VARIOUS FORMS OF COLONIALISM:
THE SOCIAL AND SPATIAL REORGANISATION OF THE
BRAO IN SOUTHERN LAOS AND
NORTHEASTERN CAMBODIA

by

IAN GEORGE BAIRD

B.A. (Co-op), University of Victoria, 2000
M.A., University of Victoria, 2003

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation engages with processes of social and spatial organisation of the Brao, a Mon-Khmer language-speaking ethnic group whose approximately 60,000 members reside mainly in the provinces of Attapeu and Champasak, in the southern-most part of Laos; and Ratanakiri and Stung Treng, in the northeastern-most part of Cambodia. Divided broadly into eight different sub-groups—the Jree, Kavet, Hamong, Ka-nying, Lun, Umba, Kreung and Brao Tanap—the Brao are, historically, swidden cultivators whose livelihoods were, and often remain, heavily dependent on fishing, hunting and the collection of various forest products, and who have particular ways of organising spatially, with concomitant rules and norms, including spatial taboos.

Over the last number of centuries, various powers have tried to dominate the Brao and Brao spaces, including the Khmer, Lao and Siamese, followed by the French, Japanese, Vietnamese, Americans, Lao (royalist and communist), Khmer (royalist and communist), and the present-day Lao and Cambodian governments working together with international development agencies. These various groups, including those typically considered to be precolonial and postcolonial, are theorised in this thesis as representing different forms of colonialism, each with particular objectives and implications for the Brao.

This dissertation examines these various forms of colonialism and their effects on the Brao over history. The role of the international border between Lao and Cambodia in constituting Brao 'places of resistance' is also examined. I demonstrate how differing forms of colonial domination have had varying impacts on the Brao; through effecting social and spatial change that in turn impact—amongst other things—Brao places. These places are constituted with meaning by the Brao, and are closely linked to their identities.

All forms of colonialism have spatial repercussions, and frequently include processes of (re)territorialisation and attempts to rescale the spatial systems of dominated groups like the Brao. However, colonial powers are never omnipotent or fully successful. Their efforts are frequently resisted, even if negotiation, compliance and other nuanced responses are important. Overall, human agency is crucial for determining the outcomes of attempts to dominate.
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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ADB — Asian Development Bank
AIPP - Asian Indigenous People’s Pact Foundation
ANL— Armée Nationale Laotienne, or Lao National Army (1949-1959)
ARNV — Army of the Republic of Vietnam (South Vietnam)
ASEAN - Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Regional grouping of 11 countries in
Southeast Asia, including Laos and Cambodia)
BPAMP — Biodiversity and Protected Area Management Project (World
Bank/Global Environmental Facility (GEF)/Government of Cambodia project)
CAOM - Centre des Archives d’Outre-Mer, in Aix-en-Provence, France
CARERE — Cambodia Area Rehabilitation and Regeneration Project (Cambodian government
and United Nations partnership), followed by the Seila programme
CBNRM — Community-based Natural Resource Management
CDC — Commune Development Committee (in Cambodia)
CIA — Central Intelligence Agency of the US
CIDG - Civilian Irregular Defense Group
CGDK - Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea; loose political and military coalition
of KR, KPNLF and FUNCINPEC
CLEC - Community Legal Education Center (Cambodian NGO)
CPA — Community Protected Area (in relation to Virachey National Park)
CPK — Communist Party of Kampuchea (also known as the KR) (1966-1981)
DED - Deutscher Entwicklungsdienst (German volunteer agency)
DRV — Democratic Republic of Vietnam, or North Vietnam
EdL - Electricité du Lao
EFEO - Ecole Francaise d'Extreme-Orient
EIA — Environmental Impact Assessment
EVN — Electricity of Vietnam
FAO — United Nations Forestry and Agriculture Organisation
FARK — Forces Armées Royales Khmères (Royal Khmer Armed Forces prior to March 18, 1970)
FANK — Forces Armées Nationales Khmères (Khmer National Armed Forces after March 18,
1970 until April 1975)
FUNCPSC - Front Uni National pour un Cambodge Indépendant, Neutre, Pacifique, et
Coopératif, which translates to ‘National United Front for an Independent,
Neutral, Peaceful, and Cooperative Cambodia’ (Established 1981)
FUNK - Front Uni National du Kampuchea (Renaksey Ruop Ruom Cheat Kampuchea)
Established by Norodom Sihanouk in April 1970 but dominated by the Khmer Rouge;
resistance movement against the Lon Nol government.
FUNSK - Khmer National United Front for National Salvation
GEF - Global Environment Facility
GMS — Greater Mekong Sub-region (ADB initiated grouping of six countries in the Mekong
River basin)
GoL — Government of Laos (referring to Lao PDR government after 1975)
GRUNK - Gouvernement Royal d’Union Nationale du Kampuchea, or Royal Government of
National Union of Kampuchea (1970-1975)
GAA — German Agro Action (German NGO)
GTZ - Deutsche Gesellschaft fur Technische Zusammenarbeit (German government’s aid agency)
ICC - International Control Commission (First Indochina War)
ICC - International Cooperation in Cambodia (Christian ‘faith-based’ development NGO
working in Ratanakiri province)
ICP - Indochinese Communist Party (1930-1951)
IDRC – International Development Research Centre (of the government of Canada)
IMC - Interim Mekong Committee
IMF – International Monetary Fund
INGO – International Non-Government Organisation
IO – International Organisation
IUCN – The World Conservation Union
JICA - Japanese International Cooperation Agency
KPNLF – Khmer People’s National Liberation Front (Established by Son Sann to fight against the Vietnamese)
KPRP – Khmer People’s Revolutionary Party (1951-1960) (predecessor of the WPK) and Kampuchean People’s Revolutionary Party (1979-1989); Phak Pracheachon Padewat Khmer
KR – Khmer Rouge
LFNC - Lao Front for National Construction
Lao PDR – Lao People’s Democratic Republic
LNCE - Lao Nation Committee for Energy
LPP – Lao People’s Party
MACV - Military Assistance Command Vietnam; formed in February 1962, replacing MAAG
MAF - Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry (Laos)
MoE – Ministry of Environment (Cambodia)
MoU – Memorandum of Understanding (an agreement)
MRC – Mekong River Commission (grouping of Cambodia, Laos, Thailand and Vietnam)
NADK - National Army of Democratic Kampuchea; successor to RAK (December 1979)
NAFRI - National Agriculture and Forestry Research Institute
NPA – National Protected Area
NPAS – National Protected Area System
NTFP – Non-Timber Forest Products
NVA – North Vietnamese Army
PA – Protected Area
PDK - Party of Democratic Kampuchea; CPK’s new name in December 1981
PEO - Program Evaluation Office; cover name for early CIA covert operations in Laos
PL – Pathet Lao (Communists in Laos)
PLG – Partnership for Local Governance (Cambodia)
PMO – Prime Minister’s Office
PRDC - Provincial Rural Development Committees (in Cambodia)
PRPK - People’s Revolutionary Party of Kampuchea
PS – Pakse Site (for use by pilots)
RAK – Revolutionary Army of Kampuchea (Established in1968 by Pol Pot)
RCAF - Royal Cambodian Armed Forces (1992 onwards)
RLAF – Royal Lao Air Force
RLG – Royal Lao Government (government between 1954 and 1975)
RSL – Resident Superior of Laos (from CAOM)
Seila Programme – Development partnership coordinated by the Cambodian government and the United Nations
SIDA - Swedish International Development Agency
SIL – Summer Institute of Linguistics
SPC – State Planning Committee
STEA - Science, Technology and Environment Agency (Laos)
TFAP – Tropical Forestry Action Plan
WWF – World Wide Fund for Nature
UNDP – United Nations Development Programme
UNEP – United Nations Environment Programme
UNHCR - United Nations High Commission on Refugees
UNTAC – United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia
US (or USA) – United States of America
USAID – United States Agency for International Development (established in 1961)
USAF – United States Air Force
USOM – United States Operations Mission (predecessor of USAID)
UXO – Unexploded Ordnance
VC – Viet Cong
VCP – Vietnam Communist Party
VDC - Village Development Committee (in Cambodia)
VNP – Virachey National Park
BRAO GLOSSARY

* Bree — The condition of the land (forest)
* Dak — The condition of the water (water)
* Arak — Spirit
* Ya — Designation for an adult male, used as a prefix in front of names (possibly originating from the Lao word A-nya, a title)
* Nang — Designation for a woman
* Dao — Designation for a young man
* Jun doo — Mountain
* Thi — Large
* Ke — Small
* Tave — Rice jar beer
* Meur — Swidden field
* Hnam — House
* Rong — Communal House
LAO GLOSSARY

Xe – River
Houay – Stream
Nam – Water or River
Nong – Natural pond
Phou – Mountain
Tham - Cave
Ban – Village
Khoun – Section of a village
Taseng – Sub-district (in the past)
Muang – Principality (in the past) or district (at present)
Chao – Prefix for names to designate as royalty
Chao Muang – Chief of principality (in the past) or district (at present)
Khveng - Province
Nang – Designation for a woman
Thao – Designation for a man
Pho Thao – Designation for an older man or father-in-law
Nai Kong – French appointed leader of groups of villages during French colonial period
Phya – Appointed representatives of French government at village, or group of villages, level
Pha-nya – A royal designation or title
Ya – Short for ‘A-nya’, a royal designation or title
Than – ‘Mister’ in Lao
Chan – Teacher or designation for a monk or former monk
Achan – Teacher or designation for a monk or former monk
Phra Khou – Designation for a senior monk
Kha – Pejorative label for Austroasiatic and Austronesian language-speaking groups
Son Xat – Common name frequently used by Lao for ethnic minorities. Not accepted by government at present, but frequently used by Lao
Lao Theung – Term presently frequently used to refer to Mon-Khmer language speaking groups, including the Brao (literally, ‘upper Lao’)
Lao Issala (or just Issala) – The name given to the revolutionary movement against the French colonial government (Issala means freedom in Lao)
Thahan – Soldier
Phatthana – Development
KHMER GLOSSARY

Phum - Village
Khum – Commune
Me Khum – Commune chief (at present)
Srok – District or Country
Me Srok – District Chief in Cambodia, 1954-1970
Chaovay Srok – District Chief; Provincial Governor
Khet - Province
Balat - Deputy
Khet – Province
Angkar – The term used in Cambodia to describe the Khmer Rouge (CPK)
Angkar Leu – Standing Committee of the Central Committee of the Khmer Rouge (CPK)
Chalat - Mobile work groups
O – Stream
Chuntop – Assistant to district chief (pronounced Chuntrop in Brao)
Sangkum Reasr Niyum (Sangkum) – Name of Cambodian government from the mid-1950s to 1970, led by Prince Norodom Sihanouk
Phnong – Pejorative label for Austroasiatic and Austronesian language-speaking groups
Vat – Buddhist temple
Yuan – Pejorative name used in Khmer for people of Vietnamese or Kinh ethnicity
Khmer Islam – Islamic Khmer/Cham
Khmer Kandal – Lowland Khmer
Khmer Kroam – Khmers living inside Vietnam
Khmer Leu – Name of ethnic minority highlanders in Cambodia, coined in Sihanouk period
Chun Chiet – Present common term to ethnic minorities, including the Brao
Khmer Issarak (or just Issarak) – The name given to the nationalist revolutionary movement against the French colonial government (Issarak means freedom in Khmer)
Khmer Krahom – The term for the communists in Cambodia up until the early 1960s when Pol Pot became Party secretary
Yokabat – Official government position in pre-French and French colonial Cambodia
Aphiwat - Development
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CHAPTER 1
Introduction

In November 2004, thirty-four people created a sensation when they emerged from along the Lao-Cambodia border. Long thought by relatives to have died during the time of Vietnam’s occupation of Cambodia, and unaware of the current political situation, they had been hiding deep in the forest, afraid that they would face violent retribution from Vietnamese troops in Cambodia if they came out. The group had lived with the Khmer Rouge in the ‘jungles’ on the Cambodian side of the border, in Siem Pang district, Stung Treng province, for ten years, beginning at the time of the Vietnamese invasion in the last days of 1978. This continued until 1989, shortly before the end of the Vietnamese occupation of Cambodia, when Vietnamese soldiers raided their camp. The inhabitants scattered and fled deeper into the forest, trying to escape. A small group of 12 people in four families ended up together. These were people from both the Kreung and Tampuon ethnic groups, but as most were Kreung, they spoke ‘Kreung’ (a dialect of Brao) together as their *lingua franca.*

The group travelled for five days and nights to the north, ultimately taking refuge in a very remote area, most likely in Attapeu’s Phou Vong district, in southern Laos. They had no idea whether they were in Cambodia or Laos, but they knew there were not many people living near the border. The main thing was to keep anyone from finding them. They were able to prepare only a few provisions before fleeing, including one machete, a rice pot, a few plates and a couple of handfuls of various seeds, such as rice, chilies and some other vegetables and herbs. Their clothes soon deteriorated, so they had to make clothing out of a particular kind of tree bark, called ‘*humbawk pray*’ in Brao. Fishhooks were crafted out of thorny vines, and other vines served as lines. Everything had to come from the forest. There was no salt available, so they burned bamboo to create a mild upland substitute from the ashes. Chilies were used to flavour their food. Although constantly fearful that the Vietnamese might return to attack them, they managed to survive relatively well. Although always looking for food, they never faced starvation.¹

After years of hiding without any contact with the outside world, the group was finally forced to give themselves up. The psychological impact of constantly worrying about being attacked finally got the best of them. First, they stole clothing that Brao villagers from Cheung Hiang village in Phou Vong district had hung out to dry, in order to cover their bodies. At that point they discarded their bark clothing. A Brao villager in Laos saw them and called the local leaders. Soon the village militia started pursuing them, and the group gave up. When apprehended, they claimed they were going to give up soon anyway. In any case, the militia turned them over to the district authorities in Phou Vong.

The ‘forest people’ were treated well by the ethnic Brao people from Laos who apprehended them. They were fed and given new clothing and other necessities. But members of the group continued to express fear about returning to Cambodia, in case the Vietnamese might kill them, and they asked to settle in southern Laos (after realising that they were there). The Lao government (GoL) would not allow it. The governor of Ratanakiri province at the time, Kham Khoeun, was contacted. He immediately sent a delegation to Attapeu to escort the group back to Cambodia.

“They are like wild people, they know nothing,” said Kham Khoeun, who collected them from the Laotian authorities. “They have received no information from the country and the world. At first they were so frightened.” Only three members in the group spoke Khmer.² Nine days after being apprehended the group was back in Cambodia. They were surprised but happy to find that the Vietnamese troops had long since departed. They were given a few days of medical attention in the capital of Ratanakiri province, Ban Lung, and were then sent back to their original villages, where they were allowed to settle peacefully without retribution. For the first time in many years they could live without fear of momentarily being attacked and killed. The majority returned to Kroala village in O Chum district, while others went to villages in Bokeo district.³

Over the 15 years since they fled their Khmer Rouge camp and lived in the forest only one person had died, while 23 were born. Shortly after returning to Ratanakiri, a ten-

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A day-old baby died at the provincial hospital.\footnote{Phann, A. & C. Purtill 2004. \textit{ibid.}} Not long after that, another child and an adult fell ill and died (Baird 2006c). It is not unusual for people who have been living in remote forested and mountainous areas to suffer serious illnesses after moving into heavily populated areas (see Goudineau 1997). Three times as many people had perished in one month after leaving the forest than had died in the forest over the previous 15 years. Those who survived were glad to be able, finally, to reunite with their long-lost families.

I met one of the families in Kroala village in early 2005. They had received a little rice upon their return, but by the time I met them that stock had been depleted, and although they had not yet planted their rice crop for the year, they had no rice to eat. Those who had come from the forest were timid and said little. Another Kreung villager from Kroala was, however, more vocal. He complained, on their behalf, about the lack of help from aid agencies to feed the new arrivals. Relatives had tried to help, he insisted, but soon they had diminished their rice stocks. The villager who complained became irate. “There are six development agencies working in our village, but nobody is helping to solve the problem of having to feed the new families from the forest,” he exclaimed. The new arrivals knew nothing about ‘development’ or ‘development agencies’, but the man who stated their case certainly did.

The above story seems appropriate to lead off this dissertation, as it touches on many of the main points that I will investigate in the coming pages. The anecdote is about people from the Brao ethnic group, the subject of this thesis. It also deals with southern Laos and northeastern Cambodia, the geographical focus here. In addition, the incident represents one of the many times over the last century that Brao people have made use of the power of the international Lao-Cambodia border to create new places of refuge for escaping from those working at a national scale with more power than they possess. Furthermore, the story reflects on a situation in which the Brao were drawn into a regional conflict, suffering as a result, and ultimately trying to flee from colonial powers by hiding in the forest. The story relates to conflict and resistance, an important theme throughout the thesis, even if resistance is often uncertain, conditional and subject to change. Furthermore, the anecdote speaks to the impacts of resettlement on human health.
and well being, a circumstance that the Brao have had to face in both Laos and Cambodia. It deals with development, aid agencies, and people (those who came from the forest) who have somehow been forgotten by development organisations. Finally, it relates to the importance of understanding the past as a means of making sense of the present, including understanding past efforts by the Brao to use the border to escape from dominating powers. More generally, the history of regional conflict that has affected the Brao is crucial. Historicising present-day circumstances involving the Brao is useful, as their histories may not be well known outside of Brao communities. Their histories are truly important to them, and are central to my approach to this research.

My Involvement with the Brao and Approach to this Dissertation

I do not remember all the details of my first visit, in 1995, to a village primarily populated by ethnic Brao people, but I do retain an image of a ‘community’, despite not having been there since. The village is situated along the Xekaman River in Sanxay district, Attapeu province, in southern Laos. I recall being told by a group of Brao elders that despite the nine years (1964 to 1973) of aerial bombing that took place in the general area during the Second Indochina War, their village was somehow spared from bombardment, even though surrounding areas were devastated. The elders were convinced that the spirit embodied in their ceremonial gate (which they call Viang) (Photo 1.1) in front of their village had protected the village space from having been hit. They were full of enthusiastic praise for the Viang, and said that they would continue doing the Animist rituals associated with it for as long as their village existed.

From my first encounter with the Brao, the social and spatial aspects of their lives caught my attention. The gate’s alleged ability to protect the geographical space that they defined as ‘village’ (shрооk in Brao) was immediately of interest. What was the Brao

5 Although ‘animism’ is typically written uncapitalised, I have chosen to capitalise it here, as it appears to me that Animism deserves to be on the same moral plane as other religions which are typically capitalised. In the past, Animism has not been considered to be a ‘real religion’ because of its varied forms and especially due to its lack of codification. These arguments for distinguishing Animism from other religions do not, I believe, stand up to scrutiny. I am not, however, arguing that varied Animist traditions require the same sort of institutionalisation and codification that is typical of many other major religions. In fact, I recognise that it is this lack of codification and institutionalisation that has provided many forms of Animism with the flexibility that makes adaptation easier. Ultimately, however, Animism deserves the same sort of recognition, in terms of its epistemological and ontological foundations, as other religions, and therefore I see no reason why it should not be capitalised.
cosmological view of the world, and how did Brao beliefs in particular spirits affect livelihoods and relationships with space, nature, agents of development and other ‘strangers’? I had heard that there were many other Brao villages in Laos and Cambodia, and I wondered if the people living in other communities placed similar importance on their own village gates.

Since first engaging with the Brao, I have had the pleasure of spending a considerable amount of time over more than about a decade with Brao people in a large number of villages and circumstances (see Chapter 2 for details), and I have become even more interested in the ways in which they socially and spatially organise themselves. I decided to make their social and spatial organisation the primary concern of my PhD dissertation.

Further, I am interested in how others have tried to socially and spatially reorganise the Brao throughout history. In particular, what spatial tools have been used in these efforts, and under what contexts have different tools been deployed? How have nation-states, development agencies, and others manipulated spatial changes to achieve what they believe to be desirable social change?

How have the Brao responded to attempts by others to spatially and socially organise them? Have the Brao resisted attempts to change them, and if so, in what ways? When have they complied with, or even accommodated and encouraged these efforts and under what circumstances? The nuanced reactions of the Brao are of particular interest—especially considering that the Brao are themselves a diverse peoples—be it the ways in which they have negotiated to gain more favourable conditions, or the more subtle everyday forms of resistance to those trying to dominate them, including those that have not been immediately obvious forms of resistance (see Scott 1985; 1990).

It can be said that this dissertation looks at various types of colonial domination, including Khmer, Lao, Siamese, French, Japanese, American, Vietnamese, Khmer (royalist and communist), Lao (royalist or communist), and present-day, in which Lao and Khmer ideas are increasingly influenced by global, especially international development discourses. All of the above groups are considered to represent colonial ambitions, in the sense that they have all tried to impose domination and change of the Brao. They have not acted in the same ways, even if they have influenced each other, and
therefore I conceptualise them as working at different forms, each with varying social and spatial implications, and often involving different types of territorialisation. Thus, this study is about various forms of colonial domination and their social and spatial implications for the Brao. It is this conceptualisation of various forms of colonialism—even those typically referred to as being precolonial and postcolonial—as representing different forms of colonialism that is crucial for connecting the various parts of this thesis together.

Theoretically, I draw on a variety of different positions. On the one hand, I fully recognise the importance of considering the political economy of change and other important factors surrounding questions of power. I am also interested in the roles of nation-states and globalising forces in effecting change. Indeed, discursive elements are paramount in justifying or promoting change. However, I recognise that nation-states and aid agencies are not omnipotent, they are not monolithic, and outside discourses do not exist in a vacuum. Of equal importance are local discourses and histories, identities and struggles, even if they are not well known by those with various types of degrees of power. All these factors typically influence each other, and result in sometimes-unexpected outcomes and responses. Thus, it would be inappropriate to either deny the important roles that political power and discourses play, or to underestimate the individual and community agency of the Brao people. In many ways, my position is much like that of Donald Moore (2000), who clearly sees the usefulness of drawing on various theoretical ideas to come up with a nuanced approach for considering how people are affected by ‘development’, a tool frequently used by colonial powers to control those being dominated.

Local histories are especially important for marginalised peoples, and particularly ethnic minorities, but the histories of these peoples are rarely well known outside of their communities, and are frequently not documented. While they are often linked to more mainstream histories, they generally emphasise quite different and localised points. Culture and local politics are huge factors in filtering and refracting events. Moreover, local histories are frequently deployed to contest dominant versions of history. For example, Brao understandings of the Ay Sa rebellion during the early 19th century stand in stark contrast to mainstream versions of the history of the rebellion, and ethnicity is
clearly a critical factor in determining how history has been interpreted and remembered by the Brao. Whereas the Lao, Thai and Euro-Americans largely remember Ay Sa as being a crazy power-hungry ethnic Lao man who was able to manipulate the ignorant highlanders through trickery, the Brao frequently see him as a messiah who wanted to emancipate the people from being victimised by the brute terror of slave raiding ordered by the ‘colonial’ Siamese and carried out by their proxies, the Lao of Champasak (see Baird 2007a). These histories make a difference in even today’s world, as they give meaning to places, constitute identities and inform us of the ways in which the Brao see themselves and others, based on visions of the past. I have observed the importance of history amongst the Brao and have taken it seriously. Thus, I have chosen to heavily historicise my inquiry into the factors affecting Brao social and spatial reorganisation, with the hope that by doing so it will be easier to understand why various forces have tried to change the Brao over history, and why the Brao have acted in the ways that they have during different periods.

Identity factors are clearly critical for my investigations, regardless of whether they are related to class, religion, gender, geographical origin, nationality or ethnicity, and finding a suitable balance between them at the right moments is challenging to say the least. Because the Brao are an ethnic minority with quite distinct cultural references, as compared to their lowland neighbours, this identity factor has tended to dominate the discourses about them, and their own responses to others. Thus, in this thesis, ethnicity will deservedly receive more focus than other identity factors. However, that does not mean that other identity factors should be ignored, or that they are not relevant. Everybody has multiple identities, and different identities become more or less important depending on context, and the actors involved (Cribb & Narangoa 2004).

Finally, the ecological factors affecting various people in different places are invariably important, and they are certainly critical for a group like the Brao, since most Brao people live close to ‘nature’, interact ‘intimately’ with it, and frequently express identities that link themselves closely with nature. Their local knowledge about forests, rivers and other aspects of nature is often considerable, and this is undoubtedly crucial for their livelihoods and overall social and spatial organisation. My interest in the biophysical world and the socio-political factors, multi-scaled local and global
environments, and territorialisation, deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation of various types of spaces has helped lead me to where I am.

I see my goal as trying to find a productive space that considers all of the above factors, that values the local as much as the global, and the sacred as much as the profane, a position that is sensitive to various forms of power. I believe the reality is that different circumstances tend to dictate the relative importance of each factor, and I have tried to do that in ways that make the most sense to me based on my long engagement with the Brao. In other words, I have attempted to situate the various perspectives that existed in different periods, amongst different actors, and in different places.

My interest in interdisciplinary studies directs me to those very interesting spaces that lie between or on the cusps and margins of various disciplines, including anthropology, history, ecology, environmental studies, political science, sociology, and of course, geography. Like Cindi Katz (1992), who pointed out that just as the margins between ecosystems are at once the most hazardous and appealing for human settlement, so it can be liberating to position oneself in the margins of different academic disciplines. I will explore my theoretical positioning in more detail in Chapter 2.

Apart from my main interest in different forms of colonialism and the social and spatial organisation of the Brao, there are other sub-themes embedded within my thesis. One of the most important of those—and one that is closely linked to my main inquiry—relates to the international Lao-Cambodia border. Much of my research is situated within these very productive international ‘border’ spaces, the margins of nation-states. They include spaces that became important places of resistance for the Brao, places that constituted struggles for independence and attempts to free themselves from state hegemony, and spaces that were created in response and in opposition to state power.

Although the geographical location of the Brao, straddling the international border between Laos and Cambodia, and my fieldwork in both Laos and Cambodia, might logically direct me towards conducting a comparative study of the Brao in both countries, as others have done with the Hausa of Niger and Nigeria (Miles 1994), the Akha of Thailand and Burma (Sturgeon 2005), and the native peoples in the USA and Canada (Wilson 2000). However, I promise no such comparative treatment of the Brao, although I do make some comparative observations at various points during the
dissertation. Instead of attempting to conduct a strictly comparative study, which would seem unnecessarily limiting to me, my focus is more on multiple spaces and places, theoretical questions associated with social and spatial changes, and their links with different forms of colonialism, changing identities and human-nature relations amongst the Brao.

Furthermore, apart from international borders, there are other important boundaries, both physical and conceptual. The role of ‘place’ is clearly critical for my enquiry, and as Deborah Pellow (1996) has pointed out, boundaries exist amongst all people and societies and are fundamental for making places meaningful. Without boundaries, there would be no diversity, and no places or territories. Thus social and spatial organisation are clearly linked to important places and the various types of boundaries that help define them, an idea that will be further developed in Chapter 2.

The next section addresses how outsiders, including colonial powers and the international development agencies that support them, frequently view Brao people. From my observations it appears that apart from being seen as a less capable and ‘backward’ ethnic minority, they are frequently seen as being ‘poor’, while also as ‘exotic’.

The Brao as Poor

Most ethnic Brao people are swidden farmers who hunt, fish and collect various products from nature for their livelihoods. They live mainly off the land, in close to subsistence circumstances and they often reside in relatively remote, mountainous, marginalised (in relation to the nation-state) and (at least until recently) heavily forested areas. The Brao are considered to be amongst the ‘poorest’ in both Laos and Cambodia, although they live in one of the biologically richest regions in the world.

Today, development indicators define the places where Brao people live as being the ‘poorest’ parts of two of the ‘poorest’ countries in Asia: Laos and Cambodia. According to the United Nations Development Programme’s (UNDP) Human Development Report (2006), Cambodia is ranked 129th in the world in terms of the ‘Human Development Index’, a composite of various economic, health and social indicators, and the Lao PDR is ranked 133rd. Furthermore, 36 percent of Laos’ population
is considered to be ‘poor’,\textsuperscript{6} compared to 39 percent in Cambodia. Similarly, the World Development Report (2006), which emphasises macro-economic indicators more than the Human Development Index, states that 45 percent of the population of Laos is ‘poor’,\textsuperscript{7} compared to 36 percent in Cambodia.\textsuperscript{8} In both countries those living in rural areas are substantially poorer than urban dwellers (World Bank 2006). While breaking down the Human Development Index rankings in terms of individual parts would be useful for better understanding the conditions in each country, it would not be particularly productive for understanding the development situation of the Brao, as the Brao make up only very small percentages of the populations of Laos and Cambodia, and the conditions of the Brao are certainly quite different from those of the dominant social and ethnic groups in each country.

Unfortunately, there are no specific development statistics at the ethnic group level for Laos or Cambodia, but the provinces and districts dominated by the Brao in both Laos and Cambodia are considered to be amongst the ‘least developed’ or ‘poorest’ parts of both countries, even though, as we will see, ‘development’ has had a considerable impact on the Brao, both socially and spatially. Phou Vong district, in Attapeu province, for example, is considered to be amongst the forty-seven ‘priority poor districts’ in Laos (Chamberlain 2007). Similarly, Ratanakiri province is recognised as being amongst the poorest provinces in Cambodia (Ironside 2006) (Map 1.1).

\textbf{The Brao to Outsiders}

In many ways, the Brao fit many exotic stereotypes of the Euro-American. Historically, both men and women had long hair and pony tails, filed their front teeth and tattooed their faces and foreheads at puberty, and made large holes in their earlobes for inserting elephant tusk ‘plugs’. The men wore loincloths and carried crossbows and large knives, while the women wore multiple layers of necklaces, wrap around cloths, and generally went bare-breasted (Klein 1912; Baudenne 1913; Maurice 1941; Fiaasson 1961;

\textsuperscript{6} Poverty statistics in Lao vary considerably, and Chamberlain (2007) claims that presently Laos recognises 33 percent of the population to be poor (2002-3 survey), compared to 39 percent in 1997-8.
\textsuperscript{7} Based on survey results from 1993.
\textsuperscript{8} Based on survey results from 1997.
Map 1.1. The study area in southern Laos and northeastern Cambodia
Loi 2001). In fact, French observers even likened them to ‘Red Indians’ from North America. Taupin (1888: 54) wrote that the Brao had, “the wild appearance under which the redskin Indian is usually represented.” Similarly, the Resident of Attapeu, Antonin Baudenne (1913: 262) reported that, “Lové [Brao] and Kasseng have some points of resemblance with the Indians of America, and recent work on Atlantis allows us to suppose a common origin.” But of course, the Brao are far from being what researchers once referred to as ‘primordial people’, nor are they related to native North Americans, and certainly they did not originate in Atlantis!

After Laos and Cambodia gained independence from the French, people from both sides of the political spectrum encouraged the men to cut their hair short, and to change their appearance to conform to the majority. It was an era in which nationalism was paramount. Now, there are no Brao men with long hair, although some old men and women can still be found with tattooed faces, ground teeth, and earlobes with large holes, legacies of cultural markers when they were young.

Despite these changes, the Brao are frequently romanticised in various discourses, be it by tourism writers,9 travelers (Fiasson 1961) or indigenous rights activists/conservationists (see Anonymous 2000b). Ironside (2001: 7), for example, called the relationship between highlanders and the environment “a relationship of respect, duty, cooperation and recognition that the community and the individual well-being are closely connected with the well-being of the surrounding natural world.” Their half naked bodies, their gourd water bottles, their crossbows and impressive bush knifes, whose handles are crafted from bamboo roots, continue to give them an appearance that fits well with many people’s idea of ‘authentic indigenous peoples’. I must admit that I was initially attracted to the Brao as a result of these same sorts of essentialising stereotypes, but my ideas have changed considerably since first coming into contact with them. Over ten years of engagement with the Brao have opened my eyes to various realities. I have come to gain considerable respect for Brao people, many of whom I consider to be friends.

When considering ‘development’ and ‘progress’, the Lao and Khmer tend to look down on the Brao, but at other times these people are fascinated with them, as they are

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often associated with the exotic in their minds; they are archetypical for ‘Lao Theung’ or ‘Khmer Leu’ people (meaning ‘upper Lao’ and ‘upper Khmer’). In Cambodia, and especially in Laos, photos of typical Brao women, with large earlobe plugs and in full Brao attire, are probably the most common ‘minorities’ shown on postcards sold to tourists all over Laos, and these photos are also used on billboards and other documentation in Attapeu and Lao (Photo 1.2).

The anthropologist Grant Evans (1998) described an event that occurred in Vientiane in 1992 regarding teachers and students from the School of Fine Arts, who were ordered to put on a show about the ‘Lao Theung’. He pointed out that they dressed up as ‘Lave’ [Brao], apparently because they were considered to be the most typical ‘Lao Theung’. It appears that just as tourists look for the most typical ‘tribe people’ they can find, ethnic Lao people want to depict ‘true’ ‘Lao Theung’ people as exotically as possible. The Brao ‘look’ apparently becomes a proxy for all other ‘Lao Theung’ groups (provided that the costumes are made appropriate for ethnic Lao audiences). However, necessary adaptations must be made. Underwear is almost certainly worn, based on what I have seen in many depictions of ‘Lave’ people in public forums. While Evans (1998) did not comment on this point, I doubt that the students actually wore loincloths that left their bums visible.

Jacqueline Matras and the Brao

Jacqueline Matras is the anthropologist who conducted the first detailed ethnographic research on the Brao. As a student of the eminent French anthropologist, Georges Condominas, she studied the Brao village of Tuh Kandrom—presently in Taong commune, Kon Mum district, Ratanakiri province—between late 1966 and very early 1968, just prior to the rapid deterioration of the security situation in northeastern Cambodia (see Chapter 6).

Based on her work with the Brao, she published a book and a number of journal articles and book chapters (Matras & Martin 1972; Matras 1973; Matras-Troubetzkoy 1983).

See Chapter 3 for descriptions of ‘Lao Theung’ and ‘Khmer Leu’, which are terms used to describe Austroasiatic peoples in Laos and Cambodia respectively.

Jacqueline Matras first published on the Brao using her maiden name, but her most important work on the Brao was published after her first marriage, as Jacqueline Matras-Troubetzkoy (1983). Most recently, since her second marriage, she has published under the name Jacqueline Matras-Guin (1992).
1974a & b; 1975; 1978, 1979; 1980; 1983; Matras-Guin 1987; 1992). As a classical anthropologist and ethnographer, Matras provided some excellent detail about how the Brao spatially organised at different scales. As Christian Taillard (1984: 331) wrote, in a review of her book on the Brao, her work “attracts more particularly the attention of the geographer.” She was especially interested in how the Brao spatially organise, particularly at the household and village scales, and this important work laid out much of the groundwork for my own investigations.

Matras mentioned the impact that large rubber plantation development had on the Brao in Ratanakiri during the 1960s, a matter that I will elaborate on later (see Chapter 6). However, she was less interested in studying different forms of colonialism, or the details of how states have tried to ‘develop’ the Brao and socially and spatially reorganise them. Rather, she conducted an almost technical study of Brao spatial organisation. Individual agency or the influences of outside actors on Brao social and spatial organisation were secondary, as were local historical factors. Like most anthropologists of her time, she was primarily concerned with detailed and sometimes essentialising descriptions of how the Brao organised. Postcolonial theory had not yet penetrated deeply into academia, and questions of power were not her major concern.

As was often the case with classical ethnographic studies of single villages during this period, the community she studied became the de facto representative proxy for a large ethnic group with many members having quite different ways of living. At that time, few would have guessed that there would be so many differences between the places and people that she studied and most other Brao villages in Laos and even Cambodia. During that period social scientists were interested in trying to define particular ethnic groups ‘scientifically’, based at least partially on their linguistic and cultural attributes.

Without intending to devalue the important work done by Matras, my research comes from a very different perspective. Now, as pointed out by Cribb & Narangoa (2004), the preoccupation amongst those conducting ethnographic research is much more on recognising and contextualising differences, which are deemed to be inherent across and within ethnic groups. I am not only concerned with how the Brao might socially and spatially organise if left to their own devices, but also how outside actors, including
nation-states, development, and conservation organisations have tried to socially and spatially change the Brao over history. The Brao may generally live in more remote areas than most other peoples, but even they have been profoundly influenced by outside forces, ones that I conceptualise as being fundamentally colonial.

Another big difference between Matras' approach and mine is that while she studied just one village, my research is multi-sited, covering a large number of villages and all of the Brao sub-groups located in both Laos and Cambodia. This has allowed me to consider a secondary but important theoretical question related to my main inquiry. I am concerned with how the Brao in both countries have interacted with the national border that presently separates the Brao in Laos from those in Cambodia.

**My Main Arguments**

Many human geographers are keenly interested in colonialism and postcolonialism and the social and spatial processes associated with European colonialism and domination of other parts of the world (Gregory 2000b; Watts 2000; Sidaway 2000; Harris 2002; Jones & Phillips 2005; Kothari 2006). Although postcolonial geographies are diverse (Blunt & McEwan 2002), postcolonialism is most commonly perceived in geography as a "critical politico-intellectual formation that is centrally concerned with the impact of colonialism and its contestation on the cultures of both colonizing and colonized peoples in the past, and the reproduction and transformation of colonial relations, representations and practices in the present" (Gregory 2000b: 612). As important as it is to consider and trace the impacts of European colonialism on present circumstances, there is a serious problem with the concepts of both 'precolonialism' and 'postcolonialism' in the context of ethnic minorities such as the Brao, who inhabit the geographical margins of nation-states. In Brao spaces, the periods prior to 1893 are frequently considered to be 'precolonial' and those after 1954 are recognised as 'postcolonial', thus giving one the distinct impression that French colonial domination represents the only type of colonialism ever to affect the Brao. Nothing could be further from the truth. Colonialism amongst the Brao is more complicated and multi-faceted, and has spanned a much longer period of time than that typically represented as colonialism. Attempts by outsiders to socially and spatially dominate the Brao began long before the
arrival of the French, and have continued since the French were forced to formally abandon French Indochina. Those who adopted administrative control over Brao spaces following the departure of the French were not ‘native’ to the areas over which they gained control. Moreover, many of those with a certain level of administrative control over the same Brao spaces prior to the arrival of the French were not Brao.

