crisis, the conservationists claimed high moral authority by commanding the Hmong farmers and highland farmers to stop cultivating crops in particular forest areas which were designed upper watershed forests. The use of lands for cash cropping was limited and monitored by the conservationists. The utilisation of many fallow lands was banned by forest officers, who deemed them secondary forests, not cultivated land.

Thus, the interaction between the people and the forests was socially constructed. In claiming this I do not mean that the relationships between the locals' lives and forest resources did not exist on the ground, but rather that the patterns of the relationships between the local people and the forest environment were shaped by a certain policy narrative that had been imposed on their relations. How the local people utilised resources from the forests adjacent to the village was shaped by either particular - or a combination of - narratives about people and the forests.

In sum, it may be suggested that the storylines and material reality were linked. This section has illustrated that the narratives of local livelihoods and conservation created the reality of the ways in which the local people interact with the forest environment. What local villagers do with the forest resources is conditioned and constrained by the storytelling, either imposed by outsiders or adopted by the villagers themselves. Under certain circumstances, however, the adoption of available narratives by local people was a community strategy to deal politically with the uncertainty faced by these people. In the next section, I will discuss the use of storytelling as a political device for balancing the dialogue on controversial subjects such as biodiversity conservation.

“Victim’s” Narratives: Not Always in Competition with the Dominant Narrative

It is widely recognised that narrative is a device that everyone has access to and is apt to use in different contexts and situations (De Groot and Zwaal 2007). In many cases, marginalised people or narrative “victims” produce their storylines as counter narratives, which are claimed to be an alternative explanation that aims to delegitimize and downplay the dominant explanations. In this section, I argue that, under certain circumstances, marginalised groups are apt to adopt familiar and available narratives

into their everyday lives in order to balance and reconcile their practices with the dominant power.

The watershed crisis narrative informed its audiences of how upper watershed forests were degraded by highland farmers who illegally inhabited the watershed areas. It rendered highlanders, and their particular agricultural practices, the main contributors to the highland ecological crisis. Based upon this storyline, the proponents suggested relocating the perceived illegal farmers out of the upper watershed forests so that the forest could effectively perform its environmental service role. In the debate surrounding the Community Forest Bill, the watershed crisis storyline was repeatedly employed to delegitimize the policy proposal that aimed to support the legal settlement of local people in protected areas. On the ground, watershed crisis storytelling lent moral authority to the Dhammanaat Foundation and like-minded agencies to claim back the forest lands in Pakluay and converted them into reforestation sites. In short, the conservation narrative was crucial for conservationists in the sense that it helped to justify their claims regarding the highlanders and their negative impact on the highland ecosystems. By telling the story, the conservationists gained legitimacy to pursue conservation intervention such as forest plantations and to implement such projects on village sites in the name of watershed protection. They gained public approval by telling the storylines of the watershed crisis.

The “victims” of the conservationist’s narratives were local people, who had been living in the highlands particularly in the upper watershed forests. In Pakluay the Cabinet approved a plan in 1989 for relocating the villagers in new sites outside of the watershed forests. Fortunately for the villagers, the plan was not implemented. Facing settlement insecurity, the Hmong farmers of Pakluay village strategically adopted conservation narratives and practices such as traditional land use mapping and forest trees ordination in their everyday lives, not only enhancing their image as forest protectors but, to some extent, recasting themselves as conservationists. In Pakluay, land use planning was introduced and conducted by villagers and involved stakeholders, their aim being to rearrange land use within the village boundaries. Mutual agreement was reached among concerned stakeholders that the boundary between the farm plots and forests should be marked. By practicing this strategy, the villagers were able to renegotiate their continued settlement of the claimed watershed forests.

With time, the voices of the Hmong farmers, the narrative victims, became heard as they repeatedly told conservation storylines more or less similar to conservationists' narrative. The farmers were given social space for dialogue with other stakeholders, particularly with the lowland farmers who shared the same watershed. But, there was no point in creating a direct challenge in the form of a completely new counter narrative. Telling their familiar stories made more sense of their claims than creating completely new stories challenging and opposing the dominant narrative. As Polletta says: "If you tell a new story, a truly new story, you risk being made sense of via those old familiar stories, or you risk not making sense at all" (2008 p.28). However, the Hmong farmers' adoption of the conservation narrative never meant to imply that they accepted the accusations labelled at them by groups of conservationists that they were highlands resource destroyers. Rather, the local conservation narratives suggested that the Hmong farmers in the highlands accepted the conservationists' concerns about the forest destruction, but denied that they were resource destructive people. They presented themselves as also being conservationists.