Thus, the Brao do not give special emphasis to European colonial domination compared to the domination imposed on them by others. Nor do they conceive of colonialism as having begun in 1893 and having ended in 1954. For them, there is no precolonial or postcolonial, but rather only a series of colonialisms, or periods in which they were administratively dominated by various outsiders, the origins and goals of whom were somewhat different. All had the overall purpose to control the Brao and their spaces, at least at certain levels. These different forms of colonialism, as I perceive them, each with its own norms and rules, peculiarities and quirks, evoke different ‘group memories’ and historical anecdotes. For the Brao, there were the Khmer, Lao and Siamese colonialisms before the French, and Japanese, Vietnamese, American, and Lao and Khmer colonialisms. Apart from the racialising colonialism—which is common in Brao discourses—various colonialisms based on political ideologies can be further distinguished amongst which different brands of communist and non-communist positions can be identified. Even those espousing ‘development’ in the present day, including international aid agencies working through colonial governments, are considered to have particular power over the Brao that makes them yet another form of colonialism. As Derek Gregory (2004) has shown, colonialism is not just about the past. It continues to resonate in the present, albeit in different forms. So for this dissertation, I have chosen to adopt the Brao position that colonialism has occurred as a series of dominations, of which the French era is but one.

The Organisation of this Thesis

This dissertation is organised into nine chapters. This chapter and Chapter 2 introduce the research, with Chapter 2 being especially devoted to reviewing some of the theoretical underpinnings of the thesis, and presenting the research methods adopted for the study. Chapter 3 provides some important background about the Brao, including basic
information about Brao sub-groups, culture and livelihoods, and Brao relations with other ethnic groups. Chapter 4 provides a detailed description of how the Brao have historically organised themselves socially and spatially, and includes a look at seven scales of Brao spatial organisation and five broad categories of spatial taboos. Chapter 5 reviews the pre-French Khmer, Lao and Siamese periods, as well as the French period, all of which I theorise as being different forms of colonial domination. Chapter 6 considers the Brao in ‘postcolonial’ Laos and Cambodia respectively—or rather Laos and Cambodia under the influence of new forms of colonial domination—from the end of the French period up to the early 1990s, a period that brought on dramatic changes. Chapters 7 and 8 cover the early 1990s to the present, including new forms of colonialism heavily influenced by international development agencies and global processes intertwined with national and local discourses. The contemporary situation in Laos is covered in Chapter 7, and in Cambodia in Chapter 8. The overall conclusions of the study are presented in Chapter 9.

**Major Findings of this Dissertation**

The major findings of this dissertation relate to the links between different forms of colonialism and the social and spatial organisation of the Brao. Colonialisms involving different actors have varying social and spatial implications for marginalised people like the Brao, and they have different impacts on identities by affecting various things, including Brao territories and the places that are constituted with meaning by the Brao. They are also subject to influences by outside forces. Yet, the powers of colonial domination are never omnipotent, even if significant, and this thesis shows how nuanced forms of human agency, including resistance, negotiation and compliance, become an important part of the mix. We need to emphasise the importance of reorganising space in colonial projects, while recognising that colonial powers are never able to achieve total spatial dominance due to the agency of those dominated.

This dissertation also reveals how the Brao have made use of the international border between Laos and Cambodia—a state constituted space—to their own advantage over history, sometimes creating new Brao places of resistance in response. Brao people clearly had a sense of the importance of borders that divided up the landscape long before the arrival of the French. Their ability to almost immediately adapt to the creation of the
Lao-Cambodia border at the beginning of the 20th century clearly indicates this, as do other factors. The Brao did not live in borderless landscapes prior to the arrival of Europeans, even if Europeans did bring the idea of nation-states to the region. I argue that scholars have tended to overly emphasised the role of Europeans in introducing the concept of borders to the Brao and mainland Southeast Asia more generally.

Additionally, this study shows how the Brao historically organised socially and spatially, including indicating various scales of spatial organisation and the concomitant norms and rules, including spatial taboos that dictated how space was organised. It indicates how different colonial players have attempted to ignore Brao spatial systems as part of their overall goal of gaining control over space, including introducing deterritorialising and territorialising processes that involve the rescaling of space. Gaining control of space is always critical for colonial powers, especially nation-states, and this dissertation illustrates how this is often achieved, even if the task is difficult to impose and is frequently resisted. Finally, I encourage fellow researchers to investigate alternate systems of spatial organisation and rescaling efforts amongst other peoples, wherever they are found.
CHAPTER 2
Setting the Foundation

Introduction

In this chapter the theoretical underpinnings of my research are presented, including a review of the areas of scholarly theory that are of particular relevance. This dissertation’s thesis statement—which integrates ideas about colonialism, development, social and spatial change, identities, place, boundaries, scale, territorialisation, resistance and human agency—is introduced.

I then turn to research methods, explaining my eclectic approach to conducting this multi-sited study covering all eight Brao sub-groups, and people in two nation-states. This includes considering the benefits and pitfalls of the research methods, including mixing research with other ‘work’. The geographically wide, temporally deep, and topically broad approach to this research is introduced.

My Theoretical Pursuit

This study touches on a number of different theoretical ideas, of which the most important can be broadly grouped into five main areas: colonialism, development, scale, places and boundaries, and places of resistance. Some ideas about them are presented in this chapter. Identity issues, especially those related to ethnicity, are crucial to this dissertation. They are mainly discussed in Chapter 3, but in that identities are an important part of my overall thesis statement, they are touched on in this chapter.

The theoretical development of this thesis was not predetermined at the outset of the study, although I certainly had some theoretical ideas when I began. Instead, it was developed based on an iterative process that involved the collection of empirical data in the field, and my own enquiries into geographical theory.

Colonialism

Michael Watts, in the Dictionary of Human Geography (4th edition), defines colonialism as, “The establishment and maintenance of rule, for an extended period of time, by a sovereign power over a subordinate and alien people that is separate from the
ruling power” (2000a: 93). Colonisation, the physical settlement of people from the imperial centre to the colonial periphery, is frequently a part of colonialism, but is not always. Colonialism is, more fundamentally, characterised by political and legal domination, relations of economic and political dependence, imperial exploitation of colonies, and racially based inequality (Watts 2000a). In fact, it could be argued that many forms of colonialism are better characterised as types of imperialism, but even when direct colonisation is not involved, it is still often appropriate to use the term colonialism. It is clear that in present-day usage the meaning of colonialism goes well beyond its original link with the idea of colonisation. Michel Foucault’s ideas about the relationships between discourses and power are important for understanding how colonialism functions, as power over knowledge is fundamental for ensuring colonial domination, and the words or discourses used are crucial in struggles related to colonialism (Foucault 1972).

Watts (2000a) explains that colonialism is a variant or sub-set of imperialism, the latter term frequently being used more broadly to cover control exercised informally (via influence) as well as formal military control or economic leverage. Edward Said (1993: 9) defines imperialism as “The practice, the theory, and the attitudes of a dominating metropolitan center ruling a distant territory”. He believes that colonialism is almost always the consequence of imperialism, but involves the “implanting of settlements on distant territories.” For me, however, imperialism and colonialism do not only involve ‘distant territories’, but also involve groups gaining control over territories outside of the ones that the dominators control, but not necessarily ‘distant’. It seems that some have unnecessarily emphasised geographical distance when it comes to defining colonialism or imperialism. The understanding of the term imperialism is somewhat confused by Lenin’s 1916 use of the term to indicate the highest and last stage of capitalism (Lenin 1963). This double-meaning is one of the reasons why I describe the various sources of power that have tried to control the Brao as various forms of colonialism rather than various forms of imperialism.

Watts (2000a: 93) understands colonialism to be “unequal territorial relationships among states based on subordination and domination...typically associated with distinct forms of contemporary capitalism such as the emergence of monopolies and transnational
corporations.” As pointed out by Watts, and in the introduction of this chapter, colonialism is generally considered to be the subjection of non-European societies as a result of European expansion, organisation and rule, although Japanese and American colonialisms are frequently recognised (Watts 2000a). Moreover, as indicated by Gregory (2000b: 612-3), postcolonial studies—the inquiry of the impacts of colonialism on peoples in the past and its ramifications for people in the present—have typically been concerned with “the period between the sixteenth and twentieth centuries, which has been marked by the expansion and contraction of European empires, the consolidation of a capitalist world-economy and the formation of a colonial, colonizing modernity.”

Colonialism frequently includes different types of socio-cultural, religious or linguistic hegemonic control that are sometimes referred to as ‘cultural imperialism’. Although cultural imperialism is a term with various meanings (see, for example, Tomlinson 1991), it is mostly recognised as the practice of promoting, distinguishing, separating, or artificially injecting the culture or language of one nation or people onto another. While often considered to be a by-product of globalisation, and part of a larger trend in the conscious dissemination of American attitudes and values (Galeota 2004), the reality is that cultural imperialism occurs at many different scales, be it in relation to American influences on the world, Thai influences on ethnic Lao people, or Lao and Khmer influences on the Brao. While some like David Rothkop (1997) have argued that American cultural imperialism is actually contributing to a more stable world with fewer conflicts, by reducing differences between different peoples, a more homogenised world is no guarantee that people will be happier and there will be less conflict globally (Galeota 2004).

The difference between colonialism and other types of domination are not easy to pin down, but it seems that if we must draw a line in the sand to separate the two, the former is a specific form of dominance that involves two main aspects. The first is the use of state power—including military, legal and administrative forms of power—to dominate other people. The second is that colonialism always involves processes frequently referred to as territorialism, a process that Robert Sack (1986: 19) calls the “attempt by an individual or group to affect, influence, or control people, phenomena, and relationships by delimiting and asserting control over a geographic area.” Although
territorialisation occurs, according to Sack (1986), at various scales from the individual to the global, colonialism fundamentally involves territorialisation at the level of the state, as usefully illustrated by Vandergeest & Peluso (1995) in the case of Thailand. The imposition of new systems for organising territories is fundamental to gaining the kind of control that is important for colonialism, and inevitably takes place at the same time as processes of deterritorialisation, which involve attempts to erase previous systems of spatial organisation over landscapes (Goudineau 2000). A critical part of territorialisation is the rescaling of landscapes, which can occur through various means, of which map-making, and the imposition of various administrative boundaries, are amongst the most important. As Adebanwi (2007: 213) pointed out, the “struggle over territoriality is simultaneously struggle over identity, resources and power.”

All forms of colonialism involve devising systems for administrating and organising people, including forms of production, of which spatial aspects are important (Watts 2000a). For example, Ann Stoler (2002) has emphasized the importance of categorisation as a colonial strategy, including categorising landscapes. Gregory (2004) has indicated how geographical imaginatives are essential for colonialism, as they separate the ‘us’ from the ‘them’, and ‘their’ spaces from ‘ours’. The discourses surrounding these imaginatives are indeed performative, in that they affect the ways we interact. As Gregory (2004) has shown in relation to present-day colonialism in Iraq, Afghanistan and Palestine, colonial powers frequently follow a cycle of locating, opposing and casting out, with discursive strategies being crucial at all stages.

Although the age of colonialism is often considered to be over, Watts, like Gregory, recognise “modern colonialisms”, which involve the incorporation of alien territories “usually through violent conquest and plunder, into world systems” (Watts 2000a: 93). Watts has theorised three broad forms of modern colonialism: settler colonies; the colonisation of trade economies; and colonising concessions that involve transnational capital and frequently migrant labour. Abdel-Fadil (1989) has argued that the persistence of primary export production and dependent political elites linked to former European colonial powers manifest themselves through ‘perpetual neo-colonialism’ today. While neo-colonialist powers generally do not use military force to gain influence, they frequently manipulate economic, financial, and trade policies and
practices to dominate the less powerful. Immanuel Wallerstein’s World Systems Theory has been used to better understand the ways that neo-colonialism (see Wallerstein 1974; 1991). However, I am more interested in transcending the boundaries that demarcate nation states than is Wallerstein. 

Apart from neo-colonialism, which is often seen as involving sources of control from outside particular nation-states, there is ‘internal colonialism’, which is conceived of as coming from within single nation-states (Hechter 2007[1975]). However, I prefer not to use this term. As with some visions of neo-colonialism, it overly emphasises the idea of the nation-state, and becomes awkward when considered in relation groups like the Brao, who are situated in the margins of two nation-states.

As pointed out by Johan Galtung (1971), and subsequently by many others, imperial colonial domination frequently requires collaborators from within the dominated parties that support the colonial powers. These collaborators are frequently members of the elite amongst those being dominated, and one important element of maintaining colonial power is to create situations of political, economic and social dependence that help ensure that those elites remain loyal to colonial powers. This part of the colonial project is essential for various reasons, including for gaining up-to-date and relevant information, deflecting criticism of colonialism onto those working for colonial powers, and providing legitimacy to colonial powers through their proxies, many of whom are popular figures in their own societies.

As will become clear in later chapters, the various colonial powers that have dominated Brao spaces over history have all worked hard to attract and create dependencies amongst potential collaborators. At present, for example, education is used to foster political elites willing to espouse certain ideas fundamental to maintaining hegemonic control.

It has been important for colonial powers to foster hierachal systems amongst the historically egalitarian Brao (see Chapter 3) in order to create the elites required to help them maintain control, and they have done that in various ways, the most important being by establishing particular positions or titles so as to create the conditions necessary for those willing to collaborate with them to dominate the rest of the population. For example, the Lao and the Siamese appointed some Brao as ‘Phya’ (see Chapter 3), thus
giving them a position that raised them above the rest of the population, and made it possible for imperialistic tributary relations to become established. The French continued with this process by establishing 'Chuntop', 'Nai Kong', 'Chao Muang' and other administrative positions at various levels. Their designation was designed to uplift and create political and economic dependence amongst collaborators. Most recently, various government and political positions, such as district and provincial chiefs, have been used to support those collaborators amongst the Brao who help to ensure the maintenance of colonial power.

Although scholars have long inquired into the roles of colonialisms in shaping the world, the emergence of postcolonial studies in the 1980s and 1990s—with particular theoretical foundations, and an explicit interest in culture and what Derek Gregory calls the “epistemic violence” of colonialism—represented, according to Gregory (2000b: 613) a significant departure from previous historical studies. With its origins in literary and cultural studies—of which Edward Said’s 1978 critique of Orientalism is considered a seminal work—postcolonial studies are particularly concerned with closely and critically reading colonial discourse, emphasising the histories through which colonialisms move through in time and space, and focusing on the ways in which colonising and colonised societies are connected. Postcolonial studies emphasise that histories of the present need to be sensitive to the political implications of their construction (Gregory 2000b). However, as Sidaway (2000) has pointed out, there are many ‘postcolonialisms’ and the term does not mean the same thing to everyone.

In that my own inquiries fit well with the general theoretical framework mapped out by Gregory, my research can be broadly situated within postcolonial studies (see, also, Young 2003). However, as mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, I do not consider my inquiries to be only ‘postcolonial’, but rather about colonialisms of the past and present. I see colonialism from a broad perspective, including within it what some might better be called feudalism or simply imperialism. Following the advice of Jones & Philips (2005), I do not only pay attention to European colonialism and its results, but also ‘colonial’ periods that most refer to as ‘precolonial’ and ‘postcolonial’. So, within this framework there is neither precolonialism nor postcolonialism. There are just a
bunch of different kinds of colonialism, each with its own unique characteristics and social and spatial implications.

Crucially for this dissertation, my conceptualisation of colonialism reflects the view of the Brao. In fact, the Brao do not have a particular term for ‘colonialism’ in their own language, but they have borrowed the Lao term for government administrative control, ‘bok khong’, to describe the various players who have tried to administratively dominate Brao people and spaces over history. They do not have a special term for describing French government administrative control, as compared to other colonialisms, but they do see the French period as being different from others. For them, the French period was simply one of many periods when others have tried to ‘bok khong’ them. For the Brao, as for me, the precolonial, French, and postcolonial periods are all included in the same broad category, with each power being influenced by past powers.

In that colonialism frequently involves the introduction of particular types of modernising capitalism (Watts 2000a), this thesis, in examining colonialism, is also very concerned with ‘development’, an idea often linked to ‘modernisation’. It is the focus of the next section of this chapter.

Development

Development has a long and complex history. While some authors trace its origins back to the end of the Second World War, and particularly a speech made by US President Harry S. Truman on January 20, 1949 (see, for example, Sachs 1992b; Esteva 1992; Escobar 1995), others, like Cowen & Shenton (1995) believe that its origins are grounded in the early 19th century and the beginnings of industrial capitalism in Europe, which is a much more plausible argument, as the beginnings of the industrial revolution already ushered in many ideas about modern development that would become especially dominant after the Second World War. Certainly the European colonial administrators of the mid-19th and first half of the 20th century were interested in modernising notions of development. Moreover, even before them Christian missionaries were amongst the first modernisers outside of Europe and North America during the European colonial period. Cooper & Packard (1997) consider them to be the predecessors to development agencies.
Whether colonial administrators, traders or missionaries, Europeans hoped to justify their continued hold on power by offering 'progress' and 'development'. At the same time, those calling for independence used similar arguments to justify their emancipatory efforts to gain freedom from colonialism, claiming—as the Viet Minh did in French Indochina in the 1940s and early 1950s—that they could better deliver the modern development that the colonial powers had been keeping the people from achieving (cf. Cooper 1997). In a sense, what the Viet Minh were advocating was a particular type of colonialism-based variety of dependency theory. For them, some level of modernisation might be possible through remaining loyal to the colonial powers, but only through paying the heavy and unacceptable price of exploitation (cf. Peet 1999).

It is not, however, surprising that the contributors to Sachs', *The Development Dictionary. A Guide to Knowledge as Power* (1992a) trace the birth of development to 1949, as the years following the Second World War, especially the 1950-60s, were the heyday for modernisation theory, including evolutionism, the rational instead of superstitious, and the profane instead of the sacred (Cooper & Packard 1997). In addition, the end of the Second World War marked the rise of American global power, gaining advantage over the United Kingdom, and replacing ideas about colonialism with ideas about nationalism. Most Westerners firmly believed in nationalist modernisation during this period, and the new 'postcolonial' leaders, with their Western education and inherited ideas, and new ideas about nationalism, saw development as the way forward, regardless of whether they espoused capitalist or communist ideologies. The idea was that these new nations could be liberated through modernising development; that through development they could 'catch up'. Development was often framed in terms of transforming rural agrarian societies into urbanised industrial ones (McCaskill 1997). Maintaining control was not only justified in relation to the 'civilising mission', but critically, was promoted in the name of nationalism. As Stacey Pigg (1992) has pointed out, during this 'golden age of development' intellectuals and political elites became part of a worldwide community intent on classifying, analysing, and reforming indigenous social institutions, which were defined as being 'backward', 'village', or 'poor'. These modernist discourses of development and nationalism have always relied on images of the native 'Other' to legitimise the narratives of progress and civilisation that demarcate
places and populations as ‘targets’ of development (Gururani 2002). Additionally, at the national scale certain groups were considered to not meet national standards for development. This brought out majority-minority differences and through the development prism certain groups were seen as unacceptable and requiring change.

Within ‘development thought’ of the 1950s, the emphasis was on economic growth, the Gross National Product, and the supposed ‘trickle down’ effect, but in the 1960s more importance was given to the need for sound ‘development planning’ (McCaskill 1997). Still, the fundamental assumptions of modernisation theory were rarely questioned. Instead, the question was simply how best to achieve modernising development.

But there were important variations in different countries, as global development discourses became intertwined with local ideas about what constituted social improvement. Few simply accepted North-South models outright. They instead constructed their own modernising hybrid development discourses (Cooper & Packard 1997), but still, few seriously questioned the benefits of modernisation.

The 1970s and 1980s brought some initial challenges to modern development theory. Concerns regarding the negative environmental impacts of development increased, and new criticisms were launched against the overemphasis of development planners on macro-economic issues, including structural adjustment. Critics argued that more needed to be done on the social or human side of development. However, the tenets of modernisation remained largely unscathed, both within the political left and right. New ideas about ‘basic human needs’ and ‘participatory development’ became increasingly popular. However, rationality remained the basis for development theory (McCaskill 1997).

Beginning in the 1980s, and especially in the early 1990s, two quite distinct sets of critics emerged intent on challenging the modernising developmentalist framework more fundamentally: ultramodernism and postdevelopmentalism. Both of these critiques agree that most development projects have failed, but apart from that they have little in common (Cooper & Packard 1997). The first states that economic theorists are largely right about the laws of economics. Therefore, there is just economics, not development economics. This perspective favours market liberalisation, and sees the appropriate role
of government as ensuring ‘good governance’ and promoting ‘market-conforming’ institutions (see, for example, Lal 1985). The second critique came from a very different perspective and group of scholars. Critical of the whole idea of modernisation, their critique has been particularly important within development studies. Heavily inspired by Michel Foucault’s (1991 [1978]) ideas about governmentality, these postdevelopmentalists, led by Arturo Escobar, Wolfgang Sachs, Gustavo Esteva, Vandana Shiva and others, wanted to de-centre and upend the whole idea of modernising development. Seeing development discourses as ‘technical performances’ that needed to be deconstructed and exposed, for them development was “a perception which models reality, a myth which comforts societies, and a fantasy which unleashes passions” (Sachs 1992b: 1). The theoretical underpinnings of their positions are well represented in the following passage written by Esteva (1992: 7),

“In order for someone to conceive the possibility of escaping from a particular condition, it is necessary first to feel that one has fallen into that condition. For those who make up two-thirds of the world’s population today, to think development—of any kind of development—requires first the perception of themselves as underdeveloped, with the whole burden of connotations that this carries.”

Arturo Escobar, in his influential book, Encountering Development: the Making and Unmaking of the Third World (1995), saw development practices as having resulted in Western (technocratic) control over people and practices in the ‘Third World’. Showing his particular interest for development discourses, and the deployment of development through particular practices, he launched a scathing attack against the epistemological and ontological basis for modernisation, including encouraging people to think outside of the box of modernisation theory. He proposed a paradigm shift, in order to create the space possible for local people to determine their own alternative development objectives, since development creates spaces where only certain things can happen, or even be said or imagined.

Crucial to many ‘postdevelopmentalists’—as this group of development critiques came to be known—has been an emphasis on loosening the power of so-called ‘Western knowledge’, and reasserting the importance of other experiences, epistemologies and
ways of knowing. For them, the alleged superiority of Western thought has been as much a problem as anything else (see Shiva 1988; Sachs 1992a; Escobar 1995; Crush 1995).

Challenging both those on the political left and right, these postdevelopmentalists—including scholars interested in postmodernism, poststructuralism and feminism—have made some important contributions to development studies, essentially arguing that ‘development’ is nothing more than an apparatus of control and surveillance, and that it should be totally dismantled (Shiva 1988; Sachs 1992b; Esteva 1992; Escobar 1995). Believing that the façade of modern development had finally been exposed, Wolfgang Sachs (1992a: 1) wrote, “This epoch is coming to an end. The time is ripe to write its [development’s] obituary.”

But while modernisation theory in its purest form has largely been discredited within the social sciences, Gillian Hart (2001) has pointed out that modernisation is far from dead. Indicative of this is the large amount of literature critical of what she calls “the nihilism of post-development” (2001: 654; see, also, Blaikie 2000). Modernisation remains the dominant paradigm within development, and like many others, Hart criticises postdevelopmentalists for romanticising the local.

Similarly, Richard Peet (1999) suggests that the enduring nature of modernising ideas—despite the brutal critiques that have been leveled against it over the years—demonstrates that there is more to modernisation than postdevelopmentalists have acknowledged. Trying to move in a different direction—one that recognises both postdevelopment critiques and the enduring nature of development—he advocates ‘critical modernist development’, an approach that he defines as taking seriously objections to the modern enterprise of development, while still finding realised potentials in ‘progress’ and ‘modernity’. Most recently, Sidaway (2007: 355), in his useful review of postdevelopment, states that “development retains significant power to shape national imaginations and strategies”, although he argues that sub- and transnational spaces, nodes and networks are being increasingly superimposed over national development discourses.

Heavily influenced by Foucault, but not exactly a postdevelopmentalist, James Ferguson’s (1994[1990]), *The Anti-Politics Machine*. “Development,” Depoliticization, and Bureaucratic Power in Lesotho, opens up the possibility of an ethnographically and
historically situated analysis of development institutions, where the ability to deny or provide funds intersects with the capability to define what kinds of knowledge are, or are not, acceptable. However, unlike hard-line postdevelopmentalists, he is less interested in critiquing development ideologies per se than illustrating how modern development works. His main point is that "the institutionalized production of certain kinds of ideas about Lesotho has important effects, and that the production of such ideas plays an important role in the production of certain sorts of structural changes" (1994: xv). Although his work is important for showing how ethnography can be useful for understanding how governmentality works in development, the monolithic nature of the forms of power that he presents—which severely limits the role of those being developed in altering the way development is implemented—remains problematic.

Tania Li (1999a) presents a useful critique of Ferguson’s work. She fundamentally agrees that Foucault’s framework for understanding governmentality is an accurate guide to development as a project of rule. More recently, she has developed this idea, calling it ‘rendering technical’, which includes problematicising so as to fit with technical solutions, and then rendering it technical so as to sidestep the politics involved (Li 2007). She believes, however, that human agency has a much greater affect on the practices of development than Ferguson and many postdevelopmentalists have recognised, and she suggests that negotiations and compromise are more important in transforming ‘the power from above’ than is often acknowledged (see Li 1999a), a position also argued by Mark Bevir in relation to Foucault’s work (1999). Similarly, Pigg (1992) and Gupta (1995; 1998) are not convinced by the alleged monolithic abilities of the state to control marginalised people, instead believing that people are frequently able to re-appropriate external interventions creatively, rather than just being purely subjected from the powers above.

Donald Moore (2000) believes that far too often contemporary analyses eclipse the micro-politics through which global development discourses are refracted, redesigned, and sometimes subverted in certain localities, and that it is too often assumed that development rigidly determines rural politics. He feels that such assumptions divert from the investigation of how particular interventions articulate with deeper histories of government attempts to regulate and discipline landscapes and livelihoods. The
specificity of these struggles suggests to him that there is not just one totalising development discourse, but many. For him, such a unitary formulation conceals important spatial, historical, and cultural differences, and he believes that there is often a tendency to downplay how contemporary global processes layer over previous historical connections, particularly those forged through capitalism and colonialism. Much like Li (1999a), Moore (2000) sees the value of a Gramscian perspective (see Gramsci 1971), in which hegemony is not thought of as a monolithic or finished product, but as problematic, contested and embedded in a continuing struggle.

Moore’s comments about the importance of history are crucial for my own research, as the historical lenses that are used to see certain development interventions certainly greatly affect one’s sense of reality. Fentress & Wickham’s (1992) perspective on the role of politics and struggle in the production of memories and histories is critical in this regard, as memory is important for refracting visions of history. As Gaston Gordillo (2002b) has demonstrated, memory and history are critical for the production of places associated with development, such as places of poverty.

For those geographers with a specific interest in Southeast Asia, Jonathan Rigg is one of the most vocal critics of postdevelopment ideas. While generally appreciative of the contributions of discourse analysis and other poststructuralist tools, he takes a more normative approach to development than those already mentioned, and argues that the deconstruction work and the building of Orientalist theories by many postdevelopmentalists do not stand up to the empirical evidence in Southeast Asia. He writes,

“Reading the literature of post-developmentalists, there is an almost constant refrain that the objects of development must be viewed from within, in terms of their cultural and historical contexts...And yet, perversely, in much of the post-developmental literature there seems to be little understanding of local culture and history” (1997: 34).

For me, Foucault’s ideas about governmentality, and those of postdevelopmentalists more generally, remain inspiring, but like Abrams (1998), Li (1999a), Moore (2000) and others, Escobar’s and Ferguson’s arguments seem useful but incomplete. Certainly, we should remain critical of modernisation processes, and the development discourses that justify modernisation, but in that there are many types of
development, and many different objects or ‘targets’ of development, the importance of human agency, negotiation and compromise should not be understated, and the power of development should not be overstated. Certainly local history, memory and context are critical, as will be demonstrated in this dissertation.

More in line with Rigg (1997), Peet (1999) and Hart (2001), modernising ideas about development continue to thrive, including in Laos and Cambodia. In fact, the dichotomy drawn by Escobar between technocratic Western development efforts and ‘local’ conceptions of development seems too clear-cut. In many cases it appears that the local people are more convinced about the benefits of modern development than many of the developers themselves, a point that is often not acknowledged by postdevelopmentalists. Cowen & Shenton (1995) have pointed out that the use of ‘Western’ discourses of development has generally ignored the domestic use of these same or similar discourses and practices institutionalised in the West, a position emphasised by Pigg (1992). It is true that the pervasiveness and hegemonic nature of development discourses in recent history has led to the adoption of western development ideas amongst those ‘targeted by development’, but the reality remains that many people desire modernising forms of development, but certainly not always all aspects of it.

It should not be surprising that many of the ‘poor’ do want better access to clean water, improved means of transportation, and access to public education and improved health care, despite all the problems that come with the provision of these services. For many, it is not so much that they do not desire modernity, but rather that they want to achieve it on their own terms. Therefore, as useful as the critiques leveled by postdevelopmentalists are in exposing the processes that have led people to want modern development, if we are really to take the advice of Escobar seriously, and open our minds up to the ideas of those in the Third World, we cannot dismiss the modernising ideas of local people without being as hypocritical as those who the postdevelopmentalists have fervently attacked.

What we can end up saying is that ‘development’ is a contentious concept. There is often a troubling divide between what Western developers think development entails and how those people affected by it understand the ensuing processes to mean. Certainly examining development discourses is a useful way of better understanding how
development is perceived and practiced by different actors (Grillo 1997), as the words used for describing development can provide many important insights.

This dissertation contributes to what Sarah Radcliffe (2006) and Michael Watts (2006) call the ‘cultural turn’ in development studies, a time in which the role of culture—including those of developers and the ethnic minorities they are increasingly working with—has come to the forefront of development studies, in some ways even surpassing the dominance of economic rationality in development that reigned supreme over the second half of the 20th century. This cultural turn in development does not represent the same sort of challenge to development as initiated by postdevelopmentalists, but there is instead a sense of understanding that culture is critical for making development more sensitive and appropriate. Furthermore, today many are searching for cultural alternatives to the development failures of the past. Here, no magic potions are offered for resolving the many complex issues surrounding questions related to the role of culture in development, but culture is a critical and pervasive element of development, and this thesis does elaborate on how development and culture are intimately connected with places and identities.

Finally, it is necessary to briefly explain how I see development in relation to colonialism, since both are key concepts for this dissertation and are closely linked. Essentially, I see colonialism as an overall framework of domination, with its administrative and territorial implications, whereas development is frequently an important tool used by colonial powers to achieve their objectives, even if the subjects of colonialism sometimes appropriate development in ways that colonial powers do not intend. Watts (2000b) usefully mentions that the ‘colonial world’ was reconfigured into the ‘developing world’ in the 1930s and especially after the Second World War, thus indicating the transition from ‘colonial’ to ‘postcolonial’. However, in this dissertation the transition is blurred, with the ‘developing world’ and ‘development’ more generally being seen as fundamentally linked with colonialism, albeit different forms.
Development and State Spaces

This thesis will not attempt to engage in all the possible links between development and space, as there are many, but there is one aspect that is of particular relevance: the question of state and non-state spaces.

James Scott, in his influential book, Seeing like a State (1998), argues that the most tragic episodes of state-initiated social engineering originate in the pernicious combination of four elements, all of which are deemed necessary for what he calls “a full-fledged disaster”. The first is the administrative ordering of nature and society, or transformative state simplifications, including simplifying space (eg. creating geometric order through organising settlements as grids). Second is what he calls high-modernist ideology, a strong faith in science and technology. When the first two are joined to an authoritarian state that is willing and able to use the full weight of its coercive power to bring these high-modernist designs into being, the situation becomes, in his view, dangerous. The fourth is linked to the third: a prostrate or apathetic civil society that lacks the will or capacity to resist these plans (Scott 1998).

Scott (1998) makes the case that large-scale capitalism is just as much an agency of homogenisation, uniform grids, and heroic simplification as the state, with the difference being that, for capitalists, simplifications must lead to profits. He argues that today global capitalism is perhaps the most powerful force for homogenisation, whereas the state may be, in some cases, the defender of local difference and variety.

Tania Li (2001) critiques Scott’s dichotomy between ‘state spaces’, where people and places are rendered ‘legible’, or bureaucratically visible, through technologies such as maps and census, and ‘non-state spaces’, which he locates at places farther from state control. Li argues that these bold strokes of contrast require a more refined analysis. Using her own ethnographic research from Indonesia, she shows how the supposedly non-state spaces of the hills of Sulawesi have not been unaffected by external powers, and she demonstrates how the supposedly ‘state spaces’ in cities and lowlands are not totally under the thumb of the state either.

Scott talks about ‘non-state spaces’ and highlights resistance there, including fleeing and evading by the inhabitants to avoid state control (taxes, conscription, debt bondage, etc.). Sometimes people’s life ways are formed not outside state agendas but
relationally, in and through them. Ironically, it is this elaboration or marginality that regional officials mistake for an isolated, primitive tradition. Even in illegible spaces, one cannot assume resistance and a desire for isolation. Virtually all spaces are somehow influenced by the state. Even places of resistance, spaces where agents of the state have never been, are not ‘non-state’ spaces, as they have been created in response to the state. They may be places of resistance, but they are fundamentally tied to state spaces. Conversely, it could be argued that ‘state spaces’ are constituted by ‘non-state spaces’ (Scott, pers. comm. 2007). My sense is that the dichotomy is not particularly useful. This is a theme that will be developed further later in this chapter, and more broadly in this dissertation.

Scale

One concept that is of relevance to this dissertation is ‘scale’, which Neil Smith (2000: 724) defines as “one or more levels of representation, experience and organization of geographical events and processes.” Smith breaks scale down into three discernable meanings in geography: *cartographic scale*, which relates to the scale of maps, and is not of particular concern in my study; *methodological scale*, which is closely related to cartographic scale; and *geographic scale*, which refers to the different dimensions of specific landscapes, a critical aspect of this study with regard to the spatial organisation of the Brao (see Chapter 4).

Geographic scale can be, as pointed out by Smith (2000), conceptual, and this conceptualisation of scale is perhaps the most important way in which scale is applied in this study. Sally Marston (2000) has usefully pointed out that there is nothing ‘natural’ about the scaling of space, even though Smith (2000) points out that there is a certain logic to the spatial scaling associated with certain types of capitalist expansion, even if Smith might be going a little far in calling it “inherent” (2000: 725). Marston’s contention that spatial scales are always socially constructed fits with my theoretical framework and empirical findings. Thus, spaces are subject to ‘rescaling’, which involves altering the way we conceptualise the boundaries that constitute different levels of spatial organisation. For example, even scales that are now seen by many as being pre-given, such as the scale of the nation-state, are actually quite recent creations in mainland
Southeast Asia (Winichakul 1994). This idea suggests that scales do not necessarily have to be set at particular or equal intervals, but can be divided up in whatever ways people want. Scales are impermanent, and as will be demonstrated in this dissertation, are subject to reorganisation and even social engineering by hegemonic forces, including government administrators, military powers, or development agencies.

The idea of scale is central to the concept of ‘place making’. “‘Scaling places’—the establishment of geographical differences according to a metric of scales—etches a certain order of empowerment and containment into the geographical landscape” (Smith 2000: 726).

Most recently, however, Marston et al. (2005) have sparked debate about the fundamental usefulness of the concept of scale. They propose “to eliminate scale as a concept in human geography” (2005: 416) and replace it with a different ontology, “one that so flattens scale as to render the concept unnecessary” (2005: 416). The details of this debate are complicated and it is beyond the scope of this dissertation to try to seriously enter the fray, but their paper has stirred interest among geographers, leading to various critiques (see Collinge 2006; Hoefle 2006; Jonas 2006; Escobar 2007; Leitner & Byron 2007) and a response from Jones et al. (2007). It is, however, worth pointing out that there is far from any consensus on this matter. While this debate is important, it is clear that most geographers are not quite ready to totally abandon scale, although the concept has been usefully de-centred. Even Arturo Escobar, who is more sympathetic to the ‘flat ontology’ argument than most, writes that, “Whether all of this amounts to a complete overhaul of the notion of scale, I think, remains an open question” (2007: 106). I continue to find scale to be a useful heuristic tool, even if the debate has indicated to me that, at least, we should be wary of using it in essentialising ways. But I will leave the fate of scale in geography to those theorists who are better equipped to resolve this matter.

**Places and Boundaries**

**Places**

Places in my understanding, are socially constructed landscapes or other types of spaces that have been constituted with meaning by particular people at certain times, and
at various scales, and are closely linked to identities (see, also, Agnew 2002). At one level, I take the realist view that space does exist at a physical level, based on atoms, proteins, genes, etc. However, this point is not of particular interest to human geographers today, and I will not spend any more time on it. What is of interest to me is how places are created and constituted socially. The physical side of space never fully defines places; they are always spaces with social meaning. For me, place making has a lot to do with choosing what scales to use in defining particular places, as scale determines the parameters of particular places, and is certainly critical in terms of their meanings. In that scales are fundamentally socially constructed (Marston 2000), there are no limits to how places can be conceived and organised. In an example from Nepal, Pigg show how people living in villages mold international development discourses, based on two scales of social order that combine to make village places important. On the one hand, there is the local order, with its own specificity, and on the other hand there is the national order with its centres and peripheries of development. There are other ‘orders’ at play when it comes to place making, such as districts, provinces, regions or the global. The possibilities are limitless.

I believe that four things are necessary to produce and reproduce particular places. First, places are always socially constructed, as already indicated above. Space can exist without the social, but places cannot. As Yi-Fu Tuan (1977: 6) puts it, “‘Space’ is more abstract than ‘place’. What begins as undifferentiated space becomes place as we come to know it better and endow it with value.” Places take on new meanings based on various factors, including, but not limited to culture, society, economics and politics. Critically, the spatial dimensions of places shift as easily as their meanings are transformed. Because they are socially constructed, places are not permanent; they change with the social.

Second, places are given meaning through events that have transpired, or are believed to have occurred, in particular geographical spaces (Tuan 1977). The distinction between the representation of space (‘the conceived’) and the spaces of representation (‘the lived’) is one drawn from the work of Henri Lefebvre in the Production of Space (1991). As Sachs (1992c) points out, places are imbued with experiences, both from the past and the present. Therefore, places are fundamentally constituted through history, be
it ancient or very recent, and history is affected by politics and refracted through memory (Gordillo 2002b; 2004). If there was no history or memory, there could not be places. Places may be established due to one or more events that took place in a particular space, but the meanings and even the geographical limits of those places can be transformed due to recent events, or past events that have gained increased meaning for whatever reasons. Therefore, places frequently become spaces of overlapping histories and contested meaning, based on the different emphasis put on particular events and their relationships to other events and places. For example, a Buddhist temple can represent a place of spiritual strength to some, but if someone happened to be murdered in the temple, the relatives and friends of the victim would probably not view the same place in terms of its spiritual strength.

Brao people frequently give meaning to particular places where rock formations are believed to be petrified objects once used by the mythical figure named Groong (see Chapter 3 for more information about ‘meut mooan Groong Yoong’). Thus, the Brao have constituted these spaces with particular meaning; they are places of importance to them; spaces where they believe events have occurred. However, these same rock formations may be meaningless to ethnic Lao people who come across them. To them, adjacent rapids may, instead, represent important places, due to certain events or legends that constitute those places with meaning. Thus, the same general spaces, even if their boundaries are not the same, overlap or represent multiple, although perhaps related, places.

In theory, there are no limits to the potential for different possible meanings for the same physical spaces, even if they do not overlay each other perfectly. Thus multiple conceptions of place can cover the same spaces, which are constituted by individuals or different identity groups, whether based family, villages, classes, genders, religions or ethnicities.

Third, places can only have meaning in relation to other places, whether they are adjacent or far away. Sacred places are only meaningful when contrasted in peoples’ minds with profane places, and Brao places only have meaning when compared to non-Brao places, and so on. Places are not only defined by clear-cut dichotomies, as could be read into the above. Instead, places may be constituted by more relative differences. It is
possible to have strongly Brao places, weaker Brao places, or even very weak Brao places. However, the possibilities go well beyond this, and reach the limits of our imagination.

Fourth, places cannot exist without boundaries. Places can only exist in relation to other places, and therefore to be meaningful there must be boundaries between them. This indicates that places can exist at various scales (Tuan 1977). However, there are not only physical boundaries, although they often symbolise the margins of particular places, or even physically prevent the movement between one place and another (e.g. the Berlin Wall during the Cold War). For the Brao, rivers and streams often constitute tangible physical boundaries between different spaces, and as will become clear in Chapter 4, they have often been used by the Brao to demarcate village territories, thus acting as both symbols and tangible markers of these places.

Boundaries can be both physical and conceptual, as pointed out by Deborah Pellow (1996). Conceptual boundaries are constructed and maintained through all kinds of processes, and take on various forms. Some kinds of boundaries may be strong for one aspect, but porous for another. Just as there is not just one kind of place, there is not just one kind of boundary. For example, conceptual borders frequently constitute 'spirit forests'. People have an idea that certain forested places have special spiritual meaning. Sometimes physical markers, like particular landscapes, provide people with a sense that they are entering a spirit forest, but in other cases conceptual markers are critical, including those conceived in mental maps, and which are controlled at virtual checkpoints (Migdal 2004). Furthermore, boundaries are often fuzzier, wider, or wavier, than lines on Cartesian maps, and may vary from person to person, so that one has a sense that he or she is gradually crossing the boundary, moving from peripheral spaces towards their cores, and at a particular point the person has the sense that a threshold has been crossed, however tentative and conditional the boundary may be. Illustrative of this, there is not a particular physical border that tells the Brao that they have entered the spirit forest on Haling and Halang mountains, located along the border between Laos and Cambodia. However, they feel like the most powerful part of this place is the peak of the mountain. Therefore, as they walk up the mountain, they are progressively crossing the boundary separating the sacred from the profane, until they have a sense—and this sense
differs between individuals and social groups—that they have entered the spirit forest. Similarly, the Brao have certain village territory boundaries, as explained in Chapter 4, but they often only apply for swidden agriculture fields, and not necessarily for hunting, fishing, or the collection of forest products. However, as Benno Teschke (2003) has pointed out, sometimes boundaries can also be definitely demarcated, such as in the case of capitalist property claims, immigration controls, etc., and thus are associated with particular kinds of social development, often linked to certain types of territorialisation.

Doreen Massey (1993) provides a useful discussion about ‘time-space compression’, following the terminology introduced by David Harvey (1989). The idea is that people’s senses of space are expanding, as travel becomes more possible, and the movements of capital become easier. She critiques those with Marxist leanings, like Harvey, for attributing the expansion of our world solely to ‘capital’, without adequately considering the many other factors at play. Crucially, Massey points out that social factors are frequently inadequately considered in relation to notions of time-space compression and place. For example, not everyone has the same freedom of movement, or the same access to the means of communication (e.g. refugees). But contra Harvey (1989), Massey believes that this sense of time-space compression, in which people have become much more mobile, able to easily communicate with others far away, and thus maintain social relationships, does not necessarily lead only to insecurity, although that is one possibility.

Searching for “an adequately progressive sense of place”, Massey (1993: 64) theorised that places are not just produced based on inward looking ideas, but also global connections. Secondly, she argued that places are not just based on single identities, but are flexible and certainly not static. These ideas support my view that places are not just produced in isolation but are a product of relationships to other places, either near or far, and that they are socially constructed, multiple, overlapping—are constituted by history, either recent or ancient—and are constantly shifting, in terms of their meanings and dimensions. Thus, various factors congeal to produce possibilities for place production.

One apparent point of difference between my approach and Massey’s is that she does not believe that boundaries are required for the production and reproduction of places, and that places are not enclosures with clear insides and outsides. In the way she
appears to use the concept of boundaries as relatively definite lines that divide (Massey 1993), the key here is not how we view places but rather how we view boundaries. My sense is that boundaries are generally much more flexible, permeable, fuzzy and broad, similar to what are sometimes referred to as ‘frontiers’, even if there are particular instances when boundaries are quite definitively demarcated, thus making them different from frontiers. But overall, my view of boundaries fits much better with Massey’s notion of relations between places than is initially apparent. In the end she is also talking about expanding the different scales possible. For her, “what gives a place its specificity is not some long internalized history but the fact that it is constructed out of a particular locus” (Massey 1993: 66).

More recently, however, Massey (2005) has shifted her views more from advocating for a progressive or global sense of place to an even more anti-essentialist position that finds nothing substantial to separate the idea of space from place. In other words, both place and space are fundamentally socially constructed. My sense is that theoretically, in this postmodern and poststructural world, this is probably true, but considering the ways that most people discursively use and understand the two terms, there is a difference between them, with places being associated with more of an emotional sense of belonging or attachment.\(^{12}\) This is certainly the sense one gets for certain types of places, like the ‘home’ (see Porteous 1989), and the destruction of these special places, called ‘domicide’ by Porteous & Smith (2001). Tuan (1977: 154) mentions the important links between ‘place’ and ‘home’, and comments that, “This profound attachment to homeland appears to be a worldwide phenomenon.”

Arturo Escobar (2001) understands places to be socially constituted through the experience of a particular location with some measure of groundedness (even if unstable), and like me he continues to believe that they are defined by their connections to everyday life and certain types of boundaries, even if they are quite permeable and connected to everyday life. Escobar usefully points out that current scholarship on place tends to emphasise the production of places by capital and global forces, based on political economy, rather than the cultural construction of places, or in other words, how places are given meaning in various social contexts. Similarly, Duncan (2000: 582) defines

\(^{12}\) This is a view shared by others, such as Cole Harris (pers. comm. 2007).
places as being “bounded settings in which social relations and identity are constituted,” with places being either officially recognised geographical entities or “more informally organized sites of intersecting social relations, meanings and collective memory.”

While the concept of place remains hotly contested (see Duncan 2000), here I am interested in how places with particular intimate meanings are produced and reproduced by the Brao, either at the individual or group level, and at various scales, and how those places are given meaning. I am also interested in how places are destroyed—in the spirit of Doug Porteous' work (Porteous 1989; Porteous & Smith 2001)—either by the Brao or others, including those involved in ‘development’, but also those engaged in the practice of war. Because places are constituted by meaningful human activities, and thus require specific approaches based on particular places, they do not fit particularly well with universalist development, and thus have often been targeted for destruction by colonial administrators, developers and other globalising forces, who intend to replace them with ‘space-centred values’, which are intended to be global in scope and to not hold the same sort of personal attachments compared to ‘place’. They are accessible globally rather than only being open to those with particular histories involving those spaces (Sachs 1992c).

**Boundaries**

As already mentioned, boundaries are a fundamental requirement for the creation of places. However, there are many kinds of boundaries. Oddly, the literature is frequently divided into two major areas. Deborah Pellow (1996) and her colleagues write about the physical and especially the conceptual boundaries that are produced and reproduced through a range of scales of spaces—especially intimate scales—giving those spaces meaning. They are not bounded to any particular scales, however they may be conceived. In this sense, the work of Frederic Barth (1969) and his colleagues regarding the social boundaries drawn between different ethnic groups falls broadly into this tradition, although they were specifically interested in the conceptual boundaries that exist between different peoples, including what those boundaries produced, how they are represented, and how they change over time. Similarly, Pierre Bourdieu’s (1979) investigation into the physical and conceptual boundaries within houses, based on
cultural aspects, fits well into this category, as do Li’s (1999a) observations regarding the boundaries that exist between lowlanders and uplanders in Sulawesi, Indonesia.

However, there are scholars who are particularly interested in the administrative boundaries created for defining nation-states, and the international borders that are created as a result. Newman & Paasi (1998) point out that international political boundaries have dominated inquiries into the question of boundaries within political geography. Although academics interested in national borders are frequently concerned with similar sorts of processes of social construction and the constituting of meaning pursued by Pellow (1996), they tend to limit their pursuits to considering just the type of borders that divide up nation-states. In other words, their focus on international boundaries, including the processes associated with their production and reproduction, is on how they are constituted with meaning, including their effect on various types of identities, of which ethnicity is frequently important (see, for example, Miles 1994; Knezevic 1998; Wilson 2002; Sturgeon 2005). The work of Hasting Donnan and Thomas Wilson and their colleagues are particularly notable with regard to their focus on international borders between nation-states (Wilson & Donnan 1998; Donnan & Wilson 2001). In the context of mainland Southeast Asia, the work of Thongchai Winichakul (1994) with regard to the creation of the borders of Thailand falls into this category, although some of his more recent work has looked at other types of social boundaries, such as those involving ‘Others’ in the Thai context (Winichakul 2000).

Some authors have, however, considered both intimate boundaries and international boundaries in the same studies. This is not surprising considering the close links between the two (Newman & Paasi 1998; Migdal 2004). Here, too, both international boundaries between the nation-states of Laos and Cambodia, and also the various scales of place production, including attempts to impose different conceptual and physical boundaries on the Brao, are of interest.

**Places of Resistance**

It is now necessary to consider what some scholars call ‘geographies of resistance’ (Pile & Keith 1997), since that is a significant theme of this thesis. But it goes beyond locating places of resistance. It looks at how those places are produced and
reproduced, as well as dismantled and destroyed. Furthermore, it seems to me that one cannot really understand places of resistance without considering other types of places, such as places of compliance, places of accommodation, or even places of support. I am interested in how the Brao have responded to attempts to socially and spatially reorganise them, including how particular places of resistance are constituted in response to the efforts of various powers through history. But without understanding other types of places constituted in response to the efforts of others, there would be little to compare with places of resistance. What makes those places different from other types of places? Do people resist differently to the state as compared to companies or other non-state players? Do they create different sort of places in response to different players?

James Scott, in his groundbreaking book, *Weapons of the Weak. Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (1985) provides some useful tools for looking at resistance, compared to previous Marxist-influenced ways that tended to see people as either being docile or politically aware and actively resisting in very visible and sometimes violent ways. He points out how those being oppressed often exhibit forms of resistance, even if they are unwilling or unable, due to their vulnerable or even precarious situations, to be vocal objectors. These everyday forms of resistance, and their hidden transcripts, are usually not very radical, and often take the form of ‘foot-dragging’, stealing, minor forms of sabotage, and other subtle or ‘safe’ forms of resistance. Scott see peasants not so much as docile and accepting of oppression, but rather as conscious of their plight and willing to resist in certain small ways, even if only symbolic and not posing any serious threat to their circumstances, but offering relatively safety. His follow-up idea about the ‘hidden transcripts’ of resistance is also very useful, and has greatly expanded possibilities for understanding certain types of resistance (Scott 1990). However, Hansen & Stepputat (2001) caution against the tendency to attribute every mundane social act as being somehow resistance to the state. Instead, they suggest that we need to “listen to and record the discourses, the organisation, and the context of that which from a distance appears as resistance. The result will inevitably be more perplexing and unclear but also more interesting” (2001: 34).

As Hansen & Stepputat (2001) have usefully pointed out, resistance remains a very opaque term despite its enormous literature. Resistance, in fact, can come in many
forms, and the types of resistance that develop are often highly dependent on the nature of the state doing the oppressing. Resistance to most is a category and a type of social practice that cannot be understood or presupposed outside of historical context (see, for example, Gordillo 2003; 2004). Yet, there is something universal and transhistorical in the way resistance is often conceptualised and assumed. This has been true of much Marxist scholarship but applies to contemporary work of a poststructuralist nature, inspired among other things by Foucault’s remark “Where there is power there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power” (1978: 95-6). Foucault’s notion of the imbrications of resistance in every operation of power has, along with work by James Scott (1985; 1990) and others, have made resistance into a much wider and more ambiguous category than it was in the past (Hansen & Stepputat 2001).

Despite the nature of resistance, we can say some things about it. Firstly, resistance involves the spatialities of location and boundary formation. Thus, there are ‘places of resistance’ (Pile 1997), but resistance is constituted through the idea of movement—a change from one place to another, or possibly to many places. More often than not, it is mobility that has been seen as radical and transformative in the eyes of state officials. In fact, development planners and other authorities frequently see one of their key roles as regulating the use of space under their jurisdiction, and when people move on their own, even within that jurisdiction, or even worse, to the jurisdictions of others, it is very unsettling to officials, as it makes people much less visible, and thus more difficult for the state to control. This dissertation will demonstrate how the Brao have often resisted state control ‘with their feet’, either moving within state jurisdictions or outside of them, and this has certainly annoyed officials since the French period, and likely earlier. It is undoubtedly one of the main reasons why every colonial power since the French has wanted the Brao to have ‘fixed settlement’ and ‘sedentarised agriculture’. While this desire is often ‘rendered technical’, as Tania Li (2007) puts it, by linking it to development, increasing socio-economic benefits of the people, and ecological protection, even when the empirical evidence suggests that fixed settlement and agriculture does not necessarily lead to a better quality of life or economic benefits.
Thesis Statement

The thesis for this dissertation is that the Brao have been objects of various forms of colonial ambitions over history—including Khmer, Lao, Siamese, French, Japanese, Vietnamese, American, Lao royalist and communist, and Khmer royalist and communist—and that each of these colonialisms represents attempts to socially and spatially reorganise the Brao, albeit differently. This reorganisation has included processes of deterritorialisation and territorialisation, and attempts to rescale Brao spaces and senses of place. In that Brao places are particularly linked to Brao identities, ultimately different forms of colonialism have altered identities in many ways, through affecting their spaces and more specifically their senses of place. However, the Brao have not simply accepted these attempts, nor have they always resisted them. Instead, change has involved a spectrum of responses based on complicated processes that have often included resistance and compliance, but also sometimes negotiation and compromise, revealing a level of human agency that has ultimately limited the ability of various forms of colonialism to fully achieve the social and spatial changes required to achieve their respective projects.

Research Methods

Ethnographic Research and Fieldwork

Most of the information included in this study has come from ‘ethnographic fieldwork’ conducted in southern Laos and northeastern Cambodia between 2004 and 2007. I was in Laos and Cambodia from December 2003 to May 2004, November 2004 to April 2005, December 2005 to May 2006, and November 2006 to March 2007 (a total of 24 months), and I spent much of that time engaged with Brao people, either in villages, swidden areas or in other locations.

During this fieldwork many frequently applied ethnographic methods were utilised, including individual and group interviews, and especially participant observation. Discourse analysis has also been quite important, which is reflective of my

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13 Although my fieldwork with the Brao was all during the dry season, it should be noted that I spent a considerable amount of time living with Brao people in northeastern Cambodia during the time I was conducting my Masters of Arts research in 2001-2002 (Baird 2003a).
14 I spent approximately half of my time in the region in Brao villages, but during much of the other time I was working with Brao people in Pakse or Ban Lung.
interest in poststructuralist perspectives. My most important ‘fieldwork’ took place in villages and surrounding areas inhabited by people belonging to all the main Brao sub-groups in southern Laos and northeastern Cambodia (see Chapter 3 for details about these sub-groups). During this fieldwork many people who have come into contact with the Brao were interviewed, including, but not limited to, those who have worked for ‘development agencies’ engaged with the Brao, people belonging to other ethnic minority groups with Brao relations, government officials (both Brao and non-Brao) and even former US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) agents who worked with the Brao in Laos on a military basis during the 1960s.

Speaking local languages is critical for effectively communicating with people and understanding their circumstances. Translators rarely provide the same sorts of nuanced understandings that direct contact offer, and in fact, this is the problem with any sort of written work like this. However, having only one filter (me) rather than two (including translators) is generally preferable, although there are circumstances in which translation is either necessary or even preferable. For example, it could be advantageous if a translator happens to have a particular relationship with informants that make it easier for him/her to gain certain information.

I can speak Brao, Lao and Thai fluently. I have a more limited but functional understanding of Khmer. I conducted all of my interviews in Brao or Lao without using a translator.

**Before the ‘Official’ Research**

Although much of the information included in this dissertation was collected during my ‘official’ research period, I consider that my field research with the Brao actually began in 1995 when I first encountered them in both Laos and Cambodia. Many of the comments, quotes and facts included in this dissertation were collected before the beginning of my official fieldwork.

I first met the Brao during a trip up the Xekaman River in Attapeu province to study to potential impacts of the Xekaman 1 dam (Baird 1995a). Later, during the same year, I took part in a natural resources management study along the Sesan River in Ratanakiri province, where I again had the chance to engage with Brao people (Baird
In 1996, I conducted a follow-up study of a Brao Kavet village and an ethnic Brao Kreung village in Ratanakiri province (Baird et al. 1996). I then assisted a Cambodian non-government organisation (NGO), NTFP Project, in Ratanakiri province with a wetlands natural resource co-management project in Brao Umba communities in Taveng district, Ratanakiri province in 1997, and in 1999 and 2000 I worked with NTFP Project again to investigate the ethnoecological system of the Kavet people in Kok Lak commune, Veun Say district, Ratanakiri province, and its relation to swidden agriculture and natural resource management near and inside Virachey National Park (Baird 2000). In 2000 and 2001-2 I conducted community-based research on the downstream impacts of the construction and operation of the Yali Falls dam on the Sesan River in the Central Highlands of Vietnam, first in Ratanakiri province (Fisheries Office & NTFP 2000) and later in Stung Treng province (Baird et al. 2002). This work frequently brought me into contact with Brao people. In 2001-3 I participated in a study of ‘migration and settlement’ in Brao areas in the vicinity of Virachey National Park, in Stung Treng and Ratanakiri provinces (Ironside & Baird 2003).

During the time I was a doctoral student, I continued working on projects that fit well with my studies. For example, between 2003-5 I led a study of Dipterocarpus wood resin tree use, tenure and management with Brao Tanap people in Teun commune, Kon Mum district, Ratanakiri province (Baird 2005b), and I participated in a Sesan River fisheries monitoring project, which involved various Brao fishers (Baird & Meach 2005). Most recently, in 2006 and 2007, I worked with a team of researchers on a study about ‘traditional authority’ (local justice) in northeastern Cambodia as part of a United Nations Development Project (UNDP) supported initiative, in which my contribution related to the Brao (Backstrom et al. 2006).

As already mentioned, my research greatly benefited from the Master’s research, which I implemented with the Brao Umba in three villages in Taveng Leu commune, Taveng district, Ratanakiri province, between 2001-3.

Other Sources of Information

My research involved reviewing literature related to the Brao and the region they come from (southern Laos and northeastern Cambodia), both published and ‘gray’. This
included doing archival research at the Centre des Archives d’Outre-Mer (CAOM), in Aix-en-Provence, France, at EFEO in Paris, and at the Catholic Missionary Archives in Paris, in September 2005. While I required assistance from various people in translating French documentation, especially Carine Guitet, Laurent Jeanneau, Dave Hubbel and my mother, Wanda Crawford, I have at least been able to examine a large amount of Lao and Thai language documentation myself, since I read both languages well. Khamphanh Keovilaysak and his father Viangvanh Keovilaysak assisted in transliterating some Brao language recordings into written Lao language.

There is virtually no documentation regarding the Brao people dated prior to the late 19th century, and even more recent efforts to document aspects of Brao life and culture have often been confused and incomplete (see, for example, Hours 1973b). Thus, I have had to rely on all the sources available to me, including the very limited Siamese documentation about the Brao, French documentation about the Brao from the very end of the 19th and first part of the 20th century, and Lao language documentation.

The work of a couple of Anthropologists who worked in the pre-1975 'postcolonial' era, particularly Jacqueline Matras in Ratanakiri province and to a much lesser extent Bernard Hours in Champasak province, also represent sources of information.

I have relied heavily on the work of two historians who have written extensively about my area of interest, Martin Rathie and Mathieu Guérin, although neither has focused specifically on the Brao. Martin Rathie, in particular, has been very helpful in allowing me to reference his uncompleted PhD dissertation about southern Laos and northeastern Cambodia, much of which will probably not be included in his final product. I have also referenced Mathieu Guérin’s important PhD dissertation on the French period in northeastern Cambodia, which is only available in French.

**Not a Typical Research Situation**

The research for this study involved many different approaches. I make no apologies for this, but it is worth elaborating on the context in which much of my fieldwork occurred, and the advantages and disadvantages of the path I followed.
One of the main challenges in doing research with the Brao was finding creative ways to conduct fieldwork in Laos and Cambodia—particularly Attapeu province, in southern Laos, where the local government is still not open to foreigners, especially those interested in conducting ethnographic or geographical research related to ethnic minorities. Thus, I had to be especially creative to gain access to my study area in Laos.

But I did not only choose my particular approach in order to gain access to the Brao, but also to better engage with them in different situations apart from what is typical for research like mine. While it is normal for researchers to do ethnographic studies simply as a ‘researcher’, it can sometimes be much more revealing to observe people in real-life situations, and to engage them not only as ‘researcher’, but also in other contexts. Researchers frequently play down this point, since most only ever engage with their subjects at the level of researcher-subject. They may be unaware of the fruitfulness of engaging with their research subjects in other contexts. Working with the Brao in this way often helps blur the boundaries between ‘researcher’ and ‘researched’, something that can open up interesting new spaces along the margins of engagement. It can be revealing when research takes place in circumstances when those being researched are engaged in an activity that is relevant to their real lives. Certainly this can lead to better participation, and a fairer exchange of benefits. It can be less ‘extractive’ than most research situations. This is not to say that my academic research was Action Research, as it was not, but the Brao who I worked with saw many of the activities that I was involved with as being to their benefit.

However, the blurring of traditional boundaries between ‘fieldwork’ and other types of ‘work’ potentially has disadvantages too. For one, those being researched may perceive the researcher as having another agenda outside of his or her study, and this can be an obstacle for certain types of interaction. For example, those being researched may not want to reveal certain information to a researcher due to his or her involvement in other activities involving the person or people being studied. This has frequently led to the devaluing of certain types of ‘applied anthropology’, especially when researchers are being employed to conduct research beneficial to clients who do not have the best interests of those being studied at heart (see Gupta 1995; Abram 1998). Certainly, being involved in other activities at the same time that research is being done can result in the
development of various kinds of complex relationships with direct implications for one's research. Those examining this kind of research can perceive it as being 'unsystematic' or 'biased', due to the dual role of the researcher. Credibility can become problematic.

Ultimately, this approach was important for shaping my research. I found that history was an important component in all kinds of situations, and this drew me to increasingly consider history. Interacting with Brao people in various contexts also indicated the importance of ethnicity in framing interactions with others.

There are potentially important ethical considerations for someone 'wearing two hats', including situations when a researcher conducts investigations but does not identify him or herself as a researcher. Trickery and betrayal can occur.

But despite these potential pitfalls, all of which require careful consideration on the part of the researcher, relationships between researchers and informants are never neutral, despite frequent attempts to present this as being the case.\(^\text{15}\) In this postmodern world, we know that people can never be robots or separate their research from different powers that prevail in society. The baggage is simply too heavy to discard. However, this is not meant to be a cop out, or to deny the need to consider these issues and avoid and reduce problems when possible. But in my assessment—and considering my particular circumstances—I believe that this approach has provided more opportunities than obstacles. Despite mixing up researcher and other activities, I tried not to overly compromise myself by engaging in activities in which others had too much control over what I did or what I was supposed to research. Furthermore, I was not involved in any projects that put me in positions where others could somehow use data collected from the Brao against them.

Overall, mindful of all of the above pitfalls, I have attempted to treat all those I have engaged with respectfully. Whenever I felt that any of those people I was working with had the potential to be somehow compromised or otherwise put at risk due to my research, I took measures to reduce the risks and protect the interests of those vulnerable. Therefore, the names of many of those interviewed have been excluded from this dissertation, and sometimes the names of the places where certain events occurred have

\(^{15}\) This is especially the case amongst positivists, such as many physical geographers and biological scientists.
been omitted. However, in many cases names are mentioned, or at least the places. People’s names have only been included in cases when those involved consented to the inclusion of their names.

The interviews took place in many different circumstances. Because many Brao people feel intimidated when tape-recorded, recorders were only used on a few occasions. For interviews, observations and quotes were recorded in thick diary books that I carried everywhere. I filled 17 during the course of my fieldwork. While I generally took notes as people spoke, that was not possible during some active situations. In those cases, I was only able to record things people said and other observations minutes or exceptionally hours later. The advantage of this method is that it is not very intimidating to the Brao or others; the main disadvantage is that because I had to jot down things quickly and sometimes from recent memory, I ended up frequently paraphrasing much of what people told me, or when I was able to record direct quotes they were often short. This is reflected in the way this dissertation is written, and has resulted in few very long direct quotes.

I collected data from all sorts of people during my research, but older men are generally the best represented while younger people and women are the least. This is largely because I was frequently interested in discussing matters of history, and this resulted in me being frequently directed to talk to older men (this is not to say that women do not have their own histories). However, I had plenty of real-life experiences involving Brao men and women of all ages. Still, I have not focused on gender issues in this study, not because I do not think they are important—in fact to the contrary—but rather because there were not many appropriate opportunities for me to speak with women when men were not nearby, and ultimately I was not well positioned to learn enough about women’s ideas, compared to what women researchers might be able to achieve. But I took notes whenever I heard interesting things that women said, and women told me many important stories. I, however, heard stories that indicated that Brao husbands sometimes abuse their wives, even if this is far from the norm.

I did have many opportunities to drink jar beer with women, as it is not only men who would sit and drink with me, and like men, women often became braver to engage with me in conversation after a few glasses of jar beer. Certainly women provided me with important insights that I would have been less likely to hear from men. In that I was
living with families in the field, women were certainly people who I engaged with frequently and in various ways, depending on the circumstances.

The initiatives that have provided me with opportunities to engage with the Brao over the last five years, apart from time specifically dedicated to systematically engaging the Brao, are as follows:

1) A study trip of Brao people from Pathoumphone district, Champasak province, Laos to visit Brao people in Phou Vong district, Attapeu province, Laos (2004)
2) A study trip of Brao people from Pathoumphone district, Champasak province, Laos to visit Brao people in Ratanakiri province, Cambodia (2005)
3) A Brao cultural protection and revival project in five villages in Pathoumphone district, Champasak province, Laos (2001-7).
4) A Brao-language radio support project in Phou Vong district, Attapeu province, Laos (2004-6)
5) A Brao language video recording, production and dissemination project in Laos and Cambodia (2005-6)
6) A study trip of Brao people from Ratanakiri province, Cambodia to visit Brao people in Champasak province, Laos (2006)
7) A Brao traditional music recording and CD production project in Champasak and Attapeu provinces, Laos (2006-7)
8) A Brao traditional music recording and CD production project in Ratanakiri province, Cambodia (2006)
9) A small research project in cooperation with two ethnic Kreung young men in Ratanakiri province regarding the spatial taboo huntre, and the spatial organisation of houses and villages (2006)

For example, during the study trips for Brao people from Champasak to visit Attapeu, and between Laos and Cambodia, I had chances to hear how Brao people from different places assessed other Brao people, thus providing me with important insights into Brao
thought processes, identities and senses of place. Similarly, when recording Brao music and making Brao videos, I had opportunities to learn about important Brao practices and beliefs that would not have arisen in conversation if not for the types of projects being implemented. Each situation provided new opportunities for seeing Brao life from a different perspective. Crucially, many of these activities provided opportunities for me to observe Brao interactions with other Brao, rather than Brao people simply dealing with my questions and inquiries, although that was part of the mix.

**Alcohol Drinking as Method**

"The wild peoples are animistic in their beliefs. For them every important event in life must be preceded by a sacrifice to the super-natural powers. Usually it is a jar of rice-spirit which is offered up. The consumption of this beverage is accompanied by a special ceremony. Its period of fermentation must not have been longer than two moons nor less than ten nights...Next the [long hollow rattan] tube is plunged into the liquid, and every man present must suck up a mouthful, while at the same rate that the exhaustion of the jar goes on it is filled with fresh water."

In *Laos*, by Captain Henri Baudesson (1913)

While lowlanders tend to drink distilled whiskey as their main alcoholic beverage,¹⁶ the favourite alcoholic drink of the Brao and those from many other Austroasiatic and Austronesian groups in the region is jar rice beer (also often called ‘rice wine’ in the literature). The jars used for making, storing and consuming this rice beer are frequently family heirlooms, and have been important symbols of material wealth for the Brao and other highlanders in the region for generations (see, also, Luu 2007).¹⁷ It is important for me to explain a little about the context in which much of my most useful interactions with Brao people took place over the years. From my first encounters with the Brao in 1995, it quickly became apparent that most important discussions amongst the Brao take place while sitting around drinking rice beer, called ‘tave’ in Brao. Illustrative of this, the Brao frequently told me that one needs the water from a jar to loosen up one’s

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¹⁶ In Laos, it is made of glutinous rice, which is stronger, and in Cambodia, it is made of non-glutinous and is weaker.

¹⁷ This is a long-standing practice, and it has recently been found that rice beer was made in China as long as 9,000 years ago (*The Cambodia Daily*, Ancient Chinese made wine while westerners lived in caves, March 14, 2005: 20).
mouth. For them, it is hard to engage in useful conversation if those talking are not
drinking rice beer together. Without the jar beer, there is little talk.

Jar rice beer drinking is a very important part of Brao culture and social life, and it is not infrequent for people to sit around and socialise while taking turns drinking one or more jars of beer. This is as true in many Brao villages today as it was when Taupin first visited the Brao people in Katot village in 1888 (see Map 8.1). He commented on how unhygienic the newly opened jars were, but later, after drinking some rice beer, he came to like it, and even asked the Brao for more.

Rice beer drinking is highly regulated. There is frequently an Animist ceremony done at a jar before drinking begins. The hosts always drink before the guests, and the older people and men generally, but not always, drink before the younger people and women. If the drinking relates to a ceremony to try to cure an ill individual, the sick person may drink early on. Hosts, or jar owners, set the limit of each drinker. Sometimes two, three, four or even more people will drink from a jar at the same time, with each using a different bamboo straw. If each person is supposed to drink two glasses, three people drinking together would collectively be required to consume six. As each person finishes drinking his or her quota, jar owners call the next people to drink. Everyone sits around and waits for his or her turn. Nobody asks to drink first. They just wait to be called, talking with friends and family. Boys and young men are generally responsible for collecting water for pouring into the jars.

Captain Cupet (1998: 84) did a very good job of describing jar beer drinking, and it is worth repeating some of his written passages here,

“The obligatory accompaniment of any sacrifice is the beer jar…When the great day comes, they kill any animal whatsoever, a chicken, a goat, a pig or a buffalo. The receptacles are fixed to the columns of the house. Above the contents they place a few small branches with leaves, which are firmly attached to keep them in place and they pour water into the jar until it overflows. This water becomes impregnated with the fermented juices and acquires a slightly acid taste which the savages appreciate very much. The accomplished, they stick long, very flexible bamboo pipes into the liquid which they suck…Every guest must drink, in a single gulp, the contents of a set measure on pain of offending his host. Then the most impaired or the greatest gourmands come back to the jar until the liquid has become completely diluted or they fall over, totally drunk. The libations are preceded by an invocation to the spirit, who must drink first. The liver of
the animals that have been killed is reserved for it. The blood is used to sprinkle the fetishes. During the ceremony, the musicians slave away on the gongs."

Although this discussion of rice beer might appear to be a bit of a diversion, it is critical for the reader to understand how important rice beer drinking is in Brao social life, and my ethnographic research with the Brao (Photos 2.1 and 2.2). While not all kinds of interviews are appropriately conducted when drinking, the Brao are generally much more at ease being interviewed when drinking. It puts them in a space that they are the masters of, and this control over the situation generally gives them more confidence to speak, and the effect of the alcohol in loosening lips should not be underestimated.

Reflections on Multi-Sited Research

Another important area of this research that must be mentioned relates to ‘field sites’, particular places where information was collected. Most ethnographic studies involve in-depth research in one or just a few communities, typically villages for rural-based studies. However, I have chosen to approach my research differently. Since starting my Masters research with the Brao in 2001, I have been fascinated with the variations amongst Brao people, and I have personally visited and interacted with people in 97 villages, over half of all Brao villages, 38 Brao villages in Laos and 59 Brao in Cambodia (see Appendix 1, Tables 2.1 and 2.2; Map 2.1 and Map 2.2). ‘Multi-sited’ studies like mine are, in fact, becoming increasingly common in the social sciences (see Marcus 1995).
Gupta & Ferguson (1997b) believe that the ‘field’ and ‘fieldwork’ are defining concepts in ethnography, and wonder why anthropology is rejecting old ideas about territorially fixed communities and stable, localised cultures, while at the same time continuing to cling to research methodologies that emphasise localised and frequently single-sited fieldwork, which is often considered to be a ‘rite of passage’ in anthropology. However, they explain that these ideas about fieldwork are being increasingly questioned and de-centred, and suggest that the distinction between ‘field’ and ‘home’ rests on simplistic ideas about the spatial separation of these places, with the first being where data are collected, and the second being where research results are written up. They are suspicious of ideas about the hierarchies of field site purity, and warn that the uncritical mapping of these differences can be dangerous, stating that the idea of the ‘field’ both enables certain types of knowledge and tends to block or obscure others. They are critical of ideas of ‘otherness’ that are central to the concept of fieldwork and ultimately have European colonial roots.

Critically for this chapter, Gupta & Ferguson (1997b) discuss ideas about multi-sited ethnography, stating that the spatial boundedness of much research is problematic, because researchers are never really outside of the ‘field’. They even suggest that the concept of fieldwork needs to be redefined in fundamental ways in order to accommodate new ways of conceiving places where ethnographic research can legitimately occur.

Michael Burawoy (2000), in the introductory chapter of *Global Ethnography: Forces, Connections, and Imaginations in a Postmodern World*, looks at multi-sited ethnography from a different, and global perspective, thus increasing the scale of possibilities beyond what Gupta & Ferguson (1997b) suggest. He argues that despite the apparently dismal prospects for ‘global ethnography’, the reality is that it has good potential, because the occupation of ethnographers is to study others in “their space and time”, thus positioning them well for learning about the lived experiences of globalisation (Burawoy 2000: 4). Similar to Gupta & Ferguson, Burawoy declares that, “global ethnographers cannot be outside of the global processes they study” (2000: 4).

Indicating the increasing acceptance of multi-sited research situations, Mika Toyota (2003) has pointed out that there has been a recent upsurge of interest in
transnational communities and multi-sited fieldwork, in an attempt to move away from
the fixed location approach that previously dominated. She explains how critics of the
older approach have challenged long held bounded and primordial notions about ‘origin’
and ‘culture’, and have offered up new possibilities of conceptualising social space,
identity and the means for representing differences in the context of ever-increasing
transnational mobility. She argues that multi-sited research can be important for
considering what James Clifford (1994) calls ‘multi-locale’ relationships between groups
with common ethnic identities. Yet Toyota warns that multi-sited research is not without
pitfalls. While one gains from getting broad perspective, these gains in breadth have the
potential to come with a loss of depth. That is, it is not possible to come to know people
in the type of intimate ways that are likely when examining just a single or a few villages.
It is difficult to introduce many individuals into one’s writing in these situations, without
giving too much weight to certain communities or individuals over others.

This is an important point in relation to my own research. Fortunately for me, I
have had the privilege of spending an extended period of time in the three nearby Brao
communities of Bang Geut, Trabok and Bong, in Taveng Leu commune, Taveng district,
Ratanakiri province, northeastern Cambodia during my Master’s research between 2001-
3 (Baird 2003a; Baird & Dearden 2003). By the end of that study I already had a fairly
detailed understanding of many Brao customs and practices. I had also developed close
relationships with Brao families.