To summarise, storytelling is widely used to convey group images, values and world views, and problems and solutions. In every case, the narrators bring issues and key messages to their audiences. A contribution of this thesis is the finding that the local people successfully adopted available stories into their narrative practices in order to recast their new image and balance dialogue on controversial issues that otherwise would have impacted upon their ways of life. But, in so doing, they undermined their own interests.

Untold Stories as Narrative Strategies

It is clear from the earlier discussion that storylines about people and forests are critical aspects of the politics of forest conservation. The storytelling was not just about amusing audiences: the stories contained political messages which aimed to persuade their target audiences to see people-forest interactions just as the storyteller wanted them to see it. The narratives surrounding people and the forests were simplistic ideas representing the relationship between the locals and the forests (Forsyth and Walker 2008). For some, they contained a degree of strategic simplification (Li 2007). In all of the cases presented in this thesis, the people and forests narratives are incomplete (Roe

1994). However, incomplete stories do not necessarily imply that the narrators could not supply the information. The narrative strategies were selectively chosen by policy actors involved in narratives production. Clearly, in some cases, social actors deliberately concealed particular information that would weaken their political argument. I will suggest that the success of certain actors' narratives was not due solely to their simplification of the relationships between the people and the forests, but rather to the fact that controversial issues were deliberately left unheard in the debate. To this end, this section discusses the untold stories embedded in people and forest storytelling and the political motivation underpinning this phenomenon.

The people and forest storytelling by officials and conservationists proved powerful. This thesis argues that the key to the power of these narratives lay in the ways in which the storytellers deliberately concealed both controversial and/or sensitive issues regarding people and forests in their storytelling. For example, the "community rights" and "forest as supermarket of the poor" narratives, which promoted the transferring of decision-making power from the Centre to the local communities, avoided any mention of the use of resources for commercial purposes related to farming land in the forests. They constantly portrayed local communities as dependent upon the forest for their subsistence. The use of valuable resources in the forests, such as timber and farming land, were excluded from their storylines. The portrayal of local communities as subsistence forest dependents provided local people with the legitimacy to protect and lay claim to forest resources. Likewise, the conservationists' claims regarding the watershed crisis, and the highland farmers' perceived contribution to environmental degradation, seemed to gain legitimacy when the issue of the history of highland colonization was excluded from their storytelling. In the conservationists' narratives, highland farmers were depicted as illegal forest encroachers, careless about the environment. However, one should not be so naïve as to view the incomplete story as simply a result of the political actors' inability to tell the full story. Rather, the incomplete stories were, in fact, deliberately constructed for strategic political reasons.

Indeed, untold stories may be treated as a narrative strategy employed by political actors committed to achieving their latent political aims. Untold stories not only legitimise political claims in policy debates, but allow social actors, to renegotiate their claims with outside powers to achieve their multiple goals. By concealing controversial issues such as shifting cultivation in their storytelling, the Hmong farmers of Pakluay village

were able to negotiate processes for land use planning with outside stakeholders and forest officials in which new land use arrangements were recognized by distant stakeholders. And, while the Hmong farmers of Pakluay were allowed to continue cropping in particular agreed upon zones, their ultimate goal was to secure their settlement in their homeland. Their real concern was about relocation given that they were threatened with eviction from the forest areas. By opting to engage in participatory land use planning, the Hmong farmers achieved their primary and hidden agenda which to continue living in the contested watershed forest.

The practice of shifting cultivation is still relevant to the Hmong farmers of Pakluay village. The farmers in the mountain areas are still practicing shifting cultivation, but they have changed from long-fallow shifting cultivation to short-fallow shifting cultivation in response to the limitation of available farming lands due to the forestry laws. As I witnessed in the village, there were a number of regenerated forest patches near the cultivated land. These forest patches were initially kept for planting cash crops. Unfortunately, they were taken over by forest officers who considered them to be secondary forest areas.

Unfortunately, untold stories may result in situations where critical issues related to community rights to resources remain unaddressed in national policy debate. During the debate over the Community Forest Bill, the issues of farming in the forests and the commercial use of resources, particularly timber, were marginalised. In my opinion, these issues are very critical for local livelihoods: local villagers in the forests to depend upon land use for cropping. The land is their main source of food and family incomes; but, their de facto utilisation of land and forest resources was unarguably illegal. These issues, however, were omitted from public discussion. I suspect that while the rights-based advocates recognised the significance of farming land to local livelihoods, at the same time they feared that these controversial issues would weaken their political claims that aimed to legitimise local settlement in the forest areas. It may be that feared that by proposing the farming land issue in the Community Forest Bill, the public may have misconceptions about the community forest as the villagers' tool for occupying lands in the forests. For this reason, the rights-based advocates left the agricultural land in the forest issue unsaid.