This previous experience, which allowed me to concentrate on just a few
communities in detail, provided me with the intimate experiences associated with staying
longer periods in just a few villages, thus making my attempt to achieve breadth by
studying a large number of communities over a wide area, eight Brao sub-groups and two
countries, possible without missing the experience of developing deeper relationships
with small numbers of Brao people. I have been able to combine my previous
experiences with learning about other things that require multi-sited investigations, such
as multi-locale relationships and networks that exist between communities within both
Laos and Cambodia, and between Brao populations within and between both countries.

There are certainly advantages with being able to spend longer periods of time in
individual communities, as this allows for relationship building and the opportunity to
consider deeper relationship issues at the community level. However, considering a larger scale has its definite advantages, such as providing a broader and more comparative perspective. Therefore, I hope to be able to tell my story with the local depth that comes with long-term ‘fieldwork’, and with the broader-scale understanding that is crucial as well. Thus, this study is not only multi-locale but it is also multi-scale.

**Expanding the Temporal Scale**

When I started my research I intended to consider some historical matters of particular relevance to the Brao, as ethnography without history is doomed to peril. However, I did not expect to engage in history to the extent that ended up being the case. Michael Burawoy’s ideas are particularly inspiring, as he has emphasised that today ethnographers use all the means available to them, including oral histories, archives, official documents, newspapers, and community memories, to turn ethnographies into ethnohistories, which he believes positions ethnographers in ways that are useful for investigating global processes (Burawoy 2000). While this research is not ‘global ethnography’, it does consider the influences of global forces.

For me, the more I worked with the Brao and engaged with them on matters of history, the more relevant history became for my study, and the more I realised how little known Brao histories are outside of the Brao. I quickly learnt that history is crucial for most Brao people, and that they frequently make reference to historical events. It cannot be removed from their identities. This led me on a journey into the past.

**Seeing the Forest and not Just the Trees**

I have long been a strong advocate of multi and inter-disciplinary approaches to research. I am interested in the biophysical components of the world we live in, but of course, the social, cultural and power related aspects. In that I consider one of my hats to be ‘political ecologist’, this broad-ranging approach should not be surprising, since political ecology has fully embraced this broad-based approach of this nature (see, for example, Zimmerer & Bassett 2003; Neumann 2005).

I believe that it would be virtually impossible to gain any meaningful understanding of what is happening amongst the Brao without covering a number of
different aspects of their lives that are normally considered to be within the realms of
different disciplines. Ultimately, I have found that so many of these different aspects
converge, thus providing me with a much better overall understanding of both the bigger
picture, and about the individual issues as well, by making it clear how different issues
are intertwined and affected by each other, converging and transforming into hybrid
results that can only be well understood through having at least some knowledge about
various factors that led to present circumstances (see, also, Whatmore 2002).

Thus, it is important to look at more than just one kind of ‘tree’ in the
metaphorical ‘forest’. One has to examine so many different trees, as well as other plants
and animals, even small insects, and of course people, before one can expect to gain a
reasonable understanding of the ‘forest’.

Conclusions

This chapter has outlined the theoretical ideas that are critical for this study—
especially in relation to colonialism, development, scale, places and boundaries, and
places of resistance—and my thesis statement. I have provided details about my research,
which is geographically wide, historically deep and topically broad.

I have explained the fundamental purpose of this thesis, which is to consider the
ways that the ethnic Brao people socially and spatially organise—including how others
have tried to affect their social and spatial organisation—and how the Brao have
responded to those efforts.

It is now possible to move onto Chapter 3, which introduces important
background information about the Brao, and their relations with people from other ethnic
groups.
CHAPTER 3
An Introduction to the Brao

Introduction

This chapter provides a general overview of the Brao. I start by briefly explaining my non-essentialist perspective on ethnicity, which is critical for grounding this thesis. I follow up by explaining some of the terms—including ethnonyms and pejoratives—that are frequently used for naming the Brao, as this issue has the potential to cause considerable confusion. I then provide some general information about Brao demography, another point of frequent confusion. This is followed by a description of the various Brao sub-groups, still another complicated and little-known (outside of the Brao themselves) aspect of the Brao that needs to be dealt with early on, especially since this information has not been recorded elsewhere. I then grapple with the question of the relative importance of different types of ethnic identities, including village, sub-group, 'pan-Brao', 'pan-highlander' and national identities. I argue that these different identities are relatively more or less important to the Brao depending on context.

Having addressed some important identity issues, I turn to Brao social organisation. First, I consider the origin of the Brao, which is clearly—in the minds of many Brao—linked with their mystical hero Groong, and epic story telling about him and his family, called 'meut mooan Groong Yoong' in Brao. I suggest that the Brao originated from the same general area where they presently live, and that stories about them migrating from northern Laos are based on unlikely links between the Brao epic story and the 'lam Cheuang' epic story amongst the ethnic Khmu people of northern Laos.

Some basic background about how the Brao have historically socially organised is also presented. I emphasise that during the pre-French period the social structure of the Brao rarely extended beyond the village, and that even within villages it was always potentially fluid and flexible.

Brao culture and social and spatial organisation are closely linked to their Animist beliefs. Therefore, providing some initial background about this is critical for what will

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18 They are believed to have lived in the same general area as they live now for as long as anyone knows.
follow in later chapters. The bilateral kinship system of the Brao is an important indicator of their egalitarian nature. While the more hierarchical forms of social organisation applied by their neighbours, the Khmer and the Lao, have certainly influenced the Brao over history—just as Edmund Leach (1954) described for the Kachin in Burma over a half century ago—resulting in hybrid forms of political organisation, with the Brao retaining characteristics that indicate their egalitarian roots. This is not based on romantic notions of the Brao, but rather historical information and present-day observations. For the Brao, egalitarianism has long been seen as the ideal, even if every day practices sometimes differ.

Livelihoods are inevitably critical determinants of social and spatial organisation. I therefore provide a general overview of the swidden agriculture systems that have historically been the main source of livelihoods for the Brao and in many cases still are. I also review some of the other key Brao livelihoods activities, such as hunting, fishing and the gathering of various products in nature.

Relations between the Brao and peoples from other ethnic groups are crucial for culture and identities, and therefore, as background for what will follow, I briefly review some of the main factors that have historically characterised the ethnic relations between the Brao and its neighbours, particularly the Lao.

Many might consider it normal for a study such as this one to include an extensive review of the literature regarding research conducted on highlanders in mainland Southeast Asia, or at least the former territories of French Indochina, as considerable research has been done in this region by anthropologists/ethnographers, historians, linguists, colonial officials, missionaries, educated travelers and others over the last century. While there has been relatively little work done on ethnic groups in the part of southern Laos and northeastern Cambodia where the Brao live and this dissertation is focused, other parts of Laos and Cambodia have been studied by scholars such as Pierre Lefèvre-Pontalis (1902) for northern Laos, Karl Izikowitz (2001[1951]) for the ethnic Lamet in northern Laos, Charles Archaimbault (1961; 1964; 1972) for the ethnic Lao, Jacques Lemoine (1972) for the Hmong in northern Laos, Barbara Wall (1975) for the Nya Heun on the Lao Bolaven Plateau in southern Laos, Gabor Vargyas (1996; 2000) for the Brou in south-central Laos, Frank Proschan for the Kmhmu in northern Laos (1997;
1998; 2001), Théophile Gerber (1940) for the Stieng in northeastern Cambodia, and Henri Maître (1912) for various groups in northeastern Cambodia, just to name some of the main works.

In addition, a considerable amount of research has been done on ethnic groups in the Central Highlands of Vietnam, including by Jean Guelach (1887) and Paul Guilleminet (1941; 1952) for the Bahnar, Jacques Dournes (a.k.a Dam Bo, 1950; 1977) for the Jarai and other groups, Pierre-Bernard Lafont (1963) for the Jarai, Georges Condominas for the Mnong (1977[1957]), Albert-Marie Maurice (1939) for the Mnong, Jean Boulbet for the Maa (1967), Marcel Ner (1927; 1942) for the Sedang and other ethnic groups, Gerald Hickey (1982a & b; 1988; 2002) for the Sedang and other ethnic groups, Andrew Hardy (2003) for the Kinh in the Highlands, Dang et al. (1993) for ethnic groups in Vietnam, and Oscar Salemink (2003) for highland identities. These works are important, and those sources directly relevant to this dissertation are cited. However, due to space restrictions I have chosen not to provide a full review of this literature. Those interested in a comprehensive review of research conducted on different ethnic groups in former French Indochina should consult Lebar et al. (1964), Jean Michaud (2006) and others.

My Understanding of Ethnicity

My understanding of ethnicity is influenced by postmodern and poststructural theoretical advances in the social sciences over the last few decades. Thus, I feel quite uncomfortable in rigidly defining the people with whom I work using essentialising labels or ethnonyms that are associated with particular ‘ethnicities’. Classic works by Leach (1954) and Barth (1969) have already clearly shown the socially constructed nature of ethnic identities, and Cribb & Narangoa (2004) have, more recently, pointed out that the existence of coherent ethnic groups—which appear so intuitively obvious to most—are actually not nearly as clear as assumed. Indicative of this, the United Nations decided, in 1952, that, “self-determination was the right of all people without feeling any need to define what a people might be” (Cribb & Narangoa 2004: 164). Even Stalin recognised the right of ethnic groups to “freedom of decision about their culture and their
own organisation”, which greatly influenced communist policies in Vietnam (Hardy & Chinh 2003: 3), and dependent countries like Laos.\textsuperscript{19}

In today’s world, ethnic identities, as with other identities, are increasingly seen as being multiple, overlapping and constantly shifting. Most importantly, they are socially constructed. There are plenty of examples of flexible ethnic identities in Asia (see Jonsson 2002; Ong 1999; Evans 1999), including in southern Laos and northeastern Cambodia (see, for example, Baird 2008a & b; Grabowsky 2004; Jonsson 1997).

The ambiguity associated with Brao ethnic identities is illustrated by a report about an ethnic group that French administrators reported from Attapeu province: the “Breugards”. Anonymous (1911) described these people as living in the upper Xexou River basin, and being a “mixed ethnic group”, half ethnic Halang from Kon Tum (in the Central Highlands of present-day Vietnam) and half “Lové” (pejorative for Brao, French spelling). In 1924, French officials again referred to half ‘Lové’ (Brao)/ half Halang people living north of the Xexou River in Attapeu.\textsuperscript{20} Henri Maitre (1912) also identified an ethnic group called ‘Pragar’, and he too thought that they were a Brao-Halang cross. However, Pinnow and Maspero, and later Percheron (both cited in Parkin 1991), thought that linguistically they were a “Brao-Sou sub-group”. Parkin (1991) pointed out that nobody had mentioned this group for thirty years before him, and so he was suspicious of the status of the ethnonym. Today, this ethnic group is no longer recognised by either ethnicity scholars, government officials, or, most importantly, the Brao or Halang peoples in Laos or Cambodia. This example clearly indicates the difficulty of applying ethnic labels to people in this region.

Henri Bruel (1916: 29) had ideas about people who were half one ethnic group and half another, and he wrote that, “The sides of the mountains, and places next to rivers, are usually inhabited by Kha Brao but inside they are half Djarai, half Brao.” The margins between different ethnic groups are often inhabited by peoples who exhibit the social and spatial characteristics of both groups, even if they might identify as belonging to just one of the two. Frederick Barth (1969) and his colleagues demonstrated this.

\textsuperscript{19} Ironically, however, Stalin’s policies actually supported the assimilation of ethnic groups and the organisation of ethnic minorities. The stated position of the Lao government and the reality in Laos still conflict today (see Chapter 7).

\textsuperscript{20} Resident Superior of Laos, 1924. CAOM Resident Superior of Laos, Notes on the State of Attopeu province (in French), Vientiane, January 1, 1924, CAOM Resident Superior of Laos E5.
In addition, some similar ethnic groups, such as the Jru Dak and Cheng\(^{21}\) of Attapeu have sometimes been considered to be sub-groups of the Brao. Engelbert (2004) considered the ‘Sou’ to be a Brao-Oy métis. French officials also referred to them as ‘Lové Sous’ and ‘Lové Cheng’,\(^{22}\) using the same prefix, ‘Lové’, as a way of linking those peoples with the Brao, since no other groups but them and the Brao were ever referred to as ‘Lové’.

As easily as the Cheng and Jru Dak are not included as Brao sub-groups, the Kreung,\(^{23}\) which are considered to be a Brao sub-group, could also be identified as a separate group, as the differences between the Kreung and other Brao are probably comparable to the differences between the Jru Dak and Cheng and the Brao. Although Mallow (2002: 24) wrote that, “The main distinguishing factor [between ethnic groups] seems to be linguistic differences that developed over the centuries in villages that were relatively isolated from one another”, differences certainly go beyond language. While worldviews may be similar, there are differences in cultural aspects as well, including Animist rituals. The inclusion of different people within the ‘Brao ethnic group’ is seemingly arbitrary, at least to a certain degree. Thus, I sympathise with Leif Jonsson’s view—when referring to the peoples of Ratanakiri province—that,

“Social organization among uplanders is not along ethnic lines. At the present, there is no supra-village organization, and [there is] a high degree of household autonomy within villages. Household and village organization suggests some gradations between extreme household autonomy and extreme lineage/village monopoly in ritual. These gradations relate to historical and political economic factors, and do not fall neatly along ethnic lines” (Jonsson 1997: 546).

However, I also agree with Engelbert (2004) that ethnonyms like Brao, Jru Dak, Oy, Cheng, etc. undoubtedly predate the French colonial period. For example, Taupin found people self-identifying as Brao near Stung Treng in 1888, before the French were powerful in the area. Thus, it would be incorrect to suggest that the French created these names or the names for the Brao sub-groups. Yet the French did influence the identities

\(^{21}\) The ethnonym ‘Cheng’ apparently originates from a type of ethnic wood carving art. According to legend, a Lao king in Xaysettha district was the first to coin the term.


\(^{23}\) Also spelt Krung, Krueng, Kru’ng, Kroeng, and Kroeng (see Bourdier 2006; Taylor 2006; Sidwell & Jacq 2003; Rifa 2000; Kampe 1997).
of highlanders in the region, be it at a local or a national level (Salemink 2003; Hickey 1982b). What is needed is a position that recognises the various dimensions involved.

Frank Proschan (2001) presents a position that comes close to the type of balance required. He discusses what he calls the “appendency theory” of ethnicity, which was promoted by Anderson (1991), and holds that, “ethnicity is a phenomenon that is secondary to, contingent upon, and necessarily later than the modern nation, and that therefore it could not possibly have existed prior to the conquest and the creation of nation-states” (Proschan 2001: 999-1000). Anderson believes that ethnicity can only exist as a result of conditions created by the existence of the modern nation-state.

I agree that French colonial and later experiences have undoubtedly had a great deal of impact on concepts of ethnicity in Southeast Asia, but it is not as if the whole idea of ethnicity is premised on Euro-American influences. Instead, following Proschan (2001), people had ideas and labels for themselves and others with whom they came into contact before French colonialism began. They were not the same ideas as exist today, but they existed nonetheless and were significant. Thus, what we have now are hybrid concepts based on both pre-French ideas of the ‘Other’ and modern influences.

Who are the Brao?

Having touched on some of the theoretical questions involving ethnicity, I now look more specifically at the Brao, and how they are identified.

Naming the Brao

The people who today self-identify as ‘Brao’ are generally considered by ethnolinguists to speak various dialects of Brao, an Austroasiatic language in the Western Bahnaric branch of the Mon-Khmer family (Keller 1976; Sidwell 2002; Sidwell & Jacq 2003; Keller et al. 2008). This seems to fit the understanding of most Brao as well.

Jacqueline Matras spells their name ‘Brou’. However, ‘Brao’ appears to be much closer to what the people call themselves in their own language, and it is the spelling used

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24 Other Western Bahnaric languages include Cheng, Oi, Jru Dak (Sou), Jru (Laven), Heuny (Nya Heun), and possibly Lavi (Sidwell 2002).

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by linguists specialising in Mon-Khmer languages (see, for example, Keller, 1976; Huffman, 1977; Parkin 1991; Sidwell & Jacq 2003; Keller et al. 2008).25

French officials who previously worked in Vietnam sometimes referred to the Brao in Laos and Cambodia as ‘Moi’, a Vietnamese pejorative for highlanders. The French in Vietnam also applied the term ‘Montagnards’ for the highlanders.

Engelbert (2004), citing Guerlach (1887: 441), reported that ‘Brao’ means ‘nude’ in Bahnar language, and LFNC (2005: 154) claims that ‘Brao’ means “a sound of a bird singing”, but none of the Brao I know make either association. Most do not recognise the word as meaning anything other than the name of their ethnic group, but some have reported that it refers to areas with mixed forests. However, for practical purposes, the term ‘Brao’ is presently only associated with ethnicity.

**Naming the Brao in Laos**

In Laos, the Brao frequently self-identify as ‘Brao’, but ethnic Lao people often refer to them using the pejorative ‘Lave’.26 Furthermore, some Brao people—especially those who have adopted many Lao cultural practices and are well along the road to internalising this ethnonym—refer to themselves as ‘Lave’, following what Condominas (1990) might call ‘Lao-isation’. This internalisation process sometimes occurs when people identify more with the ideas of a dominant group than their own group. Sometimes it is simply accepted as the term that the ‘Others’ use to refer to them. However, most Brao people object (at least silently) to being called ‘Lave’ (see, for example, Engelbert 2004; LFNC 2005), with the exception of some people from the Jree

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25 Also, some French scholars, like Josue H. Hoffet (1933b), Paul Guilleminet (1952) and Mathieu Guérin (2003) have used the spelling ‘Brao’, as did the American anthropologists LeBar, Hickey & Musgrave (1964). It also appears to be the spelling recognised by the Lao government (LFNC 2005). Brao has also sometimes been spelt in other ways, including Brau (Maître 1912; Hoffet 1933b; Dang et al. 1993; Schliesinger 1998; Loi 2001; Engelbert 2004), Braou (Bitard 1952a & b; Taupin 1888), Blao (Bourrotte 1955), Preu, Prove (Kim 2000), Prou (Grimes 1996; Hickey 1982a), Prou (Parkin 1991), Prov (Kim 2001; Kampe 1997), Preuv (Koy 1999; Ruohomaki 2003), Prouv (Bayon Pearnik 2006), Breov (Moeun 2006), Prou (see Guérin 2003), Palau (Prachatik-karacak 1995), Palaw (Vincent 1915) Palaw (see Sidwell & Jacq 2003), Preou (see Sidwell & Jacq 2003), Pralao (see Guérin 2003), Badao (Norconsult 2007), and Prau (Ting & Tiann 2001). However, the Cambodian government often uses ‘Prov’ or similar spellings (Kim 2001; Kampe 1997). Although some senior Brao government officials in Cambodia apparently told interviewers that they were ethnic ‘Kirin’ in 1994 (Joint Task Force 1994b & c), I have never heard any Brao people refer to themselves as Kirin.

26 Also spelt Lové by various French authors, Laveh (Sidwell & Jacq 2003; SIL 2006), Lavae (SIL 2006; LFNC 2005; Stuart-Fox 2001; Chazée 1999; Evans 1998), Luivae (LFNC 2005), Lawae (Chazée 1999), Laveh (Taylor 2006), Lovae (Seidenfaden 1963) and even Rawe or Rawae by some (SIL 2006).
sub-group, who prefer to be called ‘Lave’. Ultimately, Parkin (1991) is incorrect to suggest that the Brao and Lave are different ethnic groups.

The exact origin of the term ‘Lave’ is unclear. LFNC (2005) claims that ‘Lavae’ was the name of a French army chief responsible for military operations in Brao areas. However, this seems doubtful, as the name apparently predates French arrival in Brao areas. The Lao or the Siamese probably applied ‘Lave’ during pre-French times. It may originate from the Lao language word ‘ve’, or ‘stop for a short time’, referring to the frequent movement of swidden fields and settlements, as was historically common practice for the Brao. This term has a distinctly spatial dimension, as it suggests that people are defined based on their use of space. The Lao saw Brao spatial organisation as ‘impermanent’ compared to the Lao, who tend to settle themselves in larger ‘permanent’ villages near rivers, other important water bodies, and lowland wet rice agriculture fields.

Whether a particular person prefers to be called Brao or ‘Lave’, nobody likes to be labeled using an even ruder pejorative, a term frequently used by Tai language-speakers (Lao and Siamese) to refer to Mon-Khmer language speakers in the mountains: ‘Kha’. This term is generally believed to refer to ‘slave’, although its original meaning was different.27 Whatever the case, the people do not like it, or associated pejoratives like Kha Lave, Kha Kheo Hian (Kha with filed teeth) Kha Kheo Tat (Kha with cut teeth) and Kha Sam Kha (Kha with three legs, referring to wearing a loincloth) (Baird 2008a). The Brao in Laos are also frequently referred to, more politely, as ‘Lao Theung’ (literally ‘upper Lao’ in Lao language), a collective term developed in the first part of the 20th century to describe the Mon-Khmer language-speaking groups in the country, and to promote national identities. The Brao also sometimes self-identify as ‘Lao Theung’, especially when dealing with ethnic Lao officials. Being referred to as ‘Lao Theung’ is

27 The term ‘Kha’ is only used where the ranges of Mon-Khmer language-speaking peoples and Tai language-speaking peoples overlap. That is, it is not found east of the Red River or in the Tai languages of Guangxi, etc. In Black Tai the reflex is ‘Xa’ indicating that it came from a proto-Southwestern Tai form Khraa. Thus, it is assumed that when the Tai groups moved east into areas inhabited by Mon-Khmer language speaking peoples they ran into groups whose ethnonyms were prefixed with ‘Khaa’ or ‘Khraa’, hence Khmer, Khmu, Krom, Khom, etc. With the Tai capacity for hierarchical social organisation, it rapidly became a term for a lower class, though not usually ‘slave’ in the Western sense, more along the lines of the symbiotic class relationships found in the Sip Song Chau Tai or like that between the Kasak and the royal family of Luang Phrabang. The term seems not to have meant ‘slave’ until it reached Thailand. The Tai already had a good word for ‘slave’, ‘Khoy’. This is an old Tai word reconstructable in Proto-Tai (Jim Chamberlain, pers. comm. 2006).
rarely considered offensive to the Brao. Although many believe that it was created after Laos gained independence, the term was used in government documents as early as 1952 (Grant Evans, pers. comm. 2005).

Ruohomaki (2000) pointed out that the use of Lao Loum, Lao Theung and Lao Soung to classify people based on ecological areas of habitation has become so ingrained in the minds of many Lao that it has kept them from investigating, or even being interested in the various ethnic identities that fall into these broad categories. Thus, the terminology has tended to encourage assimilation, and while officially abandoned by the Lao government (LFNC 2005), the reality is that many Lao people continue to use them in everyday speech and various kinds of written documentation.

While I never use the term ‘Kha’ in everyday life—and recommend that others refrain from doing so as well—I will necessarily use it at times in this dissertation, in order to reflect the ideas of others who I am quoting. To politically sanitise all my interviews and archival sources would be inappropriate.

**Naming the Brao in Cambodia**

The labels used for the Brao in Cambodia are quite different from those applied in Laos. The Brao in Cambodia frequently self-identify as ‘Brao’, and never refer to self-identify as ‘Lave’. The Brao in Cambodia often identify using their sub-group names, often reflecting the idea that each sub-group constitutes a different ethnic group. For example, in Cambodia people from the ‘Kavet’ sub-group almost never self-identify as ‘Brao’. The same is true for the ‘Kreung’, even though elders from both sub-groups have confirmed to me that they were both once known as ‘Brao’.

The situation with the ‘Brao Tanap’ is more complicated, with many of the younger generation now self-identifying as ‘Kreung’, and only older people continuing to call themselves ‘Brao’ or ‘Brao Tanap’. The Brao Umba people, however, clearly self-identify as:  

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28 Also spelt Kowet (Taylor 2006) and incorrectly spelt Khvek (Taylor 2006), Kravet (see Taylor 2006; Sidwell & Jacq 2003; Rifa 2000) and Kraveth (Bourdier 2006). Kavet refers to a name of a stream.

29 Tanap means lowland. There is considerable confusion regarding the Brao Tanap, as they are not recognised as a Brao sub-group outside of the Brao themselves. Bourdier (2006: 143), for example, reported that the Brao and the Kreung people used to live together in Labang 1 and 2 communes, Lom Phat district, Ratanakiri “tend in their discourses to reduce their differences and present themselves as a single ethnic group notwithstanding variations among their dialects.” In fact, the Brao and Kreung never lived there together. The people are Brao Tanap people who often now self-identify as being Kreung.
identify as being 'Umba', but usually refer to themselves simply as Brao, and the 'Lun' tend to follow a similar pattern. They are increasingly referring to themselves as Brao. The ethnic status of many groups remains contested and most outsiders consider that the Brao, Kreung, Kavet and Lun to constitute four separate ethnic groups, with the Brao Tanap being lumped in with the Kreung (see, for example, ADB 2002). The Brao (Umba), Kreung and Kavet are the ‘Brao sub-groups’ with the highest public name recognition.

Collectively, along with other Austroasiatic and Austronesian peoples in the region, the Brao are often referred to as ‘Chun Chiet’ (frequently used in northeastern Cambodia as a short form of ‘Chun Chiet Pheak Tech’ or as ‘Khmer Leu’ (literally upland Khmer). Most recently, indigenous ethnic minorities in Cambodia have been increasingly self-identifying as ‘Chun Chiet Deum Pheak Tech’, which means ‘the original ethnic group’. ‘Khmer Kandal’ (lowland Khmer) also sometimes refer to Mon-Khmer language speaking people as ‘Khmer Deum’, which means the original or old Khmer. The people of one village with a significant Brao population near the Srepok River in Sesan district referred to themselves as ‘Khmer Deum’, not as Brao, when I visited them in 2002 (Baird et al. 2002). They were clearly in a transition phase, on the way to becoming ‘Khmer’.

In the mid-1950s, after gaining independence from France, Norodom Sihanouk devised the classification system that resulted in the terms ‘Khmer Leu’, ‘Khmer Kroam’ and ‘Khmer Islam’ (Ovesen & Trankell 2004). According to Anonymous (2004: 1), the term Khmer Leu was coined in order to “create a feeling of unity between the highland tribal groups and the ruling lowland ethnic Khmer.” However, Sutsakhan (1978: 63)

30 Umba refers to the name of a stream, called Khampha in Lao and Khmer. Keller et al. (2008) spell it 'Ombaa', following spelling conventions amongst linguists.
31 However, Lun, Kreung and Brao Tanap elders living south of the Sesan River have told me that they have a common origin with the Brao north of the Sesan River. The people living south of the Sesan claim that they crossed from the north side, but that the vine (tat peur in Brao) that they were using to cross the river broke, thus separating the connection between those south of the Sesan River and those north of the Sesan River. For that reason, the Lun are often known as 'Lun Tat Peur'.
32 Chun Chiet means 'National Person' and Chun Chiet Pheak Tech means 'minority national person'.
33 Also frequently spelt 'Khmer Loeu' (Anonymous 2004; Meyer 1979; Sutsakhan 1978).
34 Sre Sanook village, Sesan district, Stung Treng province.
35 The Khmer Leu were the Austroasiatic and Austronesian-language speakers, Khmer Kroam referred to ethnic Khmer people living in the present-day south of Vietnam, and Khmer Islam referred to ethnic Cham people living in Cambodia (Ovesen & Trankell 2004).
wrote that, “The term [Khmer Leu] was developed during the Sihanouk era to facilitate the integration into Khmer society of the non-Khmer hill tribes living in northeast Cambodia.” Charles Meyer (1979) was suspicious of Sihanouk’s motives, believing that the term was created to negate the traditional identities of the highlanders and connect them more with the ‘Khmer Nation’. Sihanouk clearly was trying to build the Khmer nation, and this characterisation process was part of this effort.

Most Khmer have never heard of the Brao, or any of the other indigenous ethnic groups found in Stung Treng and Ratanakiri, and instead refer to all these people collectively as ‘Phnong’, which is also the term Khmers use to call the ethnic Mnong or Bunong people of Mondolkiri province (White 1996). ‘Phnong’ has, in fact, been in use in Cambodia for a long time (Baudenne 1913). Khmer people also sometimes refer to highlanders as ‘Samre’. Both ‘Phnong’ and ‘Samre’ are pejoratives (Anonymous 2004).

Brao Demography

Although the exact number of people self-identifying as ‘Brao’ (or an associated sub-group) is uncertain, and in Cambodia is contested and unclear (Jeremy Ironside, pers. comm. 2006), I estimate the population to be about 60,000 in total, a higher number than has ever been reported in the past. About half live in Laos and the other half in Cambodia, with one Brao village located in Vietnam.\(^\text{36}\) Most villages with majority Brao

\(^{36}\) It has been reported that there are between 17,544 (1995 National census, cited by Sidwell & Jacq 2003; LFNC 2005), 19,000 (Chazée 1999) and 23,000 (Johnstone 1993) in southern Laos; between 26,606 (ADB 2002), 28,134 (Helmers & Wallgren 2002), and 29,500 (Plant 2002) in northeastern Cambodia, and 29,130 in Ratanakiri only (PLG Ratanakiri 2003). There are also an unknown number of Brao formerly with the KR living in Kampong Thom, Along Veng, Oddar Meancheay and Battambang provinces in northwestern province. One Kavet elder who visited Battambang in 2005 told me that there are at least 100 Kavet living there. It has also been estimated that between 202 (Loi 2001), 230 (Schliesinger 1998), 250 (Dang et al. 1993), and 313 (1999 national census, Writenet 2006) in the Central Highlands of Vietnam; 90 in the USA; and five in France (Grimes 1996). Eric Seidenfaden (1963) reported that ethnic “Kha Brao” people used to be “domículled” in Muang Kam Kuan Keo in King Ampeu Chanuman, Monthon Ubon and Kheimarat, Ubon Ratchathani province, Thailand. In northern Kheimarat, the Brao lived in the vicinity of a group of ethnic Phou Thai people (Seidenfaden 1952). Seidenfaden (1963: 115) mentioned that the Brao were originally from Attapeu, were “well set up and strong people”, and that in the beginning of the 20th century they still spoke their own language. He wrote that, “They like to build their villages on high ground in the forest but otherwise live like the Lao who nickname them Kha Lovae”. Parkin (1991: 81) also reported that, “there were perhaps 2,500 in Thailand”, and LeBar et al. (1964: 137-8) stated that, “Some Brao have emigrated across the Mekong into northeastern Thailand in recent decades, forsaking their forest mountain uplands for lower-lying flat plateau country.” Sidwell & Jacq (2003) added that “thousands of Brao” ended up in Thailand as slaves long ago, but they were uncertain as to whether a distinct Brao community still existed in Thailand. A Kreung elder in O Chum district, Ratanakiri province told me that the people in...
populations are either in Attapeu and Champasak provinces in Laos, or Stung Treng and Ratanakiri provinces in Cambodia. There are approximately 61 villages in Laos with significant numbers of Brao people living in them, including 51 in Attapeu province and another ten in Champasak province. In Attapeu, about half of the Brao villages are located in Phou Vong district. The rest are in Samakhixay, Xaysetha, Sanxay and Sanamxay districts. Phou Vong district, the only district in Laos dominated by the Brao—with 22 of 24 villages being predominantly populated by ethnic Brao people—was established in 1991, incorporating parts of Xaysetha and Sanamxay districts. In Champasak province, five Brao villages are found in Pathoumphone district; two in Bachieng Chaleunsouk district, and one each are in Khong and Pakxong districts (see Table 2.1, Appendix 1 and Map 2.1).

In Cambodia, significant Brao populations are found in approximately 119 villages. Of those, there are four Brao villages in Sesan district and ten in Siem Pang district, in Stung Treng province. There are also one or more Brao villages in Mondolkiri province. However, 105 villages—by far the majority of Brao villages in Cambodia—are located in Ratanakiri province. They are found in Taveng, O Chum, Veun Say, Kon Mum, Lom Phat and Ban Lung districts (see Table 2.2, Appendix 1 and Map 2.2).

Lebar et al. (1964: 137) reported that the Brao inhabited “a rather large area”, extending southerly to Veun Say in Cambodia, northerly to northern Attapeu province in Laos, easterly to the Dak To area, and westerly to the banks of the Sekong River, and that they preferred living in sloped areas between 400-800 m above sea level. Although Lebar

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37 If Phon Vixay, Khong district, Champasak province, Laos was included as a Brao village, there would be 62, but the people from the village now consider themselves to be Lao.
38 23 out of 25 villages were Brao up until April 2005, when Keng Mo village was officially transferred to Xaysetha district. However, about 20 families remained in the old village of Keng Mo in early 2007.
39 In 1975, Phou Vong Tai was incorporated into Sanamxay district, while Phou Vong Neua was incorporated with Xaysetha district.
40 In fact, two of those ethnic Brao villages, Ban Na and Houay Keua, have recently been amalgamated, along with Houay Mesang village (ethnic Lao), into a single village called Houay Mesang.
41 One of the six Kavet villages in Siem Pang district, O Chay, also includes a number of ethnic Lun families, and only Lun people populate another village not included in the six Kavet villages.
42 Taveng district was established from Veun Say district in 1986.
et al. (1964) acknowledged that the Kreung were considered to be a sub-group of Brao, they did not include Kreung areas—or Brao Tanap areas for that matter—within the above extent of Brao territory. If they had, the area would have extended south of Ban Lung, the capital of Ratanakiri, rather than just to Veun Say.

Map 3.1. The approximate locations of the main ethnic Brao sub-groups in the 1950s

**Brao Sub-Groups**

The Brao generally divide themselves up into various sub-groups, including the Jree, Hamong, Ka-nying, Kavet and Lun in Laos, and the Kavet, Umba, Kreung, Brao Tanap and Lun in Cambodia (Map 3.1). These sub-group names are similar to the sub-group names identified by Ferlus (1974) and Parkin (1991). While these clearly labeled sub-groups might appear to definitively differentiate the various Brao, in reality the

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43 There are, however, some Umba living in Laos now.
44 Ferlus (1974) identified the following Brao sub-groups: Jri, Kveet, Tngor, Trngaw, Kniing, Mba, Pah, Hmong and Daak (also cited in Parkin 1991). The Jri are the Jree, the Kveet and the Kavet, the Tngor and Trngaw are not considered to be included within the Kavet, the Kniing are the Ka-nying, the Mba are the Umba, the Pah are the Lun from Phon Sa-at village, the Hmong are the Hamong, and the Daak are the 'Ntrak, not considered to be included in the Kavet (see Appendix 1) Parkin (1991) thought that Kravet (Kavet) should be included in this list, but not the Krung (Kreung).
situation is much more complicated, as will be elaborated on later. However, for now it is
worth explaining the above classification system in brief, so as to provide the necessary
background. In fact, these are terms that the Brao themselves use for classifying people,
and many of the sub-group names, including the Brao Tanap and Umba in Cambodia, and
the Hamong, Ka-nying, Kavet, Jree and Lun in Laos, are not recognised by national
governments.

Although Parkin (1991: 81) wrote that the Brao language has few “dialectal
variations”, the reality is that there are almost as many dialects as there are villages.
Many of those dialects are quite similar, but others are significantly different. Keller et al.
(2008) divide the Brao linguistically into the Northern and the Southern Brao, with the
dividing line between the two being approximately located at the Sesan River. The
Northern Brao include the Kavet, Umba, Ka-nying, Hamong and Jree, while the Southern
Brao include the Kreung, Brao Tanap and Lun.

**Jree**

The Jree were historically found in the southwestern-most part of Brao lands, in
the lower and middle Nam Kong River basin, presently in Phou Vong district, Attapeu
province, southern Laos. They are the people who had the most contact with the ethnic
Lao during the pre-French period, and they are the ones who have internalised the idea
that they are ‘Lave’, not ‘Brao’. The Jree are approximately adjacent to the Kavet, and
historically lived to the southwest of them. It seems that some of the Jree once lived south
of the present-day border with Cambodia, but that Jarai slave raiders drove them
northwest in the 19th century. Here, the Hagoo people are also included within the Jree
sub-group.

There are presently four Jree-dominated villages in Phou Vong district, another
four in Sanamxay district, and one in Pathoumphone district (see Appendix 1; Map 3.1).
Hamong
The Hamong were historically located in the upper Nam Kong River basin northeast of the Jree and the Kavet, west of the Ka-nying, and north of the Umba. They derive their name from a stream.

Presently there are seven Hamong-dominated villages are located in Phou Vong district, and one in Xaysettha district, while the Hamong are also mixed with other Brao sub-groups in various other villages in Attapeu and Champasak province (see Appendix 1; Map 3.1) (Photo 3.1).

Ka-nying
Historically, the Ka-nying were located east of the Hamong and the Umba, and west of the Keuyawng, Sedang and Jarai ethnic groups. While they used to largely live inside Cambodia near the Ka-nying stream, a tributary of the Trabok, many fled to Laos and Vietnam in the early 1970s due to intensive American aerial bombardment near their old villages. For example, the people from Kang Dak village fled to Laos from Ratanakiri in 1972 (see Chapter 6).

Now, there are seven majority Ka-nying villages in Phou Vong district and three in Xaysettha district. There is one Ka-nying village in Vietnam, and a number of other villages in Laos with some Ka-nying people living in them. I also include two Kamainy villages living along the Xekaman River in Sanxay district in this sub-group, but this inclusion is tentative and more research is required (see Appendix 1; Map 3.1).

Kavet
The Kavet were historically located in the mountains along the Lao-Cambodia border in the Kavet, ‘Ntrak, Ta-ngao, Traneul and other stream basins that flow into the Sekong and Sesan Rivers. They were located northeast of the Jree and southwest of the Hamong. The Jru Dak, Lao and the Lun were located the west side of the Sekong River, while the Kavet occupied the mountains to the east of the Sekong.

At present, there are five majority-Kavet villages in Laos, all in Phou Vong district. The Kavet are also found in smaller numbers in other Brao villages dominated by

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45 Also sometimes referred to as ‘Heumong’. Refers to a name of a stream.
other sub-groups. There are also five majority-Kavet villages in Veun Say district, Ratanakiri province, and six-majority Kavet villages located east of the Sekong River in Siem Pang district, Stung Treng province (see Appendix 1; Map 3.1) (Photo 3.2).

**Umba**

The Umba were historically located east of the Kavet, south of the Hamong, west of the Ka-nying, and north of the Lun on the Sesan River. They also border with the Jarai to the east. They take their name from Umba Stream, called Khampha in Lao and Khmer, which flows south from near the border with Laos. Although arguably separate sub-groups, the people of the Trabok stream are included in this sub-group, as are the Ka-nyoo (Siang Sai and Hamawk villages, Taveng Kroam commune) and the Blawng (Koh Pong commune).

There is presently one Umba-majority village in Laos, in Xaysettha district, with Umba mixed in various other Brao villages in Laos. The vast majority of Umba (19 villages) are located near the Sesan River in Ratanakiri province, Cambodia, where they especially dominate Taveng district (see Appendix 1; Map 3.1) (Photo 3.3). They are typically known simply as ‘Brao’ in Cambodia.

**Kreung**

The Kreung were historically located south of the Sesan River and the Lun and Umba people, and northeast of the Brao Tanap. They are also located northwest of the Tampuon and west of the Jarai. In Brao language, Kreung refers to large old-growth semi-evergreen forest (*Bree Kreung* in Brao). Although these people historically identified as Brao, they presently prefer to be called just Kreung, and many younger people deny that they are ‘Brao’. This type of rich forest is common in the area where they live, thus their name.

As discussed earlier, there is considerable confusion between the Kreung and the Brao Tanap. I consider, rather arbitrarily, that those from 40 villages in Taveng Leu, Poy, La-ok, O Chum and Kalai communes are Kreung. There are no Kreung in Laos (see Appendix 1; Map 3.1).
Brao Tanap

The Brao Tanap (or the lowland Brao) live southwest of the Kreung, west of the Tampuon, southeast of the Lao, and east of the Khmer. As mentioned earlier, many Brao Tanap people now self-identify as Kreung. Jonsson (1997) reported that many of the Brao in this area used to call themselves ‘Brao’, but found it convenient to call themselves ‘Kreung’ during the Khmer Rouge period in order to disassociate themselves from the large group of ‘Brao’ who fled to Vietnam and Laos in 1975 from present-day Taveng and eastern Veun Say districts (see Chapter 6). The name stuck, and even years after the end of the Khmer Rouge period most ‘Brao Tanap’ continue to self-identify as ‘Kreung’, often not even realising that a change has taken place. Some also identify as ‘Brao’.

There are 28 majority-Brao Tanap villages in Teun, Cha-Ung, Taong, Labang 1, Labang 2, Kachaign and Khamphun communes. There are also Brao Tanap people mixed in various other Brao villages in Cambodia. There are none in Laos (see Appendix 1; Map 3.1).

Lun

The Lun in Laos and Cambodia are the most confusing sub-group, as ‘Lun’ simply refers to people who live next to a large river. Mallow (2002) believes that the Lun are identifiable more as a social group than a group with a linguistically different dialect from other groups, and that they live next to large rivers. However, Keller et al. (2008) have argued that there are some specific linguistic forms that link up different Lun groups. Still, there are many varieties of Lun with very different customs and linguistic dialects, and the Lun have also moved around considerably in the past, mainly due to slave raiding.

There are various types of peoples who self-identify as Lun. First, there are the Lun in Taveng, Pareu Tih and Pareu Ke villages in Taveng Leu commune, Taveng district, who are actually recorded in official Ratanakiri province population statistics as

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46 The people from ‘Nchuay village in Taveng district, Ratanakiri province, sometimes refer to themselves as Kreung Dak (water Kreung), and people from Trabok village, while generally considering themselves to be close to the Umba, they are sometimes associated with the Lun, since their territory is adjacent to the Sesan River and they conduct some Animist rituals similar to the Lun (they apparently adopted these rituals from the Lun and Kreung). The people from Lun Pat village in Talat commune, Sesan district also sometimes self-identify as ‘Lun tat peur’.
being Brao. Next there is Tanaich village in Taveng Kroam commune. Then there are Tiem Leu and Tiem Kroam villages, which identify themselves as being ‘Kreung Lun’. They are followed by those from Phnom Kok Brao village in Veun Say district, who self-identify as ‘Lun tat peur’ and are identified in government statistics as being Lun, and Lumphat village, which is separated into two villages, one in Veun Say district and the other in Sesan district. The Lun living along the Sekong River in Siem Pang district, Stung Treng province self-identify as ‘Lun din deng’, a term derived from Lao language, meaning ‘the Brao living next to a large river from the red soils’. These people probably moved from present-day Taveng district in Ratanakiri province long ago to escape from ethnic Jarai47 slave raids on them. There are also two other Lun villages in Siam Pang, Din Kon Kon and Santi, which identify themselves as being Lun Vang (Keller et al. 2008) (see Appendix 1; Map 2.2).

In Laos, people from the village of Ban Na, Houay Keua and Taong villages in Pathoumphone district, Champasak province sometimes call themselves Lun,48 and since they have a memory of migrating from present-day Siem Pang district long ago, they are probably related to the Lun Vang in Siem Pang. There are also the people from Phon Sa-at in Khong district, Champasak province. They no longer live near a large stream but nonetheless self-identify as Lun. They have quite different traditions and speak a different dialect of Brao that the Lun from the Ban Na, Houay Keua and Taong Brao, or any of the Lun in Cambodia. People from Phon Sa-at sometimes refer to themselves as ‘Pah’ (named after the Pah Stream) (Keller et al. 2008) (see Appendix 1; Map 2.1).

**Brao Identities or Highland Identities**

When considering identity issues in the Annamite Range of Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam, one of the questions that cannot be avoided relates to the relative importance of particular ethnic identities like Brao compared to broader ethnic identities.

One good example of why it is important to understand Brao sub-groups can be found for the research that Bernard Hours did in Brao villages located along the road between Pakse and Pakxong in the early 1970s (Hours 1973a, b & c). He documented a

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47 Jarai is often spelt Jorai and Djarai.
48 However, they are also sometimes referred to as Pa.
number of Brao rituals, but he considered that his research was on the ‘Lave’ (Brao), a single ethnic group. He was unaware, or indifferent, to the fact that the people he studied were Brao with markedly different customs and practices, belonging to various Brao sub-groups, but living in new villages together. Therefore, his observations about Brao rituals were confused, resulting in data that are mixed up and difficult to understand. Ultimately, the usefulness of Hours’ study was badly compromised. That does not mean that sites where people from different Brao sub-groups converge are not interesting places. But Hours was apparently not aware that such spaces existed, thus leaving them hidden and not considered.

Historically, it is clear that ethnic identities amongst the people of the Annamite Range have changed a great deal since the pre-French period. Before, social identities appear to have been mainly associated with particular ‘village groups’ or small groups of villages. However, the first Frenchman to encounter the Brao heard about ethnic groups and sub-groups. These concepts do appear to be ‘indigenous’. While a ‘pan-Brao’ identity did not exist—and in many ways still does not exist—linguistic similarities certainly helped strengthen inter-ethnic group relations. However, today there are no organisations that claim to represent or link up ‘Brao’ people throughout the areas where they live.

What about a ‘pan-highlander’ identity? Ruohomaki (2003) reported that while the various highland groups in Ratanakiri display differences, he believes that the quasi-sedentary swidden system that all the groups practice, as well as the special relationship between the highlanders and nature and the spirits are two critical factors that unite highlanders in Ratanakiri in a common highlander world that is quite different from what is visualised by lowland Khmers. Similarly, in July 1938 the governor general of French Indochina argued that, “the Moi—despite their differences—constituted one racial group, distinct from the other Indochinese races” (Salemink 1999: 293). Paul Guilleminet, cited by Salemink (1999: 294), also argued that the “Moi” shared a fundamental cultural unity, and Captain Cupet (2000[1900]: 253) asked a similar question after his trip deep into Brao and other nearby tribal areas:

“Do they belong to the same race, or to different stocks? That is a problem more easy to state than to solve. Without nationality, without history, they have left nothing behind that could clarify their past. A superficial
examination has allowed me to distinguish among them very different types and to note among their dialects such a difference that they cannot understand each other between the groups. They display this common but negative characteristic to be very inferior to the neighboring races and to possess neither religion nor script.”

I will not provide any definite conclusions about the relative importance of different identities, as any strong opinion would have a good chance of being erroneous. It appears to me that the Brao and other ethnic groups in the Annamites tend to deploy each type of identity depending on the circumstances. For example, if a group of people from a Brao village came into serious conflict with people from a different ethnic group—say the Tampuon—ethnic group or village-level identities might most conveniently be deployed. However, if a Brao and a Tampuon found themselves as ‘comrades in arms’ fighting against the Khmer Rouge in Western Cambodia, far from home (as was often the case in the 1980s), the ‘highlander’ identity might well suppress ethnic group identities, at least temporarily. Sometimes Brao people even find it convenient to identify as Khmer or Lao.

Gerald Hickey (1982b), in his important book, Free in the Forest: Ethnohistory of the Vietnamese Central Highlands 1954-1976, discusses the development of ‘ethno-nationalism’ amongst the indigenous peoples of the Central Highlands of Vietnam. He linked identity changes amongst highlanders to increased interaction between people during the French period and later during the Second Indochina War. The government brought people together, as civilians, government officials and, most importantly, as soldiers. The Viet Cong also brought different groups of highlanders together in the name of the opposite cause. In addition, the Catholic Mission at Kon Tum inevitably brought highlanders from different ethnic groups together in the name of yet another identity component, religion.

When compared to the pre-French era—when villages were independent entities or ‘countries’—and were frequently warring and had to constantly be prepared to defend themselves from attacks from other villages or parties of slave raiders from the lowlands, the French and their followed certainly brought people from different highland groups together in new ways. Therefore, changes have occurred in the socio-political and economic circumstances of the region generally, but not uniformly. However, much less
emphasis was put on village level identities, and more was put on larger ‘scale’ identities, including ethnic group identities, ‘highlander’ identities, and, of course, identities associated with the rise of the nation-state. In the future, as time-space compression continues to occur and become increasingly globalised, they might adopt even broader identities, such as regional identities, in which they adopt ‘Southeast Asian’ or ‘Asian’ identities. But that is still generally a ways away.

**The Social Organisation of the Brao**

**The Origins of the Brao and Groong Yoong**

Bourotte (1955) suggested that the mountain dwellers of the Annamite Range, including the Brao, originally came from the low-lying fertile plains of today’s coastal Vietnam, stating that they were probably driven to the mountains by invaders, such as the Cham, Khmer and the Kinh (Vietnamese). Bourotte seems to have largely based his conclusions on the fact that some upland groups have legends that link them with the sea. This view emphasises the unfounded assumption that people would not want to live in the mountains unless forced to do so. It may well be that some were displaced to the mountains from the lowlands, but it also seems likely that some were already living in upland areas. It is probable that the reality is much more complex than is frequently recognised.

Bourotte (1955) provided various other possible explanations about the origins of the highlanders. He thought, for example, that Negroes, Papuans and Melanesians, similar to the aborigines of Australia and New Guinea, once populated Indochina, but that those people disappeared from the region, being replaced by people in the “Indonesia race” (now recognised to be Austronesian). Whatever the case, Bourotte seems justified in suggesting that it is unlikely that the mountain people of the Annamites once constituted a single people.

Although the Brao have certainly moved around to some extent over history—in response to movements of other groups, conflicts with other communities, and particularly slave raiding (see Chapter 5)—there is no reason to believe that they did not come from the general region where they are presently located, southern Laos and
northeastern Cambodia. Certainly the linguistic data indicate that they have lived in the region for some time (see Keller et al. 2008).

I have not heard the Brao tell any fables or myths that relate to them having made long distance migrations. Therefore, I was surprised to read, in the 2005 book Ethnic Groups in Lao P.D.R. (LFNC 2005: 154), the following:

“The Brao ethnic group has lived in Laos for centuries. There is no clear evidence about their background or origin. According to the elderly Brao people living in Attopeu province, the Brao migrated from the north through the Plain of Jars in Xiengkhoun province and settled along the Sekong, Sekamarn, and Sesoo rivers, in the intersection between the border of Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam.”

I asked an ethnic Brao official at the LFNC in Phou Vong district about this claim, since he was the likely source of most of the information about the Brao included in the book, and while he admitted that there is no evidence to suggest that the Brao came from the north, he said that some Brao do believe that they must have come from there because the Brao have the epic story ‘meut mooan Groong Yoong’ (referred to as ‘lam Cheuang’ by the Brao when speaking Lao49), and the best-known Austroasiatic ethnic group50 that also recites the epic poem Thao Hung or Cheuang are the ethnic Kmhmu from northern Laos (Proschan 1998). Both the Brao and Kmhmu versions are called ‘lam Cheuang’ in Lao, but nobody has ever analysed Brao versions or compared them with versions of other ethnic groups to determine if they have common origins or are even related.51 It does

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50 The Cheng may also have ‘meut mooan Groong Yoong’, as the Brao, but more research is required to confirm this.
51 According to some accounts of ‘meut mooan Groong Yoong’, the spirit in the sky Gre A-dai had five children, Dao ‘Nteuk, Dao Groong, Nang Haloong, Nang Jiang and Dao Phaxay. In other accounts, Gre A-dai’s male children were Groong, Yoong, Leng Khoon, Nat, Jun Tawng, Peun Pring, and Ang. The female children were Kawng Le and Doong, Gre A-dai sent all his children to earth. Gre A-dai put Groong, the main male hero, into the womb of Nang Lao. Thus, Groong was the oldest child of Nang Lao and Dao Mam. Later, after eating some rhizome with medicinal properties (Jrao in Brao), her second son Dao Yoong, was born, followed by Nang Doong, Dao But Loong, Dao Kong Le, and Dao Ang. Dao Kanteuay was the younger brother of Dao Mam, or the younger uncle of Groong. Dao Kanteuay and Dao Mam also had two younger siblings, Lam Gawng and Rawng Rao. Their parents were Dao Peung Teen and Nang Pha Num or Nang Thai. Dao Loong Khoon, Dao Nat and Dao Ja Ra were the siblings of Nang Lao, and their parents are Dao Ngo Gre and Nang Choua. Groong was a great warrior who frequently battled and defeated the enemies of the Brao. His beautiful wife, Nang Jiang, lived at Jundoo Glang Rong (Phou Kang Hong in Lao), as did his parents. He married Nang Jiang for seven years, and then fought a war against oppressors of the Brao. The second brother, Yoong, is considered to be more of a thinker, as compared to his older brother. The epic story involves various parts that involve different members of the family. These
appear that Kmhmu versions are related to Tai versions that the Lao historian, Maha Sila Viravong, first made known in 1943 (Chamberlain 1990; Proschan 1998). The similarity might only be that the texts of both relate to millenarianism, and freeing the highlanders from being dominated and exploited by lowland groups. It would be worth investigating the links in more detail, but such an assessment is beyond the scope of this study. Certainly, highland groups have a long history of millenarianism in the region, and of being dominated by other groups. Thus, it is possible that these forms of expression developed at least somewhat independently.

The ethnic Stieng people in Kratie province, northeastern Cambodia, also have an epic poem that has been equated with Thao Hung or Cheuang (Jim Chamberlain, pers. comm. 2006; Gerber & Malleret 1946), and it appears that a number of highland groups in the Central Highlands of Vietnam also have similar practices (Frank Proschan, pers. comm. 2007). It would seem unlikely that the Brao would have learnt ‘lam Cheuang’ from Kmhmu people in northern Laos, without other neighbouring groups having also adopted similar traditions. The two groups live too far apart to have come into random contact with each other. Thus, I suspect it is an anachronous invention of the Brao and other nearby groups.

Although it seems highly unlikely that the Brao originated in northern Laos, Bourotte (1955) pointed out that other ethnic groups from the same region, including the Ede (Rhade), Harak (Alak) and Jru (Laven), have legends that tell that they originally came from the north. He mentions, for example, that the “Blao” (Brao) came from Phu Yen in Vietnam, and he also speculated that the “Krung” (Kreung) show signs of being...
influenced by Champa and its language. However, it is difficult to confirm these reports, and his conclusions seem somewhat doubtful.

Although the ‘Groong Yoong’ epic story may not tell us much about the origins of the Brao, it is very significant in Brao culture, and Brao place making, as landscapes inhabited by the Brao are full of references to this legend. For example, on the La Beu Mountain in Ratanakiri province, Cambodia, there is a large natural field of imperata grass that ethnic Kreung people claim was once the swidden of Groong. There is also a large boulder near the Lao–Cambodian border that the Brao believe was once soft. When people stepped on the rock before, footprints were left, which they say can be seen today. They also believe that Groong’s younger brother, Yoong, ate the rock. Therefore, they call it “tamaw Yoong ja” (the rock Yoong ate). There are many other examples of rock formations in streams and rivers that the Brao believe to be the tables and chairs, or the boats of Groong. Along the Sesan River in Koh Pong commune, Veun Say district, Ratanakiri, there is a large boat-shaped rock that is said by the Brao to be the petrified boat of the ethnic Lun man Yong. They call it ‘dook Yong’, and there is a story about Yong taking the boat down the Trabok stream in present-day Taveng Leu to trade rice, sesame and chilies to the Lao when it hit a fence-filter fish trap (daneuh in Brao) owned by the Brao Ya Kanteuay.53 Yoong was angry with Yong for destroying the fish trap and cut up Yong’s boat, causing Yong to run away in fear. The wooden boat later turned to rock, along with containers used to carry agricultural products. To this day, it is said that if swidden agriculture is done near the boat, chilies grow up naturally in the fields.

There are some significant differences between the cultural practices of those Brao living north of the Sesan River and those living to the south, and this fit the linguistic data that supports the same division of northern and southern Brao (Keller et al. 2008). For example, the Brao to the north are especially inclined to ‘meut mooan Groong Yoong’ epic stories, whereas the Kreung and Brao Tanap do not normally sing these stories. They just ‘mich maich Groong Yoong’, which is a form of orally telling fables. The Kreung also ‘mang boong’, a form of improvised but much more basic singing. Also, the Kreung and the Brao Tanap have spirit mediums, or Me Arak, which are almost

53 ‘Ya’ is a prefix used in Brao language in front of an adult’s name. It’s exact origins are unclear, but it appears to have been adopted during the pre-French period from Lao language, and some Brao elders claim it is an abbreviation for ‘Pha-nya’ or ‘A-nya’, noble titles used by the Lao.
always women, and play an important role in ritual life. The Brao north of the Sesan do not have these mediums, either male or female. Many other Animist rituals are different between the northern Brao and the southern Brao. There are also significant differences between different sub-groups, and in some cases between different villages.

Animists

The Brao in both Laos and Cambodia are largely Animist, believing in various kinds of spirits, including ancestor spirits, house spirits, and spirits that reside in various places in nature, including forests, particular trees, large boulders, large rapids, waterfall, and other prominent or unusual natural landscapes or places. Spirits are therefore important for place-making amongst the Brao. Cupet (1998[1891]) commented on the importance of dreams in determining the everyday actions of the Brao, and he thought that they were very superstitious. The Brao largely see spirits as malevolent. That is, spirits do not do good things for people, but instead need to be appeased and treated cautiously and with respect, in order to ensure that they do not cause misfortune, illness or death to an offending person, his or her relatives, or even a whole village community. Cupet (1998: 87) quoted a highlander stating, “If there are good spirits, why would we busy ourselves with them as we have nothing to fear from them?”

Appeasing spirits largely involves particular rituals, which significantly vary from sub-group to sub-group, and even between communities considered to be in the same sub-group. These rituals often require the sacrificing of domestic animals, mainly chickens, pigs and buffaloes, but also sometimes cows, goats and ducks. The larger the animal sacrificed, the better chances that the spirit responsible for a particular illness or misfortune will be appeased. Buffalo sacrifices are considered to be the most important and prestigious type of offering for virtually all the Brao people, and other nearby highland groups, although some groups of Jree claim not to have a tradition of sacrificing buffaloes, instead considering pig sacrifices to be their most important type of sacrifice. In the past some Brao groups in the mountains did not raise buffaloes, apparently due to living in inappropriate habitat. Instead, they traded for buffaloes when they needed them.

54 It seems likely that the Kreung and Brao Tanap adopted the spirit medium tradition from the neighbouring Tampuon, as they have the same tradition, as do the Jarai (see, also, Zweers & Sok 2002).
While I call these events ‘sacrifices’—and in fact they are outwardly done for the benefit of spirits—only a very small amount of meat is actually 'given to the spirit'. The family and friends of those who sponsored the sacrifice consume the vast majority of the meat. Jar beer is a part of every sacrifice ritual, as discussed in the previous chapter.

**Kinship Relations**

The kinship systems of people are always important to understand, and the Brao have a particular system that is not typical for the region; anthropologists might call it ‘bilateral’ (see Lebar *et al.* 1964). White (1996) calls it ‘bi-locality’. This involves newlywed couples initially going to live with the bride’s parents. The Brao did not historically have a dowry system. Both sides of the family must contribute equally to the cost of weddings. After living with the bride’s family for a period—usually three or four years for the Brao Umba, Kreung, Brao Tanap, Lun, Hamong, and Ka-nying, and seven or nine years for the Kavet and Jree—the couple moves to the husband’s parents’ residence (whether in the same village or a different one) where they live for the same number of years (Photos 3.5 and 3.6). For the Jree and Kavet, the couple and any children they may have by then are free to live where ever they please. However, couples from other sub-groups generally move back to the wife’s family again for another three or four years, and then move to the husband’s parents’ house again. The cycle can continue for another round, but generally after two rounds the couple and their children are free to live with whomever they want, or to establish their own separate household, or even move to a different village. This bilateral residence pattern generally works as described above, but realities in families can result in exceptions. For example, a couple may not move house at all if either the bride or groom do not have any living parents; Or if either the bride or the groom have no siblings, an exception may be negotiated that keeps the couple in the house with no other children. Essentially, practical realities are important in determining the actual movements of people between houses.

Considering the above, Bourdier (2006: 144) was certainly mistaken when he claimed that the Brao, Kreung, Kavet and Lun have “identical kinship system(s)”, although they are based on the same overriding principles. However, I do agree with Bourdier that different groups do apply varying cultural “markers” for distinguishing the
rituals associated with different groups. Certainly the Kreung, Lun, Kavet and Brao (Umba) all have different cultural markers for the sacrifices that they conduct.

Lebar et al. (1964) reported that in 1962 Pierre-Bernard Lafont did not know of any regulations related to marriage between the five Brao sub-groups that he encountered. Likewise, in recent years I have not heard of any restrictions regarding marriage between people from different Brao sub-groups, or between Brao and people from other ethnic groups, although the Brao say that in the past there was little marriage outside of their own ethnic groups.

I have also observed, like Lafont, that polygamy occasionally occurs amongst the Brao, even today, and that Brao men sometimes live together with two wives, who may or may not be sisters or more distant relatives. However, this is the exception, and apparently only the most prominent and richest Brao men have two wives, although it might be possible for others to have two wives too, if they have the means to support them. French colonial observers also recognised that polygamy only occurred rarely amongst the Brao.

Egalitarianism

The Brao historically were socially organised in relatively egalitarian ways, with little if any structural hierarchy existing within village communities, and apparently with very little beyond the village level. The kinship and residence patterns of the Brao described in the previous section indicate the Brao’s generally egalitarian philosophy, in which efforts are made to avoid hierarchy. In residence patterns, women have an equal opportunity to reside with their parents as men, and in many other aspects of Brao society equality is emphasised. For example, there are no people in society who are considered to structurally have any sort of inherent advantage over others. The Brao also lack clearly

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55 If sisters marry the same man, it is known as sororate polygamy.
56 Brao elders have told me that Brao people can have up to seven wives, but I have never encountered one with more than two official wives.
57 Debay, Lt. 1895. Exploration de la Chaine d'Annam entre Tourane et Moung Lao – Attopeu, CAOM Indochine 6614.
58 When I say that they are egalitarian, I mean that they are structurally organised in non-hierarchical ways. However, this does not mean that some individuals are not more powerful than others, or that certain individuals have gained a reputation over history for being strong leaders. However, this power often came as a result of the respect that leaders received for not organising in hierarchical way.
defined leaders, instead preferring to delegate authority and power amongst groups of elders, with different ones looking after varying matters. This lack of social hierarchy can also be seen in relation to overall governance structures, in which both women and men have, at least theoretically, equal rights. The penalty for a man committing adultery against his wife is equal to the penalty for a woman being adulterous against her husband. While men more frequently act as adjudicators under the traditional system, women also do this, and there is nothing structurally preventing them from having the same positions as men, provided that they are seen to have the skills required to do a good job. In fact, there do not appear to be any aspects of Brao customary justice and conflict resolution that structurally discriminates between men and women, although in reality some men sometimes do try to use their power to decrease the relative status of women.

As one Kavet elder from Ratanakiri province, Cambodia said to me, referring to the period when he was young, “It was the time when every village was a country”. People appeared to primarily self-identify as members of a particular community, or at most a small group of closely related and nearby communities, rather than being a member of what Anderson (1991) calls a large ‘imagined community’. There has certainly never been any print medium, or until recently any written Brao language, to proliferate nation-building ideas related to ‘Brao-ness’.

Cupet emphasised that the Brao and other highland groups were quite egalitarian. He wrote,

“Taken altogether, and by means of a superficial examination, they display a great uniformity of types, beliefs and customs. None of their groups resembles, in terms of its society, the idea of a tribe as we know it from former times or among certain nomadic populations such as the Arabs or the Indians. The word tribe evokes a principle of authority over the whole of the group and implies solidarity between its elements. Among the savages there is nothing like this. The different peoples are independent, one from another, and do not accept a chief. Moreover, in the same people, the villages maintain their autonomy and they are in no way grouped under one authority. This thirst for independence is so strong that within the village, the inhabitants are completely free and in the families themselves, paternal authority is very much contested. The father always avoids giving his son an order which he knows will displease him, for fear of being disobeyed. He does not even entertain the idea of compelling him to submission, finding filial independence a natural tendency. Did he not
do the same during his youth? Thus the savages’ society is essentially anarchic and it has only one centre, the village” (1998: 68-70).

Cupet mentioned, however, that individuals sometimes gained influence over large groups, but that the powers of these individuals were not customarily formally defined. Cupet (2000: 344) commented that,

“Without being recognized by law, their authority exists in fact; each is subject to it unconsciously, although the first person that comes round can contest it; and for most of the time it is moral rather than real.”

This tension was probably significant for the Brao, as it was for other highland groups. Bourotte (1955), speaking of the highland people regionally, pointed out that kingdoms or even confederations were found only very exceptionally in history, and Whitaker et al. (1973: 71) wrote about the tribal peoples of northeast Cambodia that, “Each settlement is an independent and largely self-sufficient unit.” Joanna White (1996) and Leif Jonsson (1997) have also emphasised the lack of structure beyond the village-level, particularly in relation to the Kreung.

**Exceptions to Egalitarianism**

While generally egalitarian, the Brao have been influenced by their neighbours, resulting in some individuals adopting more hierarchal structures from others, like the Lao, although the ideology of the Brao often makes maintaining this sort of power over other Brao difficult, much in the same way as Edmund Leach (1954) described for the Kachin of Burma in relation to neighbouring ethnic Shan peoples. Even the Kachin who chose to adopt hierarchal structures of governance had a hard time maintaining their power over populations of Kachin who were not favourable. There were no absolute tribal leaders amongst the highlanders during that era. The Jarai may have created the ‘King of Fire’, ‘King of Water’ and ‘King of Air’ (see Salemink 2003)—in order to facilitate tribute relations with the Khmer kings during the pre-French. It should also be noted that different colonial powers promoted more hierarchal systems than what existed prior to their arrival in order to facilitate tribute relations and to more generally increase their influence over the Brao.
Both the oral histories of the Brao and French writings indicate that there is little evidence of much hierarchy in Brao villages, and even less extending beyond the village level. This appears to have been the case for most ethnic groups in the region. The functions and powers of these exceptional ‘strongmen’ or ‘kings’ in their own societies were probably much less significant than what would have been expected for kings in lowland areas. They may have played important ritual roles, and they probably did use their power to gain advantages over weaker ones, but their powers were limited beyond the particular villages where they resided, although the Jarai probably tried to give the impression that they were more powerful than they actually were.

While historically there were not any Brao regional leaders, warlords or kings, there are certainly stories about powerful Brao leaders. However, the power of these leaders was not due to any sort of hereditary position in society or structural power, but was largely based on the popularity of particular leaders. At a certain level, one needed to be egalitarian to gain respect and power amongst one’s peers, so if leaders went against egalitarian principles and tried to manifest their power in strictly hierarchal ways, they would have likely lost the respect of local people, which was the basis of their power in the first place. In other words, Brao leaders always had to be careful to maintain their relations with their followers, as there was nothing structurally preventing the people from changing allegiances. Thus, the power of Brao leaders was always tenuous and temporary.

**Brao Livelihoods**

**Brao Agriculture**

Historically, the Brao were virtually all swidden cultivators, but at present many grow wet rice, both as their principle form of agriculture and supplementary to swidden cultivation. This is especially the case in parts of Laos where internal resettlement from mountainous areas to the lowlands has occurred in recent years, and where there has been a strong push for highlanders to adopt livelihoods similar to those of lowlanders (see Baird & Shoemaker 2005; 2007). But in the past, Brao people mainly situated themselves at medium-level altitudes, often in valleys surrounded by mountains, where they frequently lived near perennial streams.
The agricultural year for Brao who primarily conduct swidden agriculture generally begins with identifying forest areas for making swiddens. Once appropriate areas have been chosen, both men and women cut down the underbrush in the forest (called *pi meur* or *mooy meur*, depending on the dialect, in Brao). The next step involves mainly men cutting down large trees in the swidden (*kao long* in Brao) (Photo 3.7) in February or March, or in some areas large bamboos (Photo 3.8). There is then a break while the cut wood and plants dry. By March or April the swiddens are burned (*jo! meur* in Brao). This is done in the daytime, and a firebreak is often created around the swidden prior to firing. After the swidden is burned, work is done to clean up any areas that have not burned well (*beum ram* in Brao). Wood and sticks are piled in different spots and fired separately, spreading the valuable ash throughout the field. Large logs and stumps not completely burned are left in the fields.

Once the fields are fully prepared in April or May, the monsoon rains begin, and planting begins (*dam 'ngoong* in Brao). Rice is the main upland crop. Baird *et al.* (1996) documented Brao swidden agricultural patterns in two villages in Ratanakiri province, northeast Cambodia. They reported that the Brao plant 181 varieties of crops, including 36 varieties of upland rice and 145 other types of annual and perennial crops. The average family was found to cultivate between three and seven varieties of rice, and 60-100 types of crops per swidden plot. In my experience, farmers are always interested in obtaining new seeds, and so it is not surprising to find that many Brao swidden cultivators have a wide variety.

Dibble sticks are generally used to make holes in cleared swidden fields, and rice seeds are deposited into these holes. Two dibble sticks are used. One stick is held in each hand, so one person is able to alternate between sticks to make the holes quickly (Photo 3.9). Men generally do the dibble sticking with women following and depositing the seeds (Photo 3.10). The seeds are generally mixed together with small amounts of seeds of other plants (sesame, cucumber, watermelon, papaya, beans, dish-rag gourd and a native vegetable called *choony riang* in Brao). Other seeds are planted separately. For example, pumpkins are often cultivated in areas where a lot of ash has accumulated, and cassava is frequently grown in the outskirts of swidden fields.
Throughout the rainy season, a wide range of crops are harvested at various times, with corn (*boot* or *hawaw* in Brao) being the first important grain ready to eat, followed by short term rice (*jeh jaraw* in Brao), medium term rice (*jeh habak* in Brao) and long term rice (*jeh jareng* in Brao), which require approximately three, four and five months respectively to ripen. Some species, like bananas, can be harvested more than a year after being planted, but perennial crops are not commonly cultivated in swidden fields. However, selective weeding and the kinds of plants cultivated influences the nature of fallows. Rice is harvested by stripping the rice seeds from the plants, pulling one’s hand up its stem (*chooit jeh* in Brao). The rice seeds are then deposited in a small basket tied in front at waist level. This method of harvesting is not possible with most varieties of wet rice, which must be harvested with a scythe, because the rice stalks of wet rice are sharp edged, and would cut anyone who tried to pull one’s hand along them.

Once all the rice seed is collected, usually in November or December, there is a ceremony to mark the storage of the crop in rice barns (*jeh teuk nook* in Brao), and then people often return to reside in their villages for a couple months, before finding a new piece of forest, including long-fallowed fields, to make a new swidden for the next agricultural year.\(^{59}\) It is during this short stay in the village that the annual village ceremony is held, which is the most important communal ritual of the year. Generally, a pig, cow or buffalo is sacrificed, followed by a period of between three and seven days in which the village is considered ‘taboo’ (*kan-trung* in Brao\(^{60}\)), and people in the village cannot leave the community, and outsiders cannot enter. If the taboo is broken, the violator is fined, generally the equivalent of the cost of the animal that was originally sacrificed for the ceremony, plus a jar of beer.

Some Brao people also make small vegetable gardens along the edges of rivers and streams in the dry season. Watermelons, tobacco, green onions and various other kinds of vegetables are frequently grown in these gardens, which take advantage of the fertile alluvial soils in which they are frequently planted. However, this type of agriculture is rarely of major importance.

\(^{59}\) This is mainly the case for the Brao in Laos and the Brao Umba and Kavet in Laos, whereas the Kreung and Brao Tanap more frequently maintain residence in their villages year round.

\(^{60}\) There are different words for different kinds of taboo in Brao (see Chapter 4).
Other Livelihood Activities of the Brao

Apart from being swidden cultivators, most Brao also have various other livelihoods, including fishing and hunting, and the collection of various non-timber forest products (NTFPs), which provide people with food for subsistence, materials for making tools and housing, and also items to trade and sell to generate income. However, fishing has long been more important than hunting to the Brao, as indicated by my own observations, and by those of Fiasson who mentioned that, “Lové [Brao] people eat very little meat; they content themselves with rice, spices and fish” (1961: 206).

Apart from a wide variety of edible forest vegetation that is collected for eating, some of the more important NTFPs for the Brao are bamboo, rattan, malva nuts, *Dipterocarpus* wood resin and various wild fruits and vegetables. However, the types of NTFPs that are important vary based on the particular habitats where they are found. But in almost all cases, livelihood activities are organised around swidden agriculture. For example, porcupines and wild pigs are frequently trapped at the edges of their swidden fields, which attracts them, and fishing trips often take place in February and March, during the period when work in the swiddens is temporarily halted so as to allow cut trees and other vegetation time to dry out in preparation for firing. In some areas, Brao people also leave large *Dipterocarpus* wood resin trees standing in their swiddens so that they can be tapped for wood resin by swidden farmers (Baird 2003a).

The Brao are also involved in making various handicrafts for local use and sale, including dug-out canoes in some areas near large streams and rivers, woven cloth items in ethnic Kreung areas in Ratanakiri province, and bamboo baskets and other items in Champasak province. The Brao are well known for their blacksmith skills.

Brao Ethnic Relations

The Brao have long lived adjacent to, or have been in contact with, a number of different ethnic groups, including the Khmer, Lao, Tampouon, Triang (Talieng), Jru Dak (Sou), Keuyawng (also spelt Koyong), Sedang and Jarai (see Map 3.2 for general pre-French locations of these ethnic groups), and these relations have been very important for Brao identity production. Matras-Troubetzkoy (1983) has correctly emphasised that the
Brao people should not be characterised as not having had contact with other peoples. She wrote,

"[T]he Brou [Brao] have never been an isolated people. Located in a region that is truly a crossroads, they have been, throughout the length of their history, in contact with other populations. It is not surprising, under these conditions, that they have numerous cultural traits in common with their neighbours. We think it would be a waste of time to try to understand the cultures of this region without constantly keeping in mind the idea of interrelationships and reciprocal influences that unite them" (1983: 399).

Due to space considerations, I will not be able to review the various relations here. Instead, I intend to include more about these relations in my upcoming ethnohistory of the Brao. However, it is worth explaining a bit about the relationship between the ethnic Lao and the Brao, as their relationship is particularly relevant for what will follow.

Map 3.2. The approximate locations of ethnic Brao and other neighbouring ethnic groups
The Lao

It is clear from the scant written sources available, and from Brao and Lao oral histories, that these groups have had significant interactions with each other over at least the last few hundred years. This is indicated, for one, by the large number of Lao words that have been integrated into all dialects of Brao language, especially in Laos but also in Cambodia. There are many other aspects of Brao culture that indicate a high level of contact between the Brao and the Lao over history. However, this contact has rarely been on equal terms, and the Brao were often forced into subservient relations with the Lao. The following Lao idiom indicates the contempt that the Lao have often shown for the Brao: “Khvam khit Kha 5 non phou, Khvam khit Lao 20 non phou” (The idea of the Kha goes to 5 mountains, the idea of the Lao goes to 20 mountains). In other words, the Brao are shortsighted, and cannot see beyond a few mountains, while the Lao see themselves as having more vision. The Lao are well known for trying to take advantage of highlanders. As one Lao from Attapeu put it, “This attitude has caused tensions between the Lao and other ethnic groups for a long time.” Illustrative of the subservient relationship that the Brao had to the Lao, various Brao elders told me that before the First and Second Indochina wars, the Brao could never sleep in houses owned by ethnic Lao people. They had to sleep under the houses, on the edge of the nearby river, on a sand bar, or elsewhere outside. The Lao created social boundaries between them and the Brao that had real spatial implications; these boundaries helped maintain Lao hegemony over the Brao.