Untold stories contributed to unnecessary restriction of villager accesses to valuable resources at the local level. In Huai Kaew village, for example, villagers were restricted from access to timber in the forest. According to the community forest rules pertinent to the Huai Kaew community forest, the use of timber was allowed only for domestic purposes, but no one had been allowed to fell trees in the forests since the Huai Kaew community forest was established in the early 1990s. In Pakluay, the Hmong farmers were prohibited from using their fallow lands. But, issues of agricultural land, timber and other valuable resources were missing from the actors' narratives. As a consequence, there was no open public debate surrounding these issues.

Conclusion

In Thailand, the resource struggle is still going on. Local people, particularly resource dependent people, have been excluded and marginalised from the decision-making processes regarding resource allocation. The views, assumptions and beliefs expressed during this struggle have been varied as evident in the storytelling about people and the forests. This thesis stresses that the storylines pertaining to people and forests are diverse and multiple. Each storyline plays its role in assigning meaning to the relationships that obtain between the subjects of discussion. These narratives, in turn, contribute to the shaping of the relationships between the local lived reality and the natural environment. The narratives undoubtedly have material effect. Local people, the "narrative victims", became actively involved in producing the storylines in their struggle to reclaim their rights over the resources in question, but, victims' narratives do not always directly challenge the dominant narrative. Under certain circumstances, they respond to it by arguing that the story does not really apply to them. This chapter highlights some common features among the storylines about people and the forests. In all cases, the narrators deliberately avoided allusion to controversial issues that would have contributed to weakening their political claims. However, the untold stories, as a narrative strategy, sometimes undermined their interests.

Policy Implications

What are the implications of the findings of this thesis on the multiple narratives of people and forests in a situation where the controversial issue continues? In a context

where a deep power imbalance exists as in Thailand, it is natural to accept that natural resource policy, particularly forestry laws and policy, has been dominated by narratives told by powerful actors, whereas “alternative” policy narratives have been marginalised and ignored.

Obviously, a policy process that allows sharing of a wider range of perspectives is necessary. This thesis suggests that the debate about empowering local people and simultaneously conserving natural forests was highly complicated. The debate involved multiple narratives which all claimed to represent the truth regarding the relationships between people and the forests. The process for establishing shared goals and objectives among these opposing views, assumptions and knowledge was attempted, but failed. As a result, the policy for empowering local people in managing forest resources as attempted in the Community Forest Bill never came to reality. If it were to have, I suspect that that policy would have never contributed to really empower the poor access to resources under the current power structure of Thai society.

However, the thesis has no concrete solution to implement the proposed policy process. Instead, it argues for the recognition of the multiplicity of policy storylines in the policy formulation processes. In my view, the recognition that there are various views and assumptions regarding people and forest relationships in the policy arena is the key to a good policy that works for the poor. How can one deal with those various and sometime conflicting policy storylines? Some may suggest the idea of finding a “neutral convenor”, someone that is trusted the most by various groups of involved political actors. In theory, the concept of neutral convenor can be applied in any political situation where conflicting ideas exist. However, in the current political situation of Thailand where social actors are absolutely divided, a neutral convenor approach may be difficult to apply. Each social actor has been labelled as part of a particular group or particular idea. Their ideas or policy proposals are no longer seen as neutral. For example, when Dr. Prawase Wasi, the influential public intellectual in Thailand, was appointed by the Abhisit Vejjajiva government to chair the National Consolidation Committee of Thailand, he was accused by opposing groups who claimed that Dr. Prawase and the committee members supported the coup. This contrasts with the earlier situation. During the national debate to pass the Community Forest Bill in the mid-1990s, Dr Prawase was appointed to chair the national public hearing. At that time, his role as a “neutral chairman” was publicly recognised. Under the current strong political

polarization, integrating various policy storylines in order to produce policy is more difficult to achieve.

Implication for Future Research

The investigation of “victim’s narratives” is a valuable approach for understanding the politics of conservation and forest contestation. It was also an important innovation in this research. The victim’s narratives informed us that local people, the subject of policy narratives are not passive, but active participants. Local narratives are multiple, with no single storytelling within one village. The investigations and presentations of individual villagers’ storylines, particularly those who have been heavily depending on forest resource for livelihoods, are worth examining and integrating into research. Understanding the world views and concerns of these people must be a research priority. The implication is that policy narrative research generally should explore local narratives.

There is also an implication for research methodology. Understanding local narratives required an ethnographic approach. The ethnography allowed the researcher to observe how local villagers interacted with their farming lands and forest environment. Participant observation combined very well with interviews in the sense that they both informed each other about the context of local narratives about people and the forests. In short, the ethnographic approach added value to the understanding of narratives in particular contexts and that required the researcher to step outside the document orientation of policy narrative analysis.

A similar methodology, one which moves away from a focus solely on documents, would be appropriate in other studies of policy narratives, both of other issues in Thailand and in other countries.

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