An ethnic Lao man originally from Muang Kao, in Attapeu province, told me in 2006 that when he was a child in the 1940s, the Lao in Attapeu generally considered the Brao to be the ‘lowest’ of the ethnic groups in the Attapeu region because they had the smallest houses and moved around frequently. Similarly, in 1995 an ethnic Lao man who frequently traded far up the Xekaman River said that the Brao were the most ‘difficult’ of the ethnic groups in Attapeu, as they did not want to change their behaviour and ‘develop’, as he put it. The Lao also referred to the frequent movements of the Brao as representative of why it was so difficult for the Brao to develop, compared to the Lao who do not move frequently. Baudenne (1913) wrote that, “The Kha, except for the Lové, are combative. They are all shy, discreet and believe everything.”
It is certainly not uncommon for peoples to be significantly influenced by the cultural practices of colonial groups of people. In fact, the influence of the Lao continues to be significant in both Laos and Cambodia, although Khmer culture and language are becoming more significant than Lao culture and language to the younger generations in some Brao areas in Cambodia. More about the relationship between the Brao and the Lao will be presented in Chapter 5.

Conclusions

Apart from providing an introduction to Brao culture, society and livelihoods, this chapter demonstrates the complex nature of Brao ethnic identities. Even seemingly basic things like how to identify the Brao are often confusing, even to many Brao themselves. The same goes for little-understood ethnic Brao sub-group identities and the complex divide between highland and lowland identities.

While living mainly in relatively remote parts of Laos and Cambodia, one of the important conclusions of this chapter is that the Brao are not an isolated people. Instead, they have long had complex and sometimes contradictory relations with peoples from other ethnic groups, and these relationships have undoubtedly influenced the nature of Brao identity production and reproduction, not just at present, but also long into the past.
CHAPTER 4
The Spatial Organisation of the Brao

Introduction

Ethnicity is an important indicator of social and spatial organisation, and is a useful category to focus on in relation to the Brao, but a caveat is required: it will certainly never be possible to predict social and spatial organisation amongst individuals or for people in particular villages, based solely on ethnicity. In fact, it would be foolish to suggest that the Brao have ever all organised in exactly the same ways. There are many other factors that are crucial, including class, religion, nationality, ecological setting, local history, and of course individual human agency, all of which should, ideally, be considered together with ethnicity.

However, ethnic identities are relatively more important for some peoples compared to others, and it appears to me that ethnicity is frequently more critical for people belonging to ethnic minorities—as compared to those belonging to dominant or more populous ethnic groups—although there are undoubtedly many exceptions to this general observation. That is because minorities in close contact with people from more dominant ethnic groups frequently identify the ‘Others’ based on ethnicity, or race. This, in turn, tends to increase minority awareness of their ethnic identities, although at a certain point a great deal of contact with other groups—especially when they are dominant—can lead to assimilation and a resulting reduction in ethnic identity awareness.

I have noticed that ethnicity is high on the agenda of almost all the Brao people I have come into contact with, and it seems to me that their general positions of weakness compared to the ethnic Lao and Khmer who have tended to dominate them over history often leads to the Brao feeling somehow united or with a sense of camaraderie with other Brao. Ethnicity is generally quite important for the Brao in relation to differentiating between them and those they consider to be ‘Others’, as it is often important for the ‘Others’ when identifying them, even if the cultural markers and ways of classifying people by both are frequently different. Many of the differences between ethnic groups are identified by certain ways of spatially organising, including the use of spatially oriented cultural markers for identifying the differences.
In this thesis I hope to show how social organisation is closely linked with spatial organisation in the context of the ethnic Brao people and various forms of colonialism. We know that society is always in flux, so the ways that people spatially organise certainly shift, often in surprising ways. This poststructural perspective necessarily leaves us with 'messiness' and a lack of legibility—not very appealing for positivists. Yet, social theories have never been easy to model, and the value of doing so is being increasingly questioned in human geography (see Gregory 2000a).

However, this state of uncertainty should not imply that we cannot say anything useful about the role of Brao ethnicity in social and spatial organisation, or how social and spatial organisation relate to each other, and how, in turn, social and spatial organisation processes come to shape what Brao themselves perceive as ethnicity. Although the Brao are in many ways characterised by intra-ethnic diversity rather than homogeneity, it is possible to identify some particular ways of socially and spatially organising that are typical for most Brao, at least historically. Providing that the nuances within and between peoples are not denied, it is useful to relate some of the key themes revolving around how the Brao socially and spatially organise. That is the purpose of this chapter.

**Studying Brao Spatial Organisation**

Josue H. Hoffet was the first scholar to explicitly and systematically study the spatial organisation of different ethnic groups in southern Laos, including the Brao. Hoffet was primarily interested in the geology of the region, as that was the topic of his PhD field research in 1930-31 (Hoffet 1933a), but he managed to travel extensively in the Annamite Range, including "the unconquered minorities’ backcountry" between Attapeu and the high Poko River basin in Annam (present-day Vietnam). Based largely on his travels, he wrote an article about the ethnic groups that he encountered in this little known part of Indochina, entitled *Les Mois de la Chaine Annamitique entre Tourane et les Boloven* (1933b), in which he systematically described the ways that different ethnic groups spatially organised their villages. While interesting for various reasons, Hoffet’s study was comparative and considered a large number of ethnic groups without providing much detail about any one of them, or venturing to consider scales more detailed than
ethnic group. He did, however acknowledge the weaknesses of his observations and the anecdotes that he reported on, stating that, “the speed at which I traveled did not give me hardly any opportunity to gain the confidence of the minorities, something that is nevertheless indispensable to collect stories of any value” (Hoffet 1933b: 39).

Jacqueline Matras was the first to look at Brao spatial organisation at the village level. She first dealt specifically with the spatial organisation of the Brao in her article, *Elements pour L'étude du village et de l'habitation Brou* (Matras-Troubetzkoy 1975). Building on Hoffet’s (1933b) general observations, she concentrated her research in the one Brao Tanap village of Tuh Kandrom. She went into considerable detail in describing “the Brao house”. While this resulted in a singular description of the ‘Brao house’, my research indicates that there is a great deal of variety in the different kinds of dwellings that the Brao make, even within a single village, and that Brao villages and individuals design their houses in a variety of different ways (Photos 4.1 to 4.10). Some of these differences are based on the sub-group membership (see Chapter 3), but there are various other factors, including what materials are easily accessible, and, of course, individual and community agency. To be fair, however, Matras-Troubetzkoy (1975: 216) did hint at the differences even if she did not provide much information about them. For the village that she studied, she wrote,

“Several times in the previous pages, “big houses” were opposed to “small houses” (*hnaam tih* and *hnaam ke*). We did not really mention the houses with intermediary dimensions, although they are very common…”

She provided information about how the designs of the dwellings are linked with the daily life of the Brao. For example, she explained how the space of a house is socially organised by different family members and in terms of gender. Matras described the rectangular communal house (*rong* in Brao) in the middle of the Brao village, including its social significance and its role as a place where young boys gather, communal gatherings occur, and visitors stay.

Matras-Guin (1992) followed up with a much more in-depth and important contribution to the study of Brao spatial organisation in a book chapter titled, *Le cercle du village: orientation et hiérarchisation de l'espace chez les Brou du Cambodge*. Matras-Guin has maintained a long interest in spatial organisation, and her doctoral supervisor,
George Condominas, has certainly influenced her ideas in this respect (see Condominas 1980; 1990). Again, however, Matras-Guin’s chapter was limited to the same single village in Ratanakiri, and her previous research from the 1960s. She had not returned to Ratanakiri since leaving in 1968.

Yet Matras’ work is by far the most in-depth look at Brao spatial organisation prepared to date. Part of her chapter covers some previous ground, but she provides more detail about how the Brao spatially organise. For example, she elaborates on some types of spatial taboos, and explains the bilateral marriage system of the Brao (see, also, Chapter 3). Most importantly, apart from just providing a static picture of Brao spatiality, she discussed Brao spatial change, a topic that she had not dealt with previously.

Matras-Guin (1992) approaches ethnicity-based spatiality in a structural way, which is not surprising considering when her original research was conducted. But readers of her works are left to assume that all Brao organise themselves as Tuh Kandrom, as similarities or differences with other communities are hardly mentioned. Through her, Tuh Kandrom became the de facto ambassador and archetypal model of the Brao internationally. One of the things that this dissertation will hopefully do is help fill in some of the middle ground so far left undocumented by other Hoffet and Matras.

Here, I will not provide the type of detailed descriptions of Brao housing that Matras-Guin (1992) did, as my multi-sited approach does not lend itself to this. However, I will provide a general description of some of the ways that the Brao have socially and spatially organised, tracing the changes that have taken place from the late 19th century through to the present. While the main point of this chapter is to provide the reader with some foundational information about how the Brao have socially and spatially organised historically, it will also be necessary to compare the past with the present, in order to contextualise the information provided.

**Seven Spatial Scales of Brao Organisation**

I have chosen to divide Brao social and spatial organisation into seven major categories, or scales: ethnic group, ethnic sub-group, village territory, village proper, ‘bra’ (Animist spirit) group, household, and individual. These do not include more recent spatial scales based on nation-states and government-imposed administrative boundaries,
like sub-districts, district, and provinces, as it will become evident in later chapters that these administrative boundaries have changed frequently over history, and are also different in Laos and Cambodia.

The use of scales can be essentialising, and so I have tried to avoid being boxed in by these categories. In other words, these scales are useful heuristic tools, but they are not all encompassing and are always open to change. The main reason I have chosen the seven scales presented here is not because they are ‘natural’, as spatial scales at the level of social organisation can never be considered anything but society-dependent; the Brao have indeed socially constructed these scales. They are, however, the scales that appear to me, based on my ethnographic studies of the Brao, to make particular sense to at least the majority of the Brao with whom I have interacted. Even if the Brao might have a hard time articulating them in the way that I do here, these scales of organisation are meaningful to them as they live them, and they have important implications for their everyday lives.

**Brao Land**

I have noticed in both Laos and Cambodia that the Brao frequently separate themselves spatially from lowlanders by employing a particular geographical discourse that clearly differentiates their lands from those of other ethnic groups, especially the Lao. They call the places where they historically lived in the uplands ‘Brao land’ (*breh Brao* in Brao), and they contrast these spaces with the lowlands—including areas where they live today—that they call ‘Lao land’ (*breh Lao* in Brao). It seems to me that these discourses are especially evident amongst the Brao who have recently relocated from the uplands to the lowlands, as these are periods when the Brao often spend considerable amounts of time comparing their circumstances in their new spaces with what it was like where they used to live. This comparison indicates a certain lack of acceptance of their new surroundings and nostalgic desire to return to what they consider to be their own lands, or places, *breh Brao*. These discourses often indicate that the Brao do not see where they are living as really being ‘their places’.

The idea of ‘*breh Brao*’ and ‘*breh Lao*’ is not only a concept recognised by the Brao. The Lao do not fail to make the spatial divide in their own discourses, so as to
indicate that they are the masters of the lowlands. This is certainly disempowering for many Brao, as it gives them the feeling that they do not have as many rights over the spaces that they occupy in the lowlands, based on ethnic origin. It puts the Brao and other highland groups at a disadvantage when negotiating with Lao people in the lowlands. For example, in Kok Lak commune, Veun Say district, Ratanakiri, the Kavet there have experienced considerable problems with buffaloes owned by the ethnic Lao living nearby. These buffaloes roam into Kavet rice fields and damage their crops. However, the Lao claim that they have always let their buffaloes roam freely like that, and by playing the historical card they make it difficult for the Kavet to complain strongly, as they are frequently reminded that the Lao are the original inhabitants of the lowlands, even if this was not always true. When the Brao move to ‘Lao land’, they are expected to accept the livelihoods that are associated with the Lao in the lowlands. Brao space is associated with Brao ways of life, and Lao space is linked to Lao ways. Ethnic identities, and associated livelihood/lifestyle issues, are very much linked to important landscapes for the Brao.

The corollary is that while the Lao frequently make the Brao feel like they do not belong in the lowlands, this sense of spatial divide does give the Brao more discursive rights over the uplands, in their own minds and amongst the Lao. All those involved employ these spatial discourses in various ways and at different times and for multiple purposes, and to gain particular advantages over the ‘Others’. In the case of the Brao, lowland places are not seen as their own, either by the lowlands or by them. This, in turn, strengthens their contact with their own upland spaces, thus having important implications in terms of ethnic identities. Furthermore, if people want to adapt to the lowlands, and the particular ecological conditions there, they must assimilate ethnically in order to spatially belong. Thus, when people are resettled from the mountains they not only stand to lose the places that they belonged to, but also the ethnic identities associated with those places.

Indicative of this situation, in 2003 I visited a number of Kavet families that had returned to the mountains in Siem Pang district, Stung Treng province. I asked them why

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61 This is not only the case in Laos, but also in Cambodia, as villages inhabited by ethnic Lao people are often near Brao villages in Ratanakiri and Stung provinces in Cambodia, even today.
that had made the move, and the deputy Commune chief said that they wanted to return to 'breh Brao', where it would be possible for them to maintain Brao livelihoods. For them, Brao places are clearly linked with Brao culture. They are places where they feel empowered, masters of their own destiny. Drawing on the work of Keith Basso (1996), not only does wisdom sit in places, but culture does as well.

**Ethnic Brao Sub-group**

"[T]he savages’ society is essentially anarchic and it has only one centre, the village.”
Captain P. Cupet, Pavie Mission (1998[1891])

Although the most important social grouping for the Brao apart from the household level is clearly the village, the Brao have long recognised themselves as being loosely connected to other nearby communities with common ancestors, cultural backgrounds and dialects of speech, and these groupings make up the second scale of spatial organisation amongst the Brao: the ethnic sub-group.

The French explorer Henri Maitre (1912) visited various Brao villages in places where Europeans had never traveled (see Chapter 5), including Brao areas north of the Sesan River. He observed that the Brao there divided themselves into numerous sub-groups, and that these groups took the names of streams, mountains, or other nearby natural features by which they lived. According to him, each sub-group included 2-6 villages, whose populations apparently spoke the same dialect. The groups that Maitre referred to are some of the same sub-groups recognised by the Brao today. For example, he encountered the ‘Kavet’.

Ethnicity-based groupings are, however, flexible, and groupings of Brao sub-groups or villages should never be assumed to always comprise a single social, cultural or political unit. Leif Jonsson (1997: 547) wrote that,

“"The notion of ethnic groups having a particular, fixed social organization is the ideal among people with chiefly ambitions, and is promoted by anyone wanting to administer upland people, be they government officials or project staff.”

While there is certainly a lot of truth to Jonsson’s assessment, we now understand, following Jonsson’s point, that identities are multiple and flexible, and are employed in
different ways based on particular circumstances. However, ethnic classifications are not meaningless to the Brao, or totally absent. If that were true, we might believe that the Brao have had no contact with peoples other than themselves. But that is not true. They are certainly aware of the labels that others have applied to them and they have developed some ideas about who they are in relation to others, although we should not assume that people always assign equal value to different identity factors. Essentially, ethnic sub-groupings are meaningful for the Brao, and my research with them has indicated that this has been the case for quite a long period of time. Ethnic groupings are not simply French colonial constructs, although the French did influence them. I am not insisting that ethnic sub-group identities amongst the Brao have always been as significant as they are now, but neither do I deny that they have long been significant to many Brao. The literature from the early French period indicates that many of these sub-group names were at least in use around the time that the French first came into contact with the Brao. I expect, however, that their meanings and relative significance has changed a great deal over time, based on all kinds of factors. Therefore, I adopt a position that is not structural, but which does not totally deny the existence of ethnic identities that go beyond the village level.

Village Territory

“I remember when villages were the same as counties.”
Ethnic Kavet elder from Lalay village, Kok Lak commune, Veun Say district, Ratanakiri province, 1996

The third scale of social space is the village (‘shrook’ in Brao). It has been an important scale of social organisation amongst the Brao for as long as anyone remembers—or has ever been recorded—but ‘village’ does not mean the same thing to everyone, and we need to keep our minds open to ideas about the ways that the Brao have changed their organisation of village spaces, based on the particular circumstances at different points in history. The Brao meaning of ‘village’ has undoubtedly changed over time, due to the influence of various colonial administrative efforts (see High 2006).

Generally, the Brao have long shown a tendency to organise in small groups and low population densities, including groups of just a few families. However, at times they have organised in quite large villages, especially when it was deemed necessary for
security reasons (Hoffet 1933b; Klein 1912; Cupet 1998). For the Brao the concept of village is quite flexible, with membership changing based on various circumstances. The sizes and ways of organising villages have changed over time, but the concept of small groups of families organizing in social groups has long existed for the Brao.

It is important to separate the village into more than one space. The first, which is the focus here, relates to the broader village territories that the Brao have historically recognised. The second scale, which I will address in the next section, is the ‘village proper’, or the main populated part of the village.

Whatever the size of Brao villages, their existence has long been predicated on the idea that a village can only be a village if it has control over extended areas of territory, or forests (bree in Brao), surrounding the village proper. These spaces are what I refer to as ‘village territories’ (Illustration 4.1). While they are part of a community’s land, they are considered to be different from village propers. This division is indicated in Brao discourses, and with regard to the division of space in relation to taboos (see below). Historically, village territories included spaces where people would conduct swidden agriculture, hunt, fish, and collect various kinds of forest resources. As the Kavet elder quoted at the beginning of this section stated, villages were considered to be self-contained political entities, which are now, in their minds, equated to “countries” (he used the Lao word, “pathet”, which literally means ‘country’), even if they were in fact different from nation-states. The point is that villages were social and political entities with high-levels of autonomy. Formal hierarchal political structures above the village level did not exist, as already demonstrated in Chapter 3.

Each village would establish a border (‘pra-diang breu la’ in Brao) to separate their spaces from those of other ‘villages’ whose populations were close enough to potentially make swidden fields located between another village and the most outlying swidden field of that village, which is considered taboo. If neighbouring communities were far enough away that there was no chance of their swiddens coming into contact, no border would be created. Baird et al. (1996) found, for example, that an ethnic Kreung village in Taveng district, Ratanakiri province did not have any border to the north, since there were no nearby communities in that direction. Therefore, borders were not as symbolic as they were practical. However, they did help reinforce ideas about village
Illustration 4.1. Village Territory (hypothetical). A situation where three Brao village territories are separated by physical borders in order to avoid *huntre* taboos due to the crossing of swidden fields over one another.

unity, in similar ways to how international borders have huge impacts on the identities of people today (see, also, Baird 2008a).

Of course, even now villages and municipalities have physical borders, but the difference is that in the past structural hierarchy in Brao society generally did not extend beyond each village’s borders with other villages, just as some would argue is the case with nation-states. However, the increasingly globalising world is undoubtedly making
such claims of national autonomy less defendable. The key is that the scale of social and spatial organisation was different than it is today.

Other closely related groups apparently have similar spatial concepts. Brao elders for Trabok village told me, for example, that the Tampuon definitely have similar ideas about spatial order and taboos.

Essentially, the territories of villages represented the ‘homes’ for individual Brao villages, and people within the communities probably rarely ventured outside of their territories, especially when there was the chance of being attacked or captured by people from other villages. Village territories represented the defining social space of each village, and each village territory included various landscapes of importance to the people living there. These landscapes evoke Brao fables, often related to their messiah figure, Groong, and so have meaning beyond their physical characteristics or utilitarian uses. Local histories, social memory, identities are closely linked to the landscapes where they live. They were important places endowed with great meaning. However, these village territories were flexible in the sense that villages sometimes negotiated changes in borders based on practical realities.

The overall spatial livelihood strategy of the Brao and other highland groups was to inhabit all or most areas of land, with the land being divided up between different village territories. Therefore, all the land ended up being populated, but sparsely. This land use strategy resulted in low levels of human density over wide landscapes, thus making local livelihoods relatively easy for the people to sustain, and it also protected the natural resources that were the basis for local livelihoods. Small, scattered and temporary villages were the best strategy of settlement considering their swidden agricultural system (Whitaker et al. 1973). There were no large population centres where densities were higher, as the political structures that would have led to this did not exist (see, also, Ironside & Baird 2003). The closest large settlements to them were ethnic Lao dominated towns, including Champasak, Attapeu, Stung Treng, Veun Say and Siem Pang, but even these centres were not very large by present standards.

Unfortunately, outsiders have long misunderstood Brao land and their use of nature. For example, various French observers in the 19th century believed that swidden farmers from the same region as the Brao were ‘nomadic’. Aymonier (1876), for
example, described the highlanders of northeast Cambodia as being “belligerent” and “semi-nomadic”, and Taupin (1888: 52) mentioned, but this time with particular reference to the Brao, that, “These people, even though cultivating the soil, look a lot like the nomadic preachers by the easiness with which they move.” But in 1891 Captain Cupet (1998: 1437-148), from the famous Pavie Mission, stated that,

“Nowhere have I found any [highlanders] that are at all nomadic, as they are generally believed to be. Besides, even if they wanted to move around, they could not do so except within a short radius. As a consequence of secular fighting, the inhabitable territory has been divided up between the villages. Each of these has won a corner, in which it billets itself and which truly belongs to it. Simple verbal agreements and traditions limit the public domain. Within it the inhabitants mark out their fields as they see fit, fish and hunt as they please. The smallest incursion into neighbouring territory brings about a conflict because nothing safeguards collective property among them. The different peoples are, consequently, more or less immobilised where they are established. Despite the forces working against autonomy, resulting from their way of living, from their social organisation and from the deep-rooted, continual fighting, a great number of them have preserved their independence almost entirely until today.”

Essentially, different social groupings historically controlled particular territories of land, which they moved around in based on the availability of suitable forests for doing swidden agriculture, or sometimes in response to epidemics or other bad fortune. Their movements were influenced by various events and associated taboos. For example, if a village burnt down, it was not deemed suitable to rebuild at the same location. If a woman died in childbirth, her family would have to abandon their swidden house and establish residence at another location in the village territory. During some years the village proper, swidden fields, and houses would be changed, while in other years only villages would be moved, or more frequently, only swiddens and swidden field houses would be relocated.

The Brao have complex ways of interacting with nature, and have developed particular tenure arrangements for different resources. For example, swidden fallows and forests have long been considered to be common property, owned by the villages on whose territories they are located. *Dipterocarpus* wood resin trees are, however, managed using various tenure arrangements, including private tenure in Taveng district (Baird 2003a). In Kon Mum district, the Brao Tanap use a combination of private, communal,
and tenure involving small groups of individuals or families working in cooperation with each other, either by tapping trees together or through rotating between members of the association—called ‘companies’ or ‘krom hun’ (Baird 2005b). Other resources, like malva nut trees, are managed mainly as common property (as opposed to completely open access), although in some areas there are problems with enforcing rules against cutting down malva nut trees to harvest the fruit (Baird & Dearden 2003). Fisheries are considered to be common property, but the Yali Falls dam has had a very negative impact on fisheries in the Sesan River in Ratanakiri and Stung Treng provinces in northeast Cambodia (Wyatt & Baird 2007; Baird & Meach 2005; Baird et al. 2002; Fisheries Office, Ratanakiri Province and NTFP Project 2000) (see, also, Chapter 8).

Village Proper

The ‘village proper’, as I call it, is the fourth scale of spatial organisation amongst the Brao. This includes a community’s main village houses (hnam shrook in Brao), its communal house(s) (rong in Brao), and sometimes rice barns (nook in Brao), although these are frequently in swidden field areas outside of village proper. Matras-Troubetzkoy (1975) distinguished the social space of the village proper from that of the cultivated space of the swidden fields, and from the forest as well. While she is right in distinguishing the social space of swiddens and forests at a certain level, at another scale they are both part of the village territory according to the Brao, an issue that she does not specifically address.

Historically, Brao villages were all organised in concentric circles (shrook wil in Kreung, Brao Tanap and Lun and shrook joom in Umba, Hamong, Ka-nying and Kavet) (Illustration 4.2; Photo 4.11). However, at present many villages are organised in long lines, often on either sides of roads. These long villages are called ‘shrook go’ by the Umba and ‘shrook rong! dawng’ by the Kreung (Illustration 4.3). Some, however, are still circular. For example, in Cambodia Mas, Bee, Gum, Kroala, Tuh Kandrom are all good examples of circular villages; and in Laos Phon Sa-at, Ban Na and Taong are organised circularly. The Brao also sometimes support this shape of village by saying that it has been the case “from ancient times”. Many claim that circular villages increase community solidarity and promote the participation of all families in village activities. As
a Kreung villager from Bee village pointed out, “Everyone can see everyone else from their houses.” People from Tuh Kandom mentioned that the critical advantage of circular villages is that they make it easier for everyone in the village to be able to watch all the other houses. Some mentioned that having a circular village is important when guests
stay in the communal house in the middle of the village proper space, as everyone needs to see the guests so that they know to give cooked rice to them to eat, according to custom. Since the *rong* are the social centres of Brao communities, group solidarity benefits from having a good view of it from their front door. Elders also told me that having circular villages makes it easier to watch out for other people in the village if they become sick. Essentially, the circular villages appeared to be quite important for creating a strong sense of community participation and unity. The space was important for the social.

Circular villages were also critical for security. According to many Brao elders, in the distant past, when there was a lot of inter-village conflict, circular villages were particularly advantageous because they were more easily defended against neighbouring village attacks or slave raiders. Captain Cupet of the Pavie Mission described, in 1891, how Brao villages tended to be built close to clearings. The Brao were spatially organised to defend against attack. Illustrative of this, Cupet observed that Brao villages were often built in the centre of impenetrable brush, which he recognised as providing excellent defense. He explained that one, or at most two paths, cut in a zigzag or maze-like manner through the underbrush, providing access for those who knew the way to the centre of the village, where the houses were located. Once inside, the village was spread out on the perimeter of concentric circles, with a communal house located in the centre (Cupet 1998; 2000).

Henri Klein (1912) reported that in Moulapoumok province in northeastern Cambodia the highlanders, including the Brao, almost always fortified their villages, fearing both human attacks and those of tigers. They often used double rows of cut trees and tight clumps of bamboo to create buffers between villages and surrounding forests. These sorts of defences tended to reinforce the separation between the village territory and the village proper.

Antonin Baudenne (1913), as the administrator of Attapeu, mentioned that ‘Lové’ (Brao) villages were all organised following a particular model. Situated on slopes, the main entrances of villages were preceded by open areas, which were designed to make it more difficult for attackers to surprise those in villages. He described how one had to climb up bamboo ladders or trunks with cuts in them to enter the village. Once inside,
villages were circular, 30-50 m in diameter. Most Brao houses were inhabited by single nuclear families.

Hoffet (1933b) described Brao villages as having “Dwellings arranged in wagon wheels around a central communal dwelling” (Hoffet 1933b: 8). Like others, he mentioned that the Brao villages he encountered were “fortified” and had what he called, in French, “porte-couloir” (door passages). He was probably describing a type of defensive spatial organisation that involves chopping down trees surrounding a village, and making a maze of tunnels under the fallen trees (called ‘gaw! lumpat’ in Brao). Then, if a village was attacked, the people could more easily escape out of the maze. Hoffet pointed out that the Brao only inhabited their villages in the dry season, and that they lived in their swidden fields during the rainy season.

LeBar et al. (1964), based on the personal notes of Pierre-Bernard Lafont for the year 1962, stated that the large fortified villages, like those described above by Cupet, Klein, Baudenne and Hoffet, were a response to the need for group security, but since security had improved after the arrival of the French administration, these large villages were not necessary at the time of Lafont’s research and therefore the people tended to divide themselves “into two to five or sometimes more villages” (1964: 138). He referred, for example, to the Kavet community of Kok Lak in Veun Say, which apparently split into ten communities after the arrival of the French. Lebar et al. (1964: 138) wrote that, “This fissioning, partly attributable to French and subsequent national protection against incursions by the Siamese, also stems from internal dissension.” Unfortunately, however, no additional details were provided about this “dissension”. The attacks that these large fortified villages were designed to defend against would have not only come from other villages, but also the Siamese, Lao, and Khmer.

Similarly, Jonsson (1997) mentioned the reasons why highland villages were not fortified anymore. Following Leach’s (1954) argument about the Kachin Hills of Burma, he mentioned that French enforced peace apparently led to a more even distribution of people over the landscape, as they no longer had to cluster for defense and warfare.

Cupet (2000) offered additional insights about how highlanders tended to organise themselves and defend their villages. In one case, a group of soldiers under his command managed to surprise and surround a village of highlanders, who Cupet wanted to meet but
did not intend to attack. The highlanders, seeing that they were surrounded, and believing that an attack was imminent, gathered in a circle at their communal house in the middle of the village. Women and children were in the centre, and the men surrounded them on the outside. Some of the men were bent with bows while others held sabers, which they must have seen as a last line of circular defence. They all waited for the attack, reportedly with considerable calmness. In effect, they had recreated the circular defensive form that was utilised to organise their village.

Cupet (2000) mentioned that villages were quite often closed off to outsiders when there were epidemics, during village celebrations or sacrifices, or even when people were repairing their houses. A *ka-chooay* taboo stick signified that going any further was prohibited, thus demonstrating the different ways space is divided up (see description below and Photo 4.12).

But circular villages have other purposes. They make it less likely that paths from houses to swidden fields will not cross each other. For example, Tanaich village in O Chum district, Cambodia had a long village and experienced this problem, resulting in the spatial taboo ‘*huntre*’ (see below, or Baird 2008a for description of ‘*huntre*’). Thus, the village reorganised itself into being a circular village again. A person in the village dreamt about the *huntre* problem, and so the whole village abandoned their old village and made a new circular village elsewhere.

The village headman from Kroala village in Cambodia made a long village many years ago, but the community found it difficult to defend against Khmer Rouge attacks after 1979, so they reorganised their village space so that it was circular. He said that the village was also made circular because many people were becoming sick. He mentioned that when they had a long village, people frequently crossed each other’s paths, causing ‘*huntre*’ taboos.

Phon Sa-at is one of the best examples of a circular Brao village in Laos. However, it is organised in a somewhat different way than any other Brao villages in either Laos or Cambodia. As with other villages, it has a communal house in the middle, which the inhabitants call ‘*sala shrook*’. The next layer of organisation includes the 200 or so households in Phon Sa-at village, and then, just beyond the layer of houses are the rice barns. A wooden fence (‘*rambawng*’ in Brao) is outside of the rice barns, and
encircles the village. It essentially acts as the border that separates the village proper from agricultural areas that are part of the broader village territorial scale of organisation. In the case of Phon Sa-at, there are lowland rice fields (‘na’, following Lao language) just outside of the village fence, followed by streams (‘janaw’ in Brao) where water is collected, and then forests (‘bree’ in Brao).

Phon Sa-at had the unique tradition of putting an imperata grass rope (‘jameu tanaich’) around their village to protect the village proper space. This was done once every three years as part of the village’s annual rituals, to protect the village’s inhabitants from misfortune, but many Brao have recently found it difficult to keep outsiders from entering the inner-village area during the few days that the space is taboo. Therefore, they have adapted their practices so that each household makes their own imperata grass rope, and wraps it around each house roof once every three years, rather than putting a rope around the whole village. A ‘ka-chooay’ taboo stick is put in front of each house stairs or ladder when they are in the taboo phase, to warn people not from the family that lives there that they cannot enter. This is a good example of a shift in spatial scales from the village level to the house level; it is practically easier to protect household spaces from outside intrusions than it is to protect the village proper space from outsiders, as was once the case. Each house sacrifices two chickens when doing the ritual for their houses, and there is an associated sacrifice at the village communal house around the same time.

Apart from organising villages in concentric circles, and in long lines, villages are now sometimes organised in another way, which the Brao call ‘shrook thalana’. Those villages are somewhat circular, but are not as ordered in the same way. There may be a road through the middle of these villages, and in Cambodia, Khuan and Phak Nam villages are good examples of this type of village.

Some Brao in Cambodia recognise another village shape known as ‘shrook pra toy troong’. This term refers to long oblong villages in which houses are situated on both sides of a road is a well ordered fashion. Teun and Kambak villages in Cambodia were mentioned as good examples.
Village gates, called ‘viang’ by the Umba and Kavet, ‘troong’ by the Ka-nying\textsuperscript{62}, and ‘trawk’ by the Kreung, often mark the entrances of village proper spaces, regardless of their shapes, but especially for circular villages. Special rhizomes called ‘halop’ in Brao are frequently planted at the bases of these gates during village annual communal sacrifice rituals. There may be one or a few gates surrounding a village. They are mainly put on main paths to the village and from riverbanks up the village.

Brao villages are inhabited in different ways, and the ways in which village shapes influence social practices is often the focus of spatial studies of villages (Bourdieu 1979; Pellow 1996; Institute of Cultural Research 2003; Institute of Cultural Research and Hata Laboratory 2005). For example, the Brao south of the Sesan River, including the Kreung and the Brao Tanap, generally do not leave their village residences unoccupied for long periods. They even have a particular taboo that prevents them from leaving their village houses for more than a few days. However, for Brao groups north of the Sesan River, villages historically tended to only be occupied for a month or two each year, between around December to February, after the end of their agriculture season. After being occupied for a few months, families returned to their swidden fields. Villages north of the Sesan River may have occupied villages for shorter periods because of the relatively poor quality of soils on their lands, compared to the south. For example, swiddens on red soils can be successfully used for up to seven years in a row, whereas it is generally only possible to productively do swidden agriculture on a piece of land north of the Sesan for a year, or two years at the most. Therefore, villages to the south do not need as much land for agriculture as those to the north, can live in higher densities, and can more easily live in their villages without being far away from their swidden fields.\textsuperscript{63} Still, village propers have been important for all Brao groups in terms of how they spatially organise.

\textsuperscript{62} Dak Joor (Nam Souan) village, in Laos, makes village gates in two locations, whereas other Brao groups mainly only make them at the village proper borders. The Ka-nying make them once after the harvest season, at the village proper, and once in swiddens when doing a ritual called ‘bra bun’ at the beginning of the planting season. In each case, there is a one-day ‘kan-trung’ taboo after each village gate is built.

\textsuperscript{63} Bourdier (1999) found that in 1994 the sizes of villages in Ratanakiri province ranged from 70 and 841 people, with an average of 274.
Henry Klein (1912: 125) expressed considerable contempt for highland systems of spatial organisation in Moulapoumok (present-day Veun Say district, Ratanakiri province, Cambodia). He wrote:

“All the Kha people live and think in the same way: they are intelligent but resistant to any idea of progress. One of their best qualities is the hospitality that they widely practice. Their link to the forest and the mountains is to be mentioned. But if the Kha people care about their forests, on the contrary they do not care a lot about their native villages. They leave them for anything, taking with them, not only their families, but also the whole population of the villages. Either an importunate yield as before, or the “phi” does not show any favour anymore, the elderly gather if it is decided to move. It takes place as soon as the favourable season arrives.”

For the French, populating long villages year-round was the ideal, as has been the case for various colonial powers since them (see Chapters 5-8). One of the important aspects of having long villages today is that it makes it much easier to establish private property rights, since each household can be more easily allocated a certain piece of land, one that can be square or rectangular. This facilitates the planting of perennial fruit trees and ‘permanent’ inhabitation. Having villages in straight lines certainly makes this easier. This point will be more developed later in the thesis.

‘Bra’ (Animist Spirit) Group

The Brao frequently organise themselves based on their joint participation in certain Animist rituals revolving around the same spirits. These groups, which can range from just one or two to dozens of families, are based on what the Brao call ‘bra’, which can be best described as a group of families that are attached to the same spirits, and conduct rituals jointly. Brao people from all the different sub-groups appear to have socially and spatially organised themselves based on these groups in the past. Matras-Guin (1992) did not specifically use this term, but she did mention how certain houses were sometimes organised in relation to a main household where all the households participated in major Animist rituals. In most cases, related families often belong to the same bra group, but others living in the same village may also become part of a particular bra group.
Phon Sa-at village, provides an excellent example of the importance of these *bra* groups, even today. There are eight groups of families organised based on the ‘*bra*’ that they belong to, with some groups having dozens of families in them, and one having just two families. Apart from the main communal centre mentioned in the previous section, there are seven communal houses located in the circle’s open middle space, with the group with two families not having one. These structures are not for the whole village, like the main communal house; they are for groups of families that conduct Animist rituals together, coming under the same ‘*bra*’. They call these communal houses ‘*gran*’ in Phon Sa-at, a word that refers to a household in other Brao villages in both Laos and Cambodia. This is apparently an old way of spatially and socially organising amongst the Brao, and Phon Sa-at is the only village that still has this structure in either Laos or Cambodia. The state often has very little understanding of how these groups are divided up, but the physical presence of the ‘*gran*’ makes it quite evident in Phon Sa-at. Many other Brao villages in both countries still organise their rituals based on ‘*bra*’ groups, even if each was does not have its own communal house.

**Household**

The next scale of Brao spatial organisation is at the level of household. However, things are more complicated than with the village territory, village proper or ‘*bra*’ scales. That is because house design can vary significantly between Brao sub-groups—as already mentioned above—as can villages and even between households within the same village, and the ways in which people organise themselves in similarly designed houses.

The French explorer Henri Maitre (1912) commented more than once about the miserable looking huts (or “cramped dens”, as he sometimes called them) that the Brao north of the Sesan River lived in, but he also remarked on the beauty and fine craftsmanship of some village houses, and he commented on the artistry and the way that the houses were made completely with bamboo. At one of the villages he passed, the houses were built with one side sitting on the ground and the other on stilts 2-3 m tall, due to the steepness of the slope.

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64 There are also two families in the village that have their own ‘*bra*’, but do not have a ‘*gran*’ because there are not enough families in their group to justify it. They can also not join any other ‘*bra*’. All other ‘*bra*’ groups in the village have a ‘*gran*’.
As already mentioned, Jacqueline Matras-Troubetzkoy (1975) provided a detailed description of the way a Brao house is designed, and how Brao people organise themselves within houses, at least in the Brao Tanap village of Tuh Kantrom. She characterised village houses as being either large or small and raised off the ground on stilts. She described field houses as being all-purpose dwellings where people, domestic animals, tools and rice stocks share the same spaces. She wrote that they always have their entrances at ground, in contrast to village houses.

At the material level, Matras-Troubetzkoy described the particular types of trees used for housing materials, but these materials actually vary considerably between Brao villages based on both cultural and ecological conditions. Roof design and materials used are similarly variable. In some areas, for example, imperata grass is plentiful, and thus most people make their roofs with grasses. This is the case for many Lun people living next to large rivers. However, in other places imperata is rare and bamboo is more frequently used to make roofs, as was the case for the Kavet when they lived in the mountains. The same can be said for materials used for making floors, walls or posts.

Apart from differences in building material availability, there are cultural factors that are crucial across the Brao ethnic group. For field houses, for example, I found that in many cases rice granaries are separated from human dwellings, and domestic animals frequently have their own dwellings, which contrasts with Matras-Troubetzkoy’s more rigid description. In addition, village balconies or 'teer' in Brao frequently exist, but are not always located in the same position in the house as she described. They may be located in front of the house, like Matras-Troubetzkoy observed, or more indented in the house. In some cases they do not exist at all, and rice pounding occurs on the ground rather than on the balcony.

Matras-Troubetzkoy did not mention differences between individuals within the same villages, but I found that neighbours often adopt different house designs, based on various factors, of which personal preference was often an important factor. Availability of particular materials also sometimes differed between families, based on various factors, including swidden locations within particular microhabitats and labour availability. Although Matras-Guin (1992: 62) claims that all Brao houses, despite having various designs, “are organised according to identical principles”, my observations...
suggest that they are not based on identical principles at all, and in that social and spatial organisation are linked, and since we know that there are socio-cultural differences between different Brao peoples (see Chapter 3), it would be incongruous to suggest that spatial organisation principles might somehow be "identical".

Apart from simply describing housing designs, materials and building practices, as Matras-Troubetzkoy (1975) did, Matras-Guin (1992) takes the analysis a step further, and like Pierre Bourdieu (1979), pays more attention to describing how the physical spaces created by the Brao are socially utilised and take on particular meanings. This is important, because as Pellow (1996), Lawrence (1996) and others have pointed out, the same physical spaces can be quite differently utilised by different peoples, based on cultural and other factors. Matras-Guin (1992) provides considerable detail regarding how fires are located at the backs of houses, and how gongs, jars, mats and other items are situated in particular parts of the house. She explains what parts of houses different family members sleep in, as well as guests, and what parts of houses are socially allocated based on gender. She describes different sacred parts of the house, and how those special places are managed. Overall, she provides a lot of interesting detail regarding the meanings of different house spaces to the Brao people she studied.

Again, as useful as this description is, my findings in the field indicate that there is actually much more variation amongst the Brao in terms of how they socially organise within various spaces. People sometimes organise in similar ways even when their spaces are quite different, and in other cases physical spaces might be more similar, while social organisation surrounding them differs more. Any number of different factors influence these differences, and I noticed a wide range of differences throughout my research. Sometimes those differences can be attributed to the different sub-groups involved, but differences also exist between villages and between houses. It would be absurd to even suppose that everyone organises in exactly the same ways. While there are certain conceptual boundaries that are socially unacceptable to cross in particular circumstances, there is a certain amount of space between boundaries that it is socially acceptable for people to maneuver within. What is needed is a middle ground that recognises that culture is important in social and spatial organisation, without overly essentialising. For example, it is typical for cooking areas in Brao houses to be at the back of houses, but
there are exceptions, and for the smallest houses cooking is frequently done outside of the house or underneath it. These differences are perfectly acceptable in Brao society. Similarly, many Brao houses have front and back doors, but for some houses (particularly small ones) there is only one door. I could go on, but there are more important matters to consider.

**Individual**

The final scale is that of the individual person, a scale that will be obvious to most, but is necessary to include here nonetheless. There is much that could be said about how individuals utilise space. One could, for example, look at how individual Brao people organise with a focus on things like gender, age, relative wealth, or religion. For example, Matras-Guin (1992) mentions how teenage boys tend to sleep together in communal houses in the middle of villages, and how visitors are often asked to occupy certain house spaces. Fiasson (1961) pointed out how Brao people who arrived in the capital of Attapeu province for the state-organised annual rituals located themselves for sleeping in a particular place near the market. There are always spaces that some people can access and others cannot, based on the existence of either physical or conceptual boundaries. Sometimes physical boundaries are not very meaningful when conceptual boundaries do not exist in tandem. Sometimes conceptual boundaries can be very powerful even when physical boundaries do not exist. However, there are usually different types of cultural markers that physically mark certain spaces and indicate their permeability to individuals or members of social groups.

But the real point of this spatial scale is that despite the fact that we are creatures of culture, I have noticed that sometimes individuals organise in different ways for no obvious reasons. For example, some people like to spend more time underneath their houses, while others tend to spend more time inside. There are no easy structural ways of identifying the reasons for these differences. These are largely decisions based on personal preferences.

Again, even though social processes at other scales affect how Brao individuals spatially organise, ultimately people can be expected to demonstrate individual differences based on a wide range of factors, even when they are siblings, etc.
Individuality in relation to spatial organisation may not always be easily identified, but it certainly exists. People have preferences in terms of the spaces that they prefer to use, and often have some options within a range that is socially acceptable. Sometimes aptitude is important. For example, people are better at certain things than others. I am being deliberately broad here, in order to avoid essentialising in relation to the types of ways that individuality affects spatial organisation. But to provide an example, some Brao individuals prefer certain house designs instead of others. Whereas both might be considered normal in the context of the larger social group, ultimately individual human agency affects one’s choices. Even a father and son from the same household might hold different preferences in terms of how they organise their houses.

So, it is possible to reasonably identify certain ways that individuals organise, but it is critical to be agency-sensitive when doing so. For example, individual Brao men are more likely to be observed at the market in Ban Lung, whereas women tend to travel in groups to the market. However, this does not mean that one will never see individual women at the market; it is just less likely than with men. Similarly, men tend to use the dibble sticks for planting rice in their swiddens, while women put the seeds in the holes made with those sticks, but I have frequently noticed women using dibble sticks and men depositing seeds into the holes. Women are also more likely to carry young children with them, but men frequently do that as well, although less than women. The key is to avoid essentialising.

Spatial Taboos

A clear understanding of spatial taboos is important for making sense of the overall spatial organisation of the Brao, but all those who have written about Brao spatial organisation, including Jacqueline Matras, were apparently unaware of the nuances related to questions of taboos. Spatial taboos are critical for the organisation of space, including places, and greatly influence the conceptual boundaries that are created between spaces.

For this study, spatial taboos are particularly important to describe, so that it is clear how space was organised by the Brao in the past, and how different Brao systems of
spatial organisation have been changed through the imposition of other ways of spatially organising. The following are five distinctive categories of taboos.

**Da-ah**

`Da-ah’ is the most commonly used and most general term for taboo, or a prohibition, in Brao language. It is employed when someone breaks a social convention, with or without important spatial implications. For example, it would be considered *da-ah* to enter a village that is conducting a communal village Animist ritual. Therefore, *da-ah* is the term that would be used if one of the taboos described below were broken, but it could be used when more general taboos are violated. For example, it is *da-ah* for a couple to move residence before conducting the required rituals, or it is *da-ah* to only drink a half glass of rice jar beer when one’s host requires that everyone drink at least a full glass. It is considered *da-ah* to conduct swidden agriculture on the village territory of another village. There are many other possible examples.

**Kun-trung**

A second type of taboo is called `kun-trung'. It is a particular type of short-term spatial taboo that occurs after important Animist sacrifices have been completed. For example, after a village’s annual sacrifices, it is normal for access to the village proper to be restricted to those in the community. Moreover, it is `kun-trung’ for the people from the village to leave the village proper during the taboo period after the ritual, and it is also taboo to do particular things within the village proper during this period. For example, bathing may be prohibited or restricted. It is taboo for people outside of the village to enter the community for the periods following sacrifices, which may span from one to seven days, depending on the village. Village gates are closed and taboo sticks (`ka-chooay’ in Brao) are put up in the middle of all the main paths entering the village to warn people not to enter the ritually restricted space, with one end of the sticks being pounded into the ground so that the stick stands up prominently where everyone can see it. A *ka-chooay* is a strong stick, or a small tree, usually about half the height of a person, which is taken randomly from the forest and either split in the centre at the top, with

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65 *kan-trung = kan-jung* in the Brao Kreung dialect.
leaves or other sticks jammed into the split area, or if there are leaves at the top, it may just be bent over at the top (Photo 4.12).

**Gumbrung**

The third type of taboo is called ‘gumbrung’. These are long-term taboos, either for individuals, families or whole villages. They sometimes involve food restrictions, when certain individuals or households do not eat particular foods, or allow certain foods or other items to enter their ‘spaces’ (households, ‘bra’ groups, village proper, or village territories). Villages also have collective gumbrung taboos, in which usually three or four items cannot be consumed by community members or enter the village proper. This includes certain agricultural plants, like pumpkins, as well as certain types of wild plants, like some types of bamboos, and wild animals, like barking deer, cobra, or other species. For example, in Rundiem Peung (Tiem Leu) village in Cambodia, ‘play pra-pao’ forest fruits, ‘jee’ water monitor lizards, ‘teum tra-tat’ wild plants, and ‘treu ga-preuk’ wild goramy fish (Latin name: Osphronemus exodon) cannot enter the village or be consumed by people from the village. It is gumbrung for Tra-oum villagers in Laos to eat monkeys anywhere, or eat ‘ja-wooat’ rattan in the village (people can eat it outside the village proper). In the past, it was taboo to do this for all the people in the village. However, recently, since being resettled to the lowlands, the people from the village have been considering abandoning all of the above taboos—a product of the change from being on ‘breh Brao’ (Brao land) to being on ‘breh Lao’ (Lao land). As places change, so do the taboos that are associated with them and give them meaning.

**Grung**

‘Grung’ is a food taboo, usually associated with illness. With gumbrung, a food might be put off limits indefinitely or forever, but grung taboos involve not consuming particular foods for a set period of time. For example, women who have recently given birth may temporarily refrain, or grung, from eating certain foods considered potentially harmful for them. However, not long after giving birth women are again allowed to eat those foods. These taboos are often associated with particular illnesses or medical conditions, and can be considered to be a form of traditional medicine. Spatially, ‘grung’
food may be restricted from entering a particular body of an individual, a house, ‘bra’
group, or village depending on the circumstances.

**Huntre**

While all three of the above-mentioned taboos have critical spatial implications,
the most important spatial taboo for the Brao is called ‘huntre’, or ‘gagrung huntre’ by
the Brao Tanap from Teun and Kambak villages in Cambodia. Although this term is not
easily translated into English, a Brao elder from Tra-oum village in Laos described
huntre as being a taboo associated with certain types of spirits that are not the same as
standard spirits, which they refer to as ‘Arak’. However, the violation of huntre can cause
illness and misfortune like Arak. Huntre always relates to space, and the term is used to
refer to a number of different spatial taboos that are very significant for how the Brao
historically socially and spatially organise. Huntre relates to situations where social
order, as defined spatially, does not follow the form believed to be correct by the Brao.
While the Brao living south of the Sesan River tend to only use the term huntre to refer to
the violation of these spatial taboos, those to the north, like the Jree people from Viang
Xay village in Laos, claim that huntre is when people become sick or hurt, and that this is
caused by inappropriate spatial organisation, which is called ‘tung kup’ in northern
dialects of Brao. The violation of huntre can occur in more than one way, and there are
many types of huntre. I have identified approximately 66 types of huntre in a large
number of Brao villages in Lao and Cambodia, which clearly indicates that this is a
complex matter. While there are some types of huntre that are known in most or all Brao
areas, there are other types that appear to be specific to particular areas or villages, and
not two of any of the villages I studied claimed to believe in exactly the same
combination of huntre taboos! Furthermore, the terms used for different types of huntre
were found to vary significantly from sub-group to sub-group and from village to village.
The best way to illustrate the meaning of the term is through providing some examples of
how it is applied in daily life. Five are included below.

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66 This concept reportedly also exists amongst the ethnic Tampuon people, who are adjacent to the Kreung
and Brao Tanap.
67 Another term sometimes used instead of ‘tung kup’ is ‘ga-teut’, although in most cases the meanings are
somewhat different.
The first example involves the positioning of walking paths in relation to different settlements and villages and places like rivers, streams or swidden fields. It is taboo, or *huntre*, to use a path to reach regularly visited locations if it directly passes through settlements or swidden fields belonging to different villages. If people want to reach those locations on a regular basis, they must make different paths to by-pass the other villages (Illustration 4.4). In Brao, this type of taboo is often called *'huntre troong'*, or 'the path taboo'.

![Illustration 4.4. 'Huntre troong'. An example of a path related situation where a *huntre* taboo is committed (A), and another example where a *huntre* is not committed (B). The latter is the normal Brao preference.](image)

The second example relates to the positioning of swidden fields and fallows. The Brao rotate their swidden fields, often moving them annually or bi-annually in one direction up one side of a river or stream until they reach the extent of the village’s territory, especially for groups living north of the Sesan River. They then cross the stream and move the opposite direction downstream until they reach the opposite extent of their territory, and then they cross again and repeat the process (see Ironside & Baird 2003; Baird 2003a). For this reason, it is *huntre* to place a swidden recently put to fallow
between two active swidden fields owned by the same family (Illustration 4.5), especially if there is a path that crosses through the fallow swidden connecting the two active swiddens. This is called ‘huntrre meur’ or ‘the swidden taboo’ in Brao.

Illustration 4.5. ‘Huntrre meur’ An Example of swidden fields situated spatially so that a huntrre taboo is committed (A), and another example where a huntrre is not committed (B). The latter is the normal Brao preference.

A third type of common huntrre is called ‘huntrre jamawk nong’. It relates to the spatial organisation of families and houses. If two people are married, it is normal according to Brao custom for the couple to initially move into the bride’s parents’ house. It is considered ‘huntrre jamawk nong’ if the couple does that but too frequently goes to stay with the groom’s parents, or borrows tools, equipment or even kitchen utensils from the groom’s parents. According to custom, the couple is supposed to stay with the wife’s parents, and this taboo prevents too much interaction between the newly-weds and the parents of the groom (Illustration 4.6). This was a very commonly cited form of huntrre amongst all Brao sub-groups, and is considered to be potentially very problematic if not
adhered to, requiring a pig sacrifice to remedy it. However, different people from different places interpret this type of taboo following different spatial scales. For example, in Phon Sa-at village, southern Laos, it is okay to regularly borrow things from other houses if the people involved belong to the same ‘bra’, or group of families that conduct Animist rituals together.

Illustration 4.6. ‘Huntre jamawk nong’. An example of a bride’s family house and a groom’s family house in which a huntre taboo is committed due to the couple moving between the two houses too frequently (A), and another example where a huntre is not committed (B). The latter is the normal Brao preference.

The fourth type is ‘huntre gleu’, or ‘the tiger taboo’. This relates to hunting or fishing, and the dichotomy that the Brao have between water habitats, known generally as ‘dak’, and land and forest habitats known generally as ‘bree’ (see Baird 2000). This taboo prevents someone from hunting in both habitats during the same trips from wherever they are staying. Therefore, it would be ‘huntre gleu’, or ‘huntre dung ja’ (looking for food to eat taboo) if someone took some fishing hooks to put out in the river, and also some
snares to put out for birds in the forest. According to Brao custom, one is supposed to use only one of the two habitats, and if one must use both, they are supposed to return home after using one and before using the other, so as to technically separate the two trips and activities (Illustration 4.7).

Illustration 4.7. 'Huntre gleu' or 'Huntre dung ja'. An example of man going to look for food in the forest and then immediately going to the stream, causing a huntre taboo (A), and another example where a huntre is not committed (B). The latter is the normal Brao preference.

The fifth type is when people from two communities are not allowed to situate their swidden fields directly adjacent to each other. Swiddens from different villages can be almost right up to the edges of their community’s boundary, and the swiddens of another village, provided that a small patch of forest separates their swiddens from those of the adjacent community (Illustration 4.8). This small bit of forest is required for
symbolically and actually marking the border between spaces of two different villages. It is also known as ‘huntre meur’.

Illustration 4.8. ‘Huntre meur’ (second type). An example of two swidden fields of two families from two different villages that are directly adjacent to each other, causing a huntre taboo (A), and another example where a huntre is not committed (B). The latter is the normal Brao preference.

Misfortune that might result from not obeying huntre taboos can come in the form of illness, being accidentally cut with a bush knife while working in a field, getting bitten by a poisonous snake, or being stung by a scorpion, just to name a few possibilities. Therefore, this spatial concept greatly influences the organisation of Brao housing, swidden fields, path making, and many other aspects of life. For swidden agriculture, for example, one of the main goals is to organise things in particular ways so as to prevent situations when huntre taboos are violated. When huntre is violated, the Brao often conduct Animist rituals particular to their situations in order to appease the spirits. This usually involves sacrificing a chicken or pig and drinking a jar of rice beer.

While it is sometimes easy to recognise possible ‘rational reasons’ why certain huntre taboos have been created (eg. to maintain social relations or prevent the depletion
of a certain species of animal), taboos like these are not just governed by rational ideas. There are also cultural aspects and other reasons that affect these sorts of things.

The importance of *huntre* to the spatial organisation of the Brao, and probably to most of their swidden cultivating neighbours, fits well with the idea of creating physical and conceptual boundaries between particular social groups of swidden cultivators who want to ensure that their respective swidden fields do not cross each other. When a village-territory border is seen as necessary to prevent *huntre*, the leaders of the two communities meet and come to a mutual agreement regarding where the village border between them should be located. Natural markers like streams, ponds, hills, and large rocks are generally used to define these physical boundaries.

However, it is not as if there is no flexibility built into the idea of *huntre*, and I have noticed that Brao people use different kinds of explanations to either show why something is *huntre*, or to justify why it is not. For example, Brao elders from Trabok village in Cambodia told me that it is no problem to cross other villages to access wood resin trees (*Dipterocarpus* spp.) that they are tapping. However, one elder who wanted to tap those trees played the ‘*huntre* card’, apparently as a way to justify an attempt by him to take over the resin trees. Therefore, even ancient customs are affected by politics, personal benefits and local circumstances.

The Brao have various ways of determining whether the violation of *huntre* is causing problems. Brao elders in Tra-oum village, Laos, explained that there are three ways to determine if a spirit has made someone ill. The first is to crack a raw egg open and look at the yoke. This is called ‘*glung kale eer*’ in Brao. The second is called ‘*heur-keuay*’, and involves a sick person giving another person a personal artifact of theirs, like bronze bracelets (‘*kawng la*’ in Brao) or pieces of clothing, to wear or put under one’s pillow at night. If the person who takes the artifact sees something symbolising *huntre* in his or her dream during the following night, people will look into why this spatial taboo has been broken.

Similarly, Kreung people from Kroala village, Umba people from Bong village, and Brao Tanap people from Teun and Kambak villages claimed that dreams of the victims sometimes indicate *huntre*-caused illnesses. If someone dreams in this way, they
subconsciously search for the spirit that caused the problem. They look for symbols that are meaningful to them.

For example, people in Gum village, Cambodia, explained that sick people give pieces of their clothing to ‘Me Arak’ (female shamans) to see what is the cause of illness. In Mas village, elders explained that two years earlier a sick person in their village gave their shirt to another person and he put it under his head when he slept. They said that if he dreamt and saw a buffalo, a pig would need to be sacrificed; that if he saw a pig, a chicken would have to be sacrificed; and if he saw a chicken, an egg would need to be eaten. An ill person might identify huntre violations as being the problem through their own dreams, and sometimes people recognise that they have violated a huntre taboo and believe that they must be ill as a result.

The third method for determining huntre violation problems used by Brao from Tra-oum and also the Kreung, the Umba, and other Brao sub-groups is called ‘trum tawao’ or ‘trum arai’. One way of doing ‘tawao’ involves taking a stick and putting a mark part way along it. Then a person starts at the opposite end and lays his or her forearm to finger tips across the stick, twice, one after another. If the person’s fingers land exactly on the marked place, that spirit is believed to have made the person sick. The person calls out ‘chroot!’ when the specified location is reached. If the fingers go past the mark, or do not reach it, the person guesses another possible spirit that might be the instigator and does the same thing again. This can happen many times until the culprit is identified.

The Kreung from Kroala village in Ratanakiri have a similar system, called ‘lai laich’, that follows the same principles as ‘tawao’, but involves the use of a long stick and stretching out both arms, or a stick from one’s armpit to one’s outstretched fingertips. This is done to determine the problem, and the sort of sacrifice required to remedy it.

Once it is determined that huntre violations of spatial taboos is responsible for illness, people usually sacrifice (sen in Brao) a chicken or pig and drink a jar of rice beer to try to remedy the problem (Photo 4.13). For example, the spatial taboo huntre gleu requires the sacrificing of a pig and the consumption of a jar of rice beer. Elders in Mas village, in Cambodia, said that if a serious type of huntre violation occurs, a pig is eaten, and if a lesser type of huntre violation takes place, a chicken is consumed. They claimed,
as Brao from other villages did, that buffaloes are almost never sacrificed to solve huntre problems. A person from Dong Krapu, Cambodia, said that when people have problems, and they recognise that they have violated huntre, they also try to remedy the spatial imbalance. For example, an old Kreung woman from Trawng Jong village, Cambodia, explained how she noticed that water from two houses was falling off both roofs and landing in the same place. This is one type of spatial house taboo, called ‘huntre hnam’. Therefore, she got her son to buy a piece of roofing sheet to collect the water from the roofs and divert it to a separate location to solve the problem. “I told my son to buy some roofing sheets to solve the problem, before anybody got sick,” she told me.

Elders from Teun and Kambak villages in Kon Moun district, Ratanakiri said that huntre problems could be remedied by doing a sacrifice or by going away in order to avoid violating the huntre. In Kroala village, Cambodia, they say the same, but they add that one way of stopping some types of huntre violations associated with swidden agriculture is to ‘pratek’, which involves stopping doing swidden or organising oneself to prevent huntre violations from occurring in the future.

When asked what huntre is, one man from Dong Krapu village looked a bit confused and said, “Maybe it is a type of parasite? We become sick when we violate taboos” This appears to indicate that to most Brao, huntre violations are believed to cause illnesses when Brao rules for spatially organising are broken.

A Brao government official in Phou Vong district in Laos said that, “Brao people think less about huntre than they used to, as they now have access to hospitals.” Thus, increased access to health services affects spatial organisation beyond just determining the distance that people need to travel to gain access to services.

During my research it became evident that most Brao villages in Laos and Cambodia consider questions surrounding huntre to be a less important part of their lives than they once were. I also frequently heard that young people do not believe in huntre violations as much as older people. For example, elders from Kroala village explained that young people do not know much about huntre anymore, but that people who are 30-40 years or older know more. The oldest people know even more than middle-aged people. In Phon Sa-at village in Laos, it was once taboo for one household to have two rice fields, one on each side of the village, but it is not a violation of huntre anymore.
Elders said that it no longer violates *hunte* for paths going to water sources to cross other houses, as was the case in the past. However, I observed that people in the village go to three water sources, and that they use the water sources depending on where they are located in the village, so as not to cross other houses, but most importantly to be nearer to the water sources.

Kavet elders in Rok village, Cambodia, said the Kavet think less about *hunte* than they used to. One elder gave the example of Rok village people now being allowed to pass Heulay (Lalay) village swiddens, and both villages being mixed up with each other. Similarly, for the Kavet on the other side of the Heulay Stream, La Meuay village people should not be able to pass ‘Ntrak village to do swiddens to the north, since their village is south of ‘Ntrak, but ‘Ntrak has no choice but to allow them to cross, because there are no other swiddens to the south, and the government does not want either ‘Ntrak or La Meuay villages to move north, as would have been done in the past to solve this problem. There is no other forest, as people are now restricted in where they can go by the establishment of Virachey National Park (see Baird 2008b and Chapter 8). People can do swiddens on both sides of the river, where they could not before, said one elder.

People from Houay Ko village in Laos said they still recognise a limited number of ideas about *hunte*, but elders from another highly Lao-ised Brao village in Laos, Taong, claim to have totally abandoned the concept, although they remain aware of it.

However, this is not to say that *hunte* is not important or relevant to the Brao. For many, especially older people, it remains a critical part of their lives. For example, people from Phon Sa-at still recognise some other forms of *hunte* violations, such as ‘*hunte meur’*, when it is not allowed to put new swiddens (*meur hun-deum* in Brao) on both sides of a second-year swidden (*meur poo* in Brao), even though they have abandoned other forms of *hunte*. Even in very Laoised Brao villages, like Houay Ko, some very old people still think about issues associated with *hunte*.

**Marking Landscapes**

Rituals do not only restrict village spaces. If a ritual is specifically for a particular family, it is not unusual for the space of that family’s house to be off limits to people from outside the family for a few days following a sacrifice (see below). Most
importantly, sacrificing frequently revolves around creating the symbols of ritual that make the spirits of the landscape content with the person, family or village that is sponsoring the ritual. This is why certain landscapes like mountains, forests, cliffs, caves, large boulders, rapids are sometimes considered to be 'sacred', and there are rules restricting their use. Sacred forests, or spirit forests as they are often referred to, are often but not exclusively associated with burial grounds. The idea is to appease the spirits associated with these places by performing rituals for them.

The places where buffaloes are sacrificed, for example, are ritually marked, and those symbols remain in place for a year or more, so as to make it clear to others that the person has sacrificed a buffalo in the recent past. Although people from different villages and Brao sub-groups conduct Animist rituals in varying ways, this marking of space often involves planting one or more bombax or wild kapok trees (Lawng Glang in Brao). For example, the Kreung plant single bombax trees in the inner parts of their village circles in front their houses when sacrifices take place, and it is taboo to cut these trees down if they survive the original transplanting. For some older villages, like Kroala, there are now a many large, tall bombax trees growing in the village, and villagers do not want anymore to grow. Therefore, they cut the roots of the young trees before they transplant them, so as to ensure that the trees do not survive!

For the Kavet, one end of each single short pole and two bombax saplings are put into the ground in a row when a buffalo is sacrificed, with the two saplings being located on the outsides. It is considered the most auspicious if one of the two trees survives and the other one dies. Condominas (1977) reported that the Mnong Gar in Vietnam planted bombax trees to mark buffalo sacrifices. He thought that the purpose was to remind people of important sacrifices years later, and this is an important part of the reason why the Brao have planted the trees in the past. These trees mark important events. They are critical for place making.

Another way in which the Brao mark important landscapes, like swidden fields and villages, is to plant fruit trees, like mango, tamarind and jackfruit. Usually single trees were planted rather than groups of trees, and these trees help the people to remember certain landscapes where they lived and cultivated swidden crops. They identified particular places, and they marked those spaces for future generations to see.
These symbols are very important for Brao social memory, and place making, as they too indicate where certain events in history occurred.

Conclusions

Building on Chapter 3—which introduced the Brao and some of the complex issues surrounding Brao ethnic identities—this chapter has established a foundation for understanding Brao historical, social, and especially spatial organisation.

The seven scales used by the Brao for socially and spatially organising themselves, including some, like ethnic sub-group and ‘bra’ Animist group, are not invoked by all non-Brao societies even though they are important for the Brao. The Brao also have particular rules, defined through taboos, for ensuring that spatial norms are respected. These are much more complex than is typically recognised by outsiders. For example, whereas we have just one word for ‘taboo’, the Brao recognise five broad categories of taboos, which are important for determining how they socially and spatially organise. Amongst these, there is considerable variation. For example, I documented at least 66 varieties of ‘huntre’ taboos that are critical for determining how people socially and spatially organise. They dictate various aspects of social life, from how relatives living in different houses relate to each other to where swidden farms are located and where paths are situated. There is clearly much more to the decisions that the Brao make than is typically recognised by outsiders. In fact, various colonial powers have shown little interest in them, with many seeing them as being part of a superstitious belief system with little of value. But they are important to the everyday lives of the Brao.

Furthermore, it is important to recognise how immensely different the social and spatial norms of the Brao are from those of many outsiders, as it indicates many potential problems with outsiders promoting new ways of socially and spatially organising amongst the Brao compared to what the Brao are familiar with. To understand how much social and spatial change has taken place, and how it has affected the Brao, it is crucial to have a general idea about the various ways that space is organised. This has been the primary purpose of this chapter. However, it is evident that the Brao have never socially and spatially organised in the same ways as each other, and that Brao social and spatial organisation is perpetually in flux.
I will return to considering the implications of this chapter in the concluding chapter, where previous forms of social and spatial organisation are compared with social and spatial organisation that is taking place today. Now it is time to review the different forms of colonialism that have affected the Brao over history.
CHAPTER 5
Various Forms of Colonial Domination and the Brao over History

Introduction

When I began writing this thesis I briefly considered separating my accounts of history from the pre-French and French eras based on the nation-states of Laos and Cambodia. However, it was immediately evident that this would not be easy or particularly useful. Instead, it makes much more sense to present the early history of my area of interest together, as international borders as we know them today did not exist in the pre-French period, and during the French period Laos and Cambodia were both part of French Indochina.

This chapter examines various forms of colonial domination of the Brao, beginning with the pre-French Khmer, Lao and Siamese periods, which I argue represented different forms of colonialism. I then consider the influence of French colonial domination and the Brao, as well as the significance of the short but important Japanese colonial experience. Finally, I describe how the Indochina Communist Party gradually increased its importance in southern Laos and northeastern Cambodia, especially after the departure of the Japanese.

I also consider how the Brao reacted to the establishment of the national border between Cambodia and Laos, which in 1905 split the Brao into two countries. While the border was not well demarcated, and did not prevent Brao people from crossing from one side to the other, it was almost immediately significant to the Brao, the reasons for which I will elaborate on here.

Khmer Colonialism and the Brao

Although data are sparse and inexact, there is enough evidence to suggest that the Khmer came into considerable contact with various highlanders in present-day northeastern Cambodia and southern Laos over a long period of time beginning hundreds of years ago. However, apart from some ruins indicating that the Khmer once lived near the Brao, there is no definite record of the nature of early Khmer contact with the Brao. Yet, it is known that the Khmer organised slave raids against highland groups to provide...
labour to the rulers of Funan about 2000 years ago (Bourotte 1955). However, it is uncertain if these slave raids penetrated as far north and east as where the Brao were living. However, during the Chenla era, between the 5th and 8th centuries, the Khmer pushed up into the middle Mekong, including the Sekong River basin (Rathie 2006) where the Brao have long lived. Bourotte (1955) reported that the Chenla polity expanded its influence in the Attapeu, Champasak and the Khone Falls areas in around the 6th century. He suggested that the Khmer of the Chenla era interbred extensively with the people they encountered there, before pushing these groups, including the Brao, into the mountains. Chinese records from the 8th century mention that the population of northern Chenla, also called ‘land Chenla’, included a lot of dark-skinned curly-haired people, suggesting the prevalence of Austroasiatic language-speaking peoples mixed amongst the Khmer (Rathie 2006). Guilleminet (1941) and Bourotte (1955) thought that the Khmer left a deeper impression on the Bahnar and the Sedang of Kon Tum (and presumably the Brao, who lived near these groups), than other ethnic groups such as the Jarai and the Ede.69

The 13th century marked the beginning of the decline of the Khmer in the highlands, before which time they controlled at least parts of the Sesan and Sekong basins, and territories to the north, as far as at least the Xebanghieng basin in today’s south-central Laos. Apart from being involved in human slave trade, various forest products were exchanged with the Khmer (Bourotte 1955).

A Chinese visitor to the Angkor court at Siem Reap in 1296-7, Chou Ta-Kuan (1987), mentions the ‘savages’ that fed the markets of the country and the capital, and the fierce warriors that defended the highlands from outsiders. According to Ta-Kuan (1987: section 11, n.p.),

“There are two categories of aborigines: the first comprises those who understand the language of the country; these are sold in the towns as slaves. In the second category are those who refuse to submit to civilization and are not familiar with its language. They have no houses, but wander about in the mountains, followed by their families, carrying clay jars on their heads. Should they meet a wild animal, they kill it with bow or lance, strike fire from flint, cook the animal and eat it communally, afterwards resuming their wanderings. Their nature is savage and their

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68 Funan was the name given by the Chinese for what is now known as Cambodia (Bourotte 1955).
69 In the French literature, the Ede are usually referred to as the ‘Rhade’.
poisons are extremely dangerous. Even in their own gatherings murder is common.”

Ta-Kuan’s (1987) accounts indicate that at least some of the people he wrote about were probably still hunter-gatherers who had not yet adopted swidden agriculture as their main means of production.

Ta-Kuan (1987) mentioned that lowland Khmer had large numbers of slaves. Some wealthy families had more than one hundred, and apparently only the poorest did not have any. These slaves were captured in the mountains, and were considered to be of a different race, which the Khmer called ‘Chuang’ [brigands]. According to Ta-Kuan (1987: section 9, n.p.), “So looked down on are these wretches that when, in the course of a dispute, a Cambodian is called ‘Chuang’ by his adversary, dark hatred strikes to the marrow of his bones.”

During this period there was a strict spatial divide enforced between the Khmer and the highlanders, with the Khmer being the masters. Ta-Kuan (1987: section 9, n.p.) wrote that,

“They [the aboriginal slaves] are permitted to lie down or be seated only beneath the floor of the house. To perform their tasks they may go upstairs, but only after they have knelt, bowed to the ground, and joined their hands in reverence...If they have committed some misdemeanor and are beaten for it, they bow their heads and take the blows without daring to make the least movement.”

In addition, Ta-Kuan (1987), contradicting Bourotte’s (1955) claims that during the Chenla era the Khmer interbred widely with the people they encountered, reported that sexual relations between Khmer and aboriginals were unheard of, and that even Chinese visitors who had sex with slaves were no longer permitted to sit with a Khmer master. The offspring of slaves remained slaves for life, and those who were captured after trying to escape had blue marks tattooed to their faces, and iron collars put around their necks, or shackles fastened to their arms or legs.

Yet, it is difficult to know whether those captured as slaves included the Brao, who lived far from the Khmer capital, and may or may not have been affected by slave raiding at this time. Moreover, if they were affected, it is not certain to what extent. It appears likely, however, that the Brao would have been considered unequal to the Khmer.
By the 14th century the Khmer did not control any areas north of Savannakhet in southern Laos, and their dominance in the region was waning. After repeated attacks by the Siamese in the 14th century, in 1432 Angkor was finally abandoned as the Khmer capital, eventually to be relocated to Phnom Penh (Chandler 1991). During the same period Lao migration to the south increased, and the frontier region between the Lao and the Khmer gradually shifted south. The Khmer Kingdom continued to decline in the 16th century, at least partially due to persistent attacks from Siam (Bourotte 1955). However, it was not until the 17th century that the Lao came to dominate Champasak (Rathie 2006), although they probably arrived before then.

According to the elders that Henri Maître (1912) talked to in 1909-10 during his trip from Veun Say to Attapeu, in the early 1800s the ‘Kha’ occupied all the areas east of the confluence of the Sesan with the Srepok River. At that time, highlanders reportedly had commercial relations with the Khmer, and Maître reported that highlanders maintained memories of periods when they were vassals of the Khmer. In approximately 1770, two Khmer, Ta Seng and Ta Pang, with a number of Khmer followers from the south, made an armed incursion into ‘Kha’ territory under the cover of commerce, the most important of which was probably slave trading. These Khmer established a village on the west bank of the Sekong River that became the centre of their operations. The village was named Seng Pang (presently Siem Pang, a district in Stung Treng province). According to Maître (1912), this band, with their families, pushed the highlanders (probably the Brao) to the north towards Attapeu and to the east to where they came up against the Jarai and the Tampuon. The Khmer were probably able to become established at this time because Champasak was in turmoil and about to become a vassal of Siam.

Then, in around 1825, a man with the title ‘Ponhea Muk’, from Phnom Penh, arrived in what is today northeastern Cambodia with immigrants fleeing from the Governor of Thabong Khmum province (now a district in Kampong Cham province, Cambodia). Ponhea Muk apparently became very influential and attracted many Khmer, who were pressured by the Lao in the Stung Treng area. He organised an independent district for which he obtained the authority of the court of Siam. Bangkok assigned a Lao

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70 Guérin (2003) dates the establishment of Siem Pang by the same two Khmer as being around the turn of the century between the 18th and 19th centuries. Bourotte (1955) puts the date at 1775.
to jointly govern the area, and with the death of Ponhea Muk, the Lao was installed by Bangkok to replace him (Maitre 1912). The ancestors of the Khmer followers of Ponhea Muk still live to the west of Siem Pang, and now identify themselves ethnically as being ‘Khmer Khe’.

Martin Rathie (2006) believes that the arrival of the Lao in the region affected Khmer relations with upland groups, because the Lao became the new intermediaries in the middle Mekong. The Lao adopted some administrative practices from the Khmer, but they had their own ways of doing things, and they became increasingly dominant. This gradually led, through marriage and other contact, to the integration and assimilation of some Khmer populations into Lao communities.

**Lao Colonialism and the Brao**

Palm leaf Lao language manuscripts from the 19th century record ‘Muang Lao Long’ (the lost Lao principality) as being the first ‘Lao’ settlement in the region of present-day Attapeu. People who migrated from the north established it. According to the manuscripts, after the leader of the group, Pha-nya Lao Long, died, Pha-nya Khamkhat, his son, renamed the principality or ‘Muang Lamrak Ong Kan’ or ‘Muang Ong Kan’. It was located along the Xexou River near its confluence with the Xekaman. Later, according to the manuscripts, Muang Ong Kan was moved north to ‘Muang Lamam’, near Ban Phon in present-day Sekong province, and then to ‘Muang Sok Muang Soum’, near Haisok village in present-day Samakhixay district, not far from the Sekong River, north of Attapeu town. Muang Ong Kan was apparently based there for over 200 years, until the principality began being called ‘Ik Kalpeu’ in 1778 and finally ‘Attapeu’ after it was moved to ‘Muang Kao’ (old principality), in present-day Xaysettha district, which was established by the kingdom of Champasak during the 18th century (Bounthanh Chanthakhaly, pers. comm. 2006; Phutthavong 2004).

At the end of the 17th century the chief Buddhist monk in Vientiane, named Phra Khou Phonsamek (Photo 5.1),71 from Vientiane, had a conflict with the Kingdom of Vientiane. Therefore, in around 1689 he decided to leave Vientiane and travel south with

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71 He was apparently so venerable that even his excrement smelled good. Therefore, he was often referred to as ‘Pha Khou Khi Home’ (the monk with the good smell excrement) His name is sometimes spelt Phonsamet (Archaimbault 1961).
his followers, stopping at various places along the way. He entered Cambodia and eventually arrived at Phnom Penh. On his way back he came up the Mekong River and established himself at Hang Kho, at the confluence of the Sekong River with the Mekong, across the Sekong River from present-day Stung Treng town. He then moved north to Khong in 1709, where he installed Chan Houat as Khong’s first governor (Archaimbault 1961; Martin Rathie, pers. comm. 2006). Phra Khou Phonsamek appointed Chao Sieng Teng, a Lao, as the first governor of the Stung Treng area, based at Hang Kho. But soon after Phonsamek went on to Champasak, Sieng Teng agreed to pay tribute to Cambodia. Over time, as Khmer power weakened, Sieng Teng became increasingly allied with Champasak. Sieng Teng established a settlement at the confluence of the Trabok Stream with the Sesan River (Rathie 2006), in an area populated by the Brao today.

The queen of Champasak, Nang Phao, who by some accounts came to power in 1638, was apparently so impressed with the Phra Khou Phonsamek that she gave him the power to administer her kingdom. However, the rules of the monastic discipline prevented the monk from acting with enough strength to restore order to the chaotic situation that apparently existed. Therefore, in 1713 he sought out Chao Nokasat, who had been exiled from Vientiane, and installed him as the King of Nakhone Champa Nakabursi (Champasak). He took the name Chao Soysisamout and ruled Champasak from 1713 to 1737 (Archaimbault 1961). Soysisamout’s son Chao Sayakouman, who was King of an independent Champasak from 1738 to 1777 or 1778, succeeded him. It was, as Constance Wilson put it, the ‘golden age’ of Champasak, a time of relative peace and prosperity (Wilson 1992). Attapeu was under the nominal control of Champasak, but had not yet been elevated to the status of principality. During this time important relations began to develop between the Lao and the Brao.

The Lam or Phya

During the Lao colonial era, and continuing into the Siamese and French eras, there were intermediaries who developed important relationships with highland communities. Known as ‘Lam’ or translators in Lao language, these individuals were generally ethnic Lao men from well-established villages who had developed special

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72 Sieng is a distinction for monk.
relationships with remote communities of highlanders who had little contact with the outside world. Taupin (1888), one of the first French to come into direct contact with the Brao, reported that the chiefs of Brao people that he met in Khamphun village, an ethnic Lao village in present-day Sesan district, Stung Treng province, were called Phya. He met four of these Phya during his trip. They were all ethnic Lao. Initially, the terms Phya and Lam appeared to have a similar meaning.

Often, it was only possible to meet with people from remote populations through these intermediaries, who rarely lived in the highland villages. If unknown people tried to contact these groups, including the Brao, the highlanders would usually flee into the forest. In 1995, an old Chinese man from Veun Say, in Cambodia, told me that when he was young the people from Kavet villages in the mountains to the north would flee into the forest when outsiders arrived in their communities, especially the young men, who feared being drafted into the army. It was already well into the French period, but Lao or Chinese Lam who had developed special and quite feudalistic relationships with the Brao were still their main contacts. For example, Ya Lat and Ya La were ethnic Lao Lam for the Kavet in the Veun Say area during the Siamese period. As a Kavet elder said, “The Lam collected the taxes.”

**The Lao Gain Increasing Influence among the Brao**

There is no record of the vast majority of Brao people being under the control of the lowland populations in the region during the pre-French period. However, the Lao and the Siamese were able—at various times in the 19th century—to coerce a small number of ‘Lave’ (Brao) villages in Attapeu to pay tribute (or taxes) to the Siamese via Lao intermediaries (Long 1969[1890]). The Lao reputedly collected tribute as far as the mouth of Sathay River, but probably not on a regular basis. However, even for the Lao and the Siamese, maintaining tribute relationships with some Brao groups probably did not imply actually controlling the people, as these relationships required exchanges rather than simply the collection of taxes, which was not formally introduced until the French arrived. Still, the Lao dominated the Brao in a way that can be considered to be a form of colonialism. One way that the Lao increased their influence over the Brao and Brao spaces was to appoint Brao people as Phya, in order to elevate them to being their
representatives in upland villages. In this way, the Lao colonial project gradually came to rely on Brao collaborators to help them gain control over upland populations.

In relation to cosmogony, the Lao recognised the highlanders as being the ‘older brothers’, but these ‘older brothers’ were expected to give their younger and more capable siblings in the lowlands the power to rule. The rituals included in the boat races of Champasak were critical for maintaining order and the balance of power in the hands of the Lao (Archaimbault 1961), but it is beyond the scope of this dissertation to explain this relationship in detail.

Siamese Colonialism and the Brao

It is argued that the Khmer and the Lao before them were already ‘colonial’ in Brao areas, due to their attempts to gain control of Brao slave labour and extract tribute from the Brao, both of which required a certain level of control over Brao territories, even if that control was not absolute. However, an even stronger argument can be made for calling the Siamese period in Brao areas ‘Asian colonialism’. Thongchai Winichakul (1994) shows how Siamese expansion and colonial control took place, even if he did specifically refer to Siamese expansion as ‘colonial’.

The Sekong valley, including Attapeu, came under Siamese control after 1777 or 1778 when troops invaded Champasak and forced it to become a Siamese vassal state (Archaimbault 1961; Viravong 1964; Rathie 2001; Ngaosyvathn & Ngaosyvath 1998). Siam took control of Champasak but initially tried not to disrupt the local governance system (Martin Rathie, pers. comm. 2005). Attapeu was elevated to a principality, or ‘Muang’, in 1777 (Archaimbault 1961) (Map 5.1).

Attapeu began paying tribute directly to Siam in 1782, whereas prior to then they paid Champasak. By 1784 Stung Treng was paying taxes directly to Bangkok (Archaimbault 1961; Rathie 2001), and by 1798 Siem Pang was under Siamese suzerainty as well (Rathie 2001). There was some resistance to Siamese domination, but apparently none of the protests or uprisings that occurred during the Siamese period represented a serious threat to the Siamese, although the Ay Sa Rebellion did destabilise southern Laos for a few years (Baird 2007a).
During this period the Lao and the Siamese were mainly interested in controlling trade and expanding their influence, as well as extracting tribute and people as slave labour from the Brao and other Mon-Khmer language speakers, as is typical in cases of colonial expansion. However, the Siamese wanted to 'civilise' the Lao, in order to
assimilate them into Siam. The Siamese felt that their manners, official ceremonies, and elaborate court language and etiquette were far superior to those of the Lao. Illustrative of this, a Siamese government document was quoted by Breazeale (1975: 268) as stating, “In the eastern Lao and Khmer towns, which are small ones, the people are uncivilised, needy, impoverished, and know nothing of affairs or manners.” Certainly, the contemptuous attitude of the Siamese to the Lao would have left the highlanders in an even lower position.

The Expansion of the Slave Trade

One of the most intensive periods of slave trade occurred in Brao areas after 1778. Siam needed labour to recover from the devastation of Burmese invasions, and ordered various slave raids into the Sekong River basin. Although Charles Archaimbault (1964: 59) wrote that, "Vassalage to Siam [of Champasak] at the end of the 18th century was not much more than token submission", this was hardly the case for people who were brutally taken from their villages in slave raids. The first official ‘slave-draft’ against highland people living in present-day Laos began in 1791. Large numbers of people were forcibly enslaved in brutal raids (Ngaosyvathn & Ngaosyvathn 1998).

People from outside of the region generally do not think of the latter half of the 19th century as being a particularly violent era in mainland Southeast Asian history. However, in the minds of many Brao people, the Siamese and Lao periods continue to represent one of the most violent periods they ever experienced. It was certainly critical for shaping the historical landscape and mindset of people in the region.

While acknowledging that there was a slave trade prior to the arrival of the Siamese, as well as some sporadic conflicts and violence between and within ethnic groups before, many Brao I have spoken to believe that what came later was much more systematic and caused more serious disputes between ethnic groups. This generally fits with the conclusions drawn by Bourotte (1955) and Rathie (2001), both of whom believe that the slave trade in the region was stimulated by increased Siamese demand for slaves. This led to considerable upheaval and various revolts amongst the Brao and other highland groups against Siamese hegemony, including the Khama, Xiang Keo, Kavet and Ay Sa Rebellions, between 1791 and 1819 (Nartsupha 1984; Baird 2007a).
Expanding Lao Hegemony into the Highlands

During the time following the fall of the Lao King of Vientiane, Chao Anou, to the Siamese in the 1820s, more and more highland villages agreed to pay tribute to Attapeu (Long 1969; Wiphakphachokij 1987), and the Lao, as vassals of Siam, gradually expanded their influence over the highlands.

In the 1860s, the Siamese set a tax levy on Attapeu that was quite high: 280 baht (3.2 kg) of gold annually (Breazeale 1975). This was probably an attempt to increase the revenue of Siam in the face of British and French colonial expansion into the region.

Many villages in Attapeu, especially ones populated by highlanders, used human slaves and bees wax to pay tribute instead of gold, which is what the King of Siam wanted. Thao King, the Chao Muang in Attapeu, took slaves and bees wax from the communities and traded them in Attapeu for gold, which was in turn sent to Siam each year as tribute (Long 1969). Kavet elders told me that apart from providing people as tribute, they paid in cotton, ginger and cardamom, while the Kreung claim that they paid their tribute in sesame, rice and people. The slave trade was critical for providing tribute payments to Siam, even though in the end taxes were paid in gold.

Many Brao believe that since few wanted to give up their own friends and relatives to the slave trade, sometimes a preferable option was to attack other villages to capture slaves. Sometimes people without parents or relatives were given up as tribute. While some groups, like the Brao, tended to only irregularly raid other villages, the Jarai and Sedang gained reputations as vicious attackers of communities in order to capture slaves to sell (see, also, Matras-Troubetzkoy 1983). Some of these slaves were used to pay tribute, and when there were excess, they were sold or traded for valuable items like musical gongs. According to Brao elders, Jarai attacks extended as far west as areas inhabited by Kavet people near the Sekong River, and Kreung areas southwest of the Sesan River. Furthermore, during this period, the Sedang frequently attacked neighbouring Brao communities to capture people to sacrifice to their spirits. People had to flee to remote mountain areas to avoid slave raids and most villages became heavily fortified. Many Brao elders told me that large numbers of people gathered together in large villages for protection.
Some Brao also kept slaves. For example, one senior elder from Bang Geut village told me that his great grandparents had slaves—seven couples (all highlanders). Most were debt slaves (gataw loong in Brao). Some were captured slaves (gataw arup in Brao), including some purchased from the Jarai and Sedang. Captured slaves were considered to be “life slaves” (slaves for life), as Breazeale (1975: 107) calls them, and generally had less rights than debt slaves. The designation between these two types of slaves is important, as the practice of debt slavery was common well into the French period, whereas capturing people as slaves during raids was banned much earlier.

The main interest of the Lao and the Siamese during this period was in maintaining control over the human populations, not particular territories except in as far as that advanced their control of people. Yet, to achieve their goals the Lao and Siamese had to gain some control over territory, as without doing that they would have not been able to gain slaves or tribute. They wanted tribute, including slaves, forest products and gold dust panned from the rivers and streams. Attapeu, Siem Pang and Stung Treng were all centres for the slave trade with Cambodia, Siam and even Burma (Bourotte 1955).

**Lao Expansion in the Sesan River Basin**

In the 1850s or early 1860s, a Lao member of the Champasak royal family named Sengdara Van Vong tried to establish a Buddhist temple and a Lao settlement along the Sesan River north of the mouth of the Umba (Khampha in Lao and Khmer) Stream. However, the Lao settlement along the Sesan was not secure. The Jarai threatened to attack if rice was not provided. They were apparently looking for a reason to destroy the settlement, and they attacked some people just outside of it. Therefore, the Lao decided to move downstream before a major assault by the Jarai took place. When the Buddhist monks from the community prepared to relocate downriver, they let three coconuts float down the Sesan River. They planned to build their new temple where the coconuts came to shore. Thus, Sengdara Van Vong established a new temple at Veun Say, but at a different location from where the present temple at Veun Say is located. Later, the community was abandoned due to tribal aggression.

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73 The Umba is an important tributary of the Sesan River in present-day Taveng district, Ratanakiri province, Cambodia
In 1881, the King of Champasak, Chao Khamsouk (Photo 5.2),\textsuperscript{74} in an attempt to increase the status of Champasak, set up ten new Muang. More importantly, however, the Siamese were eager to consolidate control of the Sesan basin, as France was expanding its influence in the region. Thus Lao movement into the Sesan basin was largely in response to French pressure. Phra Vongsa Soradet led a group of ethnic Lao people to the Sesan River from Muang Moulapoumok, on the west side of the Mekong River in Champasak, where they established Tha Kalan (Rathie 2006).

In 1883, at the age of 38, Chao Tham Phouy—who would become well known as Ya Chao Tham\textsuperscript{75}—was sent by his uncle, the King of Champasak, to the Sesan River basin (Guérin 2003). In 1905, this Muang would become the Cambodian province of Moulapoumok, adopting the name of the place where the ethnic Lao people there came from (see Map 5.1).

After spending a couple of years on the south bank of the Sesan River at present-day Kachon village (ethnic Tampuon), Ya Chao Tham decided to establish a Buddhist temple at a new location at Veun Say, near the mouth of the Lalay Stream.\textsuperscript{76} Taking over from Phra Vongsa Soradet, Ya Chao Tham was able to rapidly gain influence over the tribal groups located north and east of Veun Say, apparently because of his supposed magical powers (Bruel 1916). Ya Chao Tham’s reputation for having the ability to change his appearance was critical, and the Brao in the area quickly came to fear and respect him. His granddaughter, who still lives in Veun Say and is over 80 years old, recalled during a 2007 interview that a highlander with a crossbow once shot at him, but his power was so great that the arrow could not pierce him; he could not be cut or shot! He was able to control the highlanders, including the Brao, and drive those in the Veun Say area to the north.

**Reforms, Taxes, Slaves and the Brao**

In 1882 the government of Siam initiated major administrative changes specifically in order to try to increase their control over the hinterlands, and improve their

\textsuperscript{74} He was apparently given the time Chao Thammatheva by the King of Champasak in 1884 (Martin Rathie, pers. comm. 2008), although his relatives in Veun Say claimed his official name was Chao Youtithammathone.

\textsuperscript{75} The ‘Ya’ in Ya Chao Tham is short for A-nya or Phra-nya, with ‘A-nya Chao’ being a royal title.

\textsuperscript{76} This is the present site of the Veun Say temple.
reputation with the Europeans. Apart from sending Champasak royals like Ya Chao Tham to the outer reaches of areas of their control, senior Siamese officials were posted for the first time in the outer areas of Siamese influence, such as Attapeu, Stung Treng and Siem Pang, and in 1883 the Siamese sent Lao forces from Champasak as far as Dak Lak province (present-day Central Highlands of Vietnam) to establish their continued influence over the area (Rathie 2006). But for the Brao, the most important decision was the one to ban capture slavery, and the trade in slaves, for which an order was issued throughout the kingdom in 1884. The idea was to remove one of France’s main justifications for expanding control (Long 1969; Wiphakphachokij 1987).

In Attapeu, however, the order did not have the desired effect, at least initially. It did, however, have a profound impact on highlander-Lao relations. On the one hand, many highlanders were initially angry with the Lao for not being able to pay their tribute with humans. When the highlanders found that the King of Siam no longer allowed the Siamese or Lao people to hunt for ‘Kha’ slaves, they no longer feared the authorities in Attapeu and became belligerent, refusing to pay tribute altogether. Officers from Attapeu and other people who went to highlander-populated areas to do business or work were increasingly robbed, and more than ever before, the highlanders captured people to sell as slaves. The Chao Muang of Attapeu wanted to subdue the minorities but he was afraid that doing so would anger the Siamese (Long 1969; Archaimbault 1961; Wiphakphachokij 1987). The security situation in Attapeu was worse than it had been for years.

Critically, however, during this period it appears that despite the significant relationships that developed between the Lao and the Brao, the lowlanders were largely indifferent to how the highlanders lived. Provided that they contributed tribute, and were not belligerent, the lowlanders had little desire to socially change them or improve the lives of the Brao. The Brao were looked down upon, but the lowlanders did not have much of a ‘civilising mission’. The concept of ‘development’—and associated ‘development discourses’—had still not penetrated the region. It appears that the lowlanders largely accepted highlander ways of organising, including living in the highlands, doing swidden agriculture, and engaging in Animist rituals. The natural order included highlanders and lowlanders, and there was no reason to change things. There
were no nation-states to spatially combine highland and lowland worlds. However, the Lao and Siamese still dominated the Brao in a fundamentally colonial way, as they needed to dominate Brao territories in order to gain tribute.

**French Colonialism and the Brao**

The French only first came into contact with the Brao at the end of the 19th century, and probably the first Frenchman to have significant contact with the Brao, and to explicitly identify them as such, was J. Taupin (1888), who spent eight days with a Brao community in present-day Sesan district, east of Stung Treng town, during the height of the rainy season in July and August 1888. The village that he visited, Katot, can still be found in Sesan district today, name unchanged (see Map 2.2).

**The Pavie Mission**

While the French were already well entrenched in Cochinchina by the 1860s, it was not until 1883 that Annam became a French protectorate (Hickey 1982a), and it was only after 1885 that the political climate in France made more aggressive territorial expansion into the hinterlands possible (Bourotte 1955). Auguste Pavie was the one to lead France’s colonial expansion into what would become French Laos, with his main objective being to impede the eastward advance of the Siamese. Although the Pavie Mission was officially inaugurated in 1885 (Gunn 1988), the Mission’s work can be divided into three periods, with the first (1887-9) not relating to the area of interest here; the second period, from 1890-1, was initiated to try to occupy key positions or force Siamese forces to withdraw; and the third period, between 1891-3 marked aggressive colonial expansion (Bourotte 1955). The Pavie Mission officially ended in all areas in 1905 (Gunn 1988).

In the early 1890s Captain P. Cupet and his colleagues represented the Pavie Mission in areas inhabited by the Brao and other tribal groups, and he was key in laying the groundwork for a formal take-over of territories east of the Mekong River by France. He made a number of excursions during the time he was in his position. In late November 1890, Cupet traveled southeast from Champasak to the Sekong River and Siem Pang and then crossed to Tha Kalan village on the Sesan River. He mentioned the “Kha
Love’’(Brao) living in the upper Samong [Nam Senong] basin, a tributary of the Sekong River. These people were said to be dependent on Siem Pang. During his overland journey from Siem Pang to the Sesan River, Cupet encountered some ethnic Kavet people on the path. He described his encounter with them as follows:

“[W]e suddenly clash with a gang of some ten savages armed with lances who, with their baskets on their backs, are on their way to barter in Siem Pang. They walk so quietly that nobody has heard them come and I have the impression that, if we have to travel in hostile country, these people could spring some quite nasty surprises on us.

They line up outside the road to let us pass, their eyes aimed at the ground, appearing to flee our eyes and taking up their march without having exchanged a word with our people” (2000: 264) (Photo 5.3 and 5.4).

Cupet (2000) observed that there was a perpetual state of war between the villages that he passed, and that the villages were well fortified, and guarded day and night. He described entering one village via its defensive barrier,

“When we approached the village, there was no more path. The guide squats and advances with lowered head into a thicket, gives us a signal to follow him and here Mr. Lugan and I march for more than a kilometer on hands and feet, like wild animals not without abandoning to the thorns part of our clothes and a little of our skin” (Cupet 2000: 269).

Cutting trees down without dislodging the stems from the trunks, called ‘gaw lumput’ in Brao, created the conditions suitable for making mazes. Cupet claimed that security was precarious for the highlanders, and that they rarely ventured farther from their villages than a crossbow could fire. They were always armed and ready for a battle. Cupet thought that their Laotian masters, and behind them the Siamese, exploited this state of insecurity to keep the people subservient to them. He explained about the highlanders being exploited, and that what little the people had largely ended up in the warehouses of Champasak and Ubon, or was used to buy salt, leaving barely enough for the people’s subsistence needs (Cupet 2000). Of course, we cannot forget that the French of this period were ultimately interested in presenting a picture that would justify French control.

De Coulgeans reported, in early 1892, that many of the Lao militia under Siamese control had married “Kha” women soon after being posted near highland villages. While
the highlanders were not reported to have objected to these marriages, the couples were reportedly not allowed to live in the villages, instead having to stay just outside of them,\textsuperscript{77} in spaces that were clearly considered to be non-Brao, outside of the concentric circles that defined the village proper (see Chapter 4). This shows that strong spatial divides existed between different groups at the time.

**The Early Years of French Colonial Rule**

The 'Pak Nam' incident between the Siamese and the French in July 1893 led to the Siamese formally agreeing to sign over the left bank of the Mekong River to the French, which they did on October 3, 1893 (Hall 1981; Savada 1995). However, months earlier, on April 1, Captain Bastard, the Vice-Resident of the Mission of the Governor of Indochina in Saigon, on the orders of De Lanessan, the Governor General at the time, led a military contingent up the Mekong River and took over Stung Treng and later Khong with minimal resistance from the Siamese (Bourotte 1955).

Initially, in 1893, Attapeu, Stung Treng and Siem Pang were all put under the authority of Cochinchina, which was a surprising decision considering that these areas could only be accessed from Cochinchina via Cambodia. In 1894 the acting governor-general of Indochina found this arrangement difficult to understand, impractical and possibly dangerous to good administration, and on June 1, 1895 all the above areas were transferred to Lower Laos (Preston 1975).

**Slaves**

When the French took control, they found that slavery was far from being eliminated. Siamese laws banning slave trading and raiding had existed since 1884, but they were never seriously implemented in the region, due to the upheaval that they initially caused (see above). In Attapeu, the first French administrator, Monsieur Ruthe, learnt that there were 450 slaves in 1894, including about 100 Vietnamese,\textsuperscript{78} and in 1895, just a year after Ruthe had estimated that there were 450 slaves in Attapeu, French authorities reported that there were still apparently 1,000 slaves, including 500

\textsuperscript{77}De Coulgeans, 1892. January-February 1892 Stung Treng Report (in French), February 20, 1892, Stung Treng, CAOM Indochine 14401.

\textsuperscript{78}Ruthe, 1894. April 1894 Attopeu report, Ibid.
Vietnamese (Annamites), 300 tribal peoples and 200 Lao (Rathie 2001), much more than they initially realised.

Although the Siamese prohibited debt slavery in 1892, it was still prevalent in Stung Treng, Khong, Siem Pang and Attapeu when the French took control. Although the French did not support slavery, the administration was initially hesitant about immediately banning all forms, and was particularly wary about releasing already existing slaves. The French did not want to upset the local elite, who they needed as collaborators to help run the country. Large-scale slave raiding and trading did end when the French arrived, but debt slavery through local justice systems continued. However, by 1894 the French issued orders to ensure that slaves were fed and treated reasonably well.

The French did not begin to consistently enforce the abolition of all forms of slavery until 1897, when the French heavily pressured King Norodom to issue a Royal Decree to prohibit slave raids and the slave trade (Guérin 2008). This brought an end to mainstream slave trading (Bourdier 2006). Yet raids between opposing villages continued for decades. French penetration into remote areas was still quite limited (Guérin 2003), and was often more of an illusion than reality. However, the French gradually reduced slavery by ordering that former slaves in transition stages of becoming free (i.e. former slaves who did not want to leave their previous masters) should be paid salaries like other labourers. However, the French were never able to totally put an end to debt slavery (Guérin 2008).

**Assessing the Highlanders**

Monsieur Frébault, the Resident of Stung Treng in April 1894, was initially sympathetic to the aboriginals. He thought that the Lao were generally lazy and useless, but he had some hope for the highlanders living between the Se Bang Khan (Srepok)

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79 Ruthe, 1894. April 1894 Attapeu report (in French), May 14, 1894, Attapeu, CAOM 20941.
81 Lt. Gouvernor Indochine, 1894. Message to Administrator of Stung Treng (in French), March 1894, Saigon, CAOM Indochine 22664.
82 Government of Stung Treng, 1894. Message to Foreign Asian Criminal Court of Cochinchine (in French), March 20, 1894, Stung Treng, CAOM Indochine 22664.
River and the Sesan River. He reported having hired 50 to work with him.\textsuperscript{83} He mentioned that the highlanders were easily scared, and that the administration needed to be gentle with them.\textsuperscript{84}

However, Frébault's hopes for the highlanders were apparently short-lived, and within just a couple of months he was still writing that the Lao were lazy, but without mentioning the highlanders, he started vigorously proposing bringing Vietnamese and Chinese immigrants into the area.\textsuperscript{85}

Generally, the French administrators became increasingly eager to promote Chinese and Vietnamese immigration into the Stung Treng and Attapeu areas, as they were seen to be hard workers and inclined to increase trade and commerce, something that the French were eager to promote. The situation was similar to the British colonial situation in British Columbia, Canada described by Cole Harris (2002). There, too, the native people were considered to be irresponsible and unreliable by the colonial powers. For example, the natives had a different sense of time, and although they worked hard, they did not necessarily follow the schedules of the Europeans. As in Canada, bringing in labourers was deemed desirable to the French in Indochina, and in 1902 the French began actively promoting the immigration of Vietnamese to Stung Treng, including coolies to assist in infrastructure development and in harvesting the region's natural resources.\textsuperscript{86} The Vietnamese and Chinese were expected to act as examples for the highlanders and the Lao, in order to encourage them to be more industrious and business oriented.

\textbf{Another French Territorial Change}

Meanwhile the French were still experimenting with how to administrate Laos. On June 1, 1895 Laos was separated into Upper and Lower Laos, with the capital of the former being in Luang Phrabang, and the capital of the latter being on Khong Island, in present-day Champasak province, and covering all of the area occupied by the Brao, including those located further south and east from Khong. At the time there were just two French officials based in Attapeu, with the rest of the senior positions in the

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\textsuperscript{83} Frébault, 1894. Situation in Stung Treng 1894 (in French), April 7, 1894, Stung Treng, CAOM Indochine 20718.
\textsuperscript{84} Frébault, 1894. Message (in French), May 6, 1894, Stung Treng, CAOM Indochine 20941.
\textsuperscript{85} Frébault, 1894. Message (in French), June 12, 1894, Stung Treng, CAOM Indochine 20718.
\textsuperscript{86} Resident Superior of Laos, 1903, F1, August 1903, Stung Treng, CAOM.
\end{flushright}
government being held by Lao and Vietnamese, who became important colonial collaborators. In April 1897, Siem Pang was attached to the administrative area of Khong district. However, French officials felt that the Champasak and Khong influences on Siem Pang represented a “malign force”, and thought that Stung Treng should administer Siem Pang (Rathie 2006; Hickey 1982a), which it would some years later.

Map 5.2. French southern Laos, 1899
On April 19, 1899 the French decided to unite Upper and Lower Laos into a single Laos, with its capital in Vientiane (Breazeale 2002; Preston 1975). All Brao areas were included in Laos. The French administrative regional centres in southern Laos were at Khong Island and at Ban Mouang (Map 5.2).

**Gaining Control of the Brao**

In September 1895, there was an attempt to collect taxes from the uplanders in parts of the hinterlands north of the Sesan River, as well as ten days of corvée labour a year from each male adult. But apart from that, the French authorities did not try to penetrate much into areas populated by the Brao during the early French period (Maître 1912). However, later, when the French attempted to enter, they quickly found that they were not welcome. Some refused even to recognise French authority, to the shock of some French administrators (Guérin 2003). The people were frequently keen to be independent.

**Initial Attempts at Khmerisation**

At the very beginning of the 20th century, one of the main objectives of the French colonial authorities was to sever ties between the Lao in Champasak—who were still inside Siam—and the ethnic Lao and highlanders in their new territories, who continued to maintain close relationships with their previous bosses in Champasak. The Kavet of Siem Pang, for example, were still exchanging goods with the Lao in Veun Say, who were in turn closely connected with the Champasak royal family. This annoyed the French, and worked to justify severing Stung Treng from Laos. The Kavet apparently had little knowledge of monetary values, and were dependent on the Lao for trade. The trade that the Kavet were involved in caused problems for French taxation, as the Kavet often engaged in banditry and rebelled against French attempts to tax transported goods that they were trading with the Lao. Trade included rice, cotton, tobacco, salted meat, iron, copper, salt and various forest products, including bees wax, gumlac, indigo, and ivory. The Kavet also sold boats, Chinese nettle and rattan fibre ropes to Chinese traders (Maître 1912; Rathie 2006).
One key aspect of the French plan to promote trade inside Indochina was to increase Khmer influence in the government administration in Stung Treng, since Lao officials were believed to be too closely linked with Champasak and Siamese patronage networks. Therefore, the French began attempting to increase Khmer influence over Stung Treng, even though it was still part of French Laos. In 1900, for example, the French appointed a Khmer named Mey to be Balat (deputy) in Stung Treng. He was considered to be intelligent, but his efficiency as an administrator was limited due to being an opium addict. During the same year, another Khmer named Ua, originally from Kratie, was appointed as the district governor at Veun Say, and in 1904, a Khmer official previously based in Siem Pang was transferred to manage the administrative post at Veun Say responsible for tribal affairs (Rathie 2006). However, the Lao continued to dominate in reality, and the language of trade continued to be Lao. Even the Hakka Chinese who the French encouraged to migrate into the area quickly adopted Lao as their main language of trade, whether amongst the Lao or the Brao.

The Separation of Stung Treng from Laos

On December 6, 1904 the Governor General of French Indochina, Monsieur Paul Beau, decided to extract Stung Treng from Laos and give it to Cambodia, which had lost the region to Lao and Siamese expansion over a century earlier (Tully 1996). One of the reasons why the French agreed to give Stung Treng to Cambodia was in order to compensate for Cambodia’s loss of Siem Reap and Battambang to Siam, which the Khmer had been waiting for the French to get back for decades (Guérin 2008; Rathie 2006).

Detaching Siem Pang from Laos was particularly difficult, as the nobles there were all aligned with Champasak (Rathie 2006). Even though there were very few Khmer in the region, the transfer proceeded, changing the socio-political landscape considerably. Thus, the 547-kilometre border between Laos and Cambodia was established, although it was not initially well demarcated. It was a border between two countries under the same

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87 Resident Superior of Cambodia, File 12717, National Archives of Cambodia (reference provided by Martin Rathie).
colonial power, and thus was not a priority for detailed demarcation (Chhak 1966; Preston 1975; Breazeale 2002).

The Reorganisation of the ‘New Territories’ of Northeastern Cambodia
Once Stung Treng was given over to Cambodia, the French decided to administratively reorganise the region. It took some time to finalise these changes, but on August 26, 1907, the new ‘Circonscription’, or ‘Residence’ (region) of Stung Treng was officially established, with four provinces included in it. Melouprey and Tonle Repou were located west of the Mekong River, outside of Brao areas. On the east side of the Mekong was Stung Treng, which included Lom Phat on the Srepok River, and Siem Pang on the Sekong; and Moulapoumok (Veun Say), which covered the northeastern hinterlands of the Sesan River basin to the frontier with Annam (Bruel 1916) (Map 5.3). Stung Treng and Moulapoumok were considered to be relatively wealthy, since harvests were generally sufficient to feed the population in most years, and exports of forest products and gold provided some revenue (Guérin 2008).

Initially, the Lao living in the Veun Say area dominated, and there were only nine ethnic Khmer in all of Moulapoumok province in 1911 (Klein 1912). In 1906, a French Administrative Post was established farther up the Sesan River, not far from Annam, at Bokham. A Lao was put in charge. While on the one hand the French wanted to integrate the former Lao territories into Cambodia, they remained reliant on the Lao to administrate the people.

Still, the administration was gradually reformed so as to fit better with the Khmer government structure in other parts of Cambodia. 1905-7 represented a period of trial and error. Many officials were demoted or removed from government, and research was done to gain a better knowledge of the “new territories”, including the highlanders who lived there. Commercial ties with Siam were strongly discouraged, and the French continued to try to sever the close ties between the Lao and the highlanders. In Siem Pang, for example, the French thought the Lao must have used brute force to convince the Kavet in the mountains to respect them, since the standard of living of the Lao seemed so much higher. However, the Lao and highlanders did not initially welcome these changes, and

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88 Resident Superior of Laos, 1906, L13, CAOM.
were often unwilling to sever old alliances or dissolve former networks (Rathie 2006). Although there were an insufficient number of Khmer officials in the new territories, the French wanted Khmerisation to take place smoothly, and saw schools and Buddhist temples as being important vehicles for the changes they envisioned. However, they...
opted to not encourage Khmer people to colonise the provinces, as labour in the plains was already deemed insufficient, and it was feared that rapid Khmer movements into the region might increase tensions with the existing population (Guérin 2008). In any case, most Khmer were not interested in moving to the ‘wild’ and ‘backward’ region.

Ya Chao Tham and French Cambodia

In 1906, the first Governor of Moulapoumok province was none other than the powerful ethnic Lao leader, Chao Tham Phouy, or Ya Chao Tham. This was paradoxical, considering that Ya Chao Tham had been pivotal in establishing Veun Say in the name of Champasak and Siam in the 1880s. The main Cambodian administrative codes at the time, *Krom Srok*, dictated that those born outside of Cambodia could not become governors. Ya Chao Tham was, in fact, born in Champasak and so technically should not have been eligible. However, that did not prevent him from rising to power, and in his case the rule was ignored (Guérin 2003). A Khmer was appointed as his deputy, but Ya Chao Tham held all the real power. According to his granddaughter, he did not speak any Khmer until later in life, and he never learnt how to read or write the language. But that did not stop him from exercising his influence over the Sesan basin. Certainly, his reputation as the founder of Lao communities along the Sesan River was very significant.

But Ya Chao Tham resigned as Governor of Moulapoumok in May 1907, not long after being appointed in May 1906, and in July 1907 a *Khmer Kandal* named Var replaced him. However, Var had a difficult time governing, largely because he was Khmer and did not know how to deal with the highland or Lao populations. He resigned in 1909, and in April 1910 Ya Chao Tham was given control of the province by the Council of Ministers once again as provisional governor. However, he lost his position a year later, apparently due to abuse of authority (Rathie 2006; Guérin 2003). The relationship between the French and Ya Chao Tham was love-hate. As much as the French wanted to sever ties between the highlanders and the Lao and Siamese power structures that Ya Chao Tham represented, they needed his influence with the local population to keep the region peaceful.

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89 In 1907, Ya Chao Tham gained considerable credit when he was able to organise the capturing of a white elephant, which he presented to King Sisowat in Phnom Penh (Martin Rathie, *pers. comm.* 2008).
Moulapoumok province was initially administratively divided up to 17 ‘Khum’ or communes and 150 official villages. Ethnic Lao people were appointed as commune chiefs, and worked with one or two ‘Chuntop’ or village representatives, who were highlanders. Highlanders could only rise up to the level of assistant commune chiefs, since none were literate (Klein 1912). The Chuntop positions that the highlanders could hold often passed from father to son. The main qualification of a Chuntop was that the person needed to be able to speak Lao. These administrative changes increasingly introduced hierarchy into Brao society, something that was necessary in order to expand French colonial dominance.

The Brao remember Ya Chao Tham as being a fair and highly respected leader. One elder told me that, “Ya Chao Tham was the first Chao Muang of Veun Say. He was a good Chao Muang and the people liked him.” According to other Brao elders, Ya Chao Tham was the first outsider to nominally govern the Brao. An elder from Bong village said, “Before Ya Chao Tham the Brao governed themselves.” Ya Chao Tham was the first person who they paid ‘taxes’ to, via the Chuntop. One Kavet elder said, “Ya Chao Tham did not hit people. He only got taxes from them. He did not tell people to go to particular places. He just told the Heulay (Lalay) people to stay along the Heulay Stream, and the Kavet to stay along the Kavet Stream. He just told people to stay where they had been in the past.” Ya Chao Tham was valued because he had authority, and could therefore bring peace to the land. He was not particularly interested in transforming the Brao from being highlanders, except to the extent that he wanted peace in the country, and for the highlanders to pay taxes to him. This required some territorial control.

**Debt Slavery Declines but Village Attacks Continue**

In 1905 Siam decreed an end to the status of ‘slave’, including selling and buying people in and out of slavery. It was not until this decree that debt slavery in Siam was finally abolished in reality (Rathie 2006). This was important for the Brao, as it removed an important market for slaves from Brao areas. Ya Chao Tham’s influence certainly reduced the amount of conflict and slavery in the region, but despite these changes, highland villages still frequently attacked each other (Klein 1912).
A New Tax System for the Brao of Cambodia

When the inhabitants of the Circonscription of Stung Treng were transferred from Laos to Cambodia, the amount of taxes that they were required to pay increased, from one piastre per person per year, for men between 18-60 years of age, to 2.5 piastres for men aged 21-50, and 0.8 piastres for men between 50 and 59 years old. It cost three piastres instead of two to buy one male adult out of having to submit to corvée labour. There were new land taxes and rice taxes in Cambodia that did not exist in Attapeu, as well as taxes on trading elephants and cutting trees for making boats. This had a very negative effect on the local economy and trade. Of particular importance, the tax on people wielding firearms increased from the one piastre charged by Laos to 25 piastres in Cambodia, well beyond the means of most highlanders to pay. This upset the people, as they needed guns to protect themselves from thieves and tigers (Tully 1996; Guérin 2003).

These new taxes were very difficult for the French to collect, especially in the first years after Stung Treng became part of Cambodia, and while the French hoped that the necessity of paying higher taxes would force the people to work towards becoming ‘civilised’, it actually just bred resentment. To make matters worse, to perform ten days of corvée labour, Brao villagers often had to add eight to ten days of walking from their villages to where they needed to perform their drudgery, and back, and those who could not pay their personal income taxes had to add 15 more days of corvée in cases when personal income taxes could not be paid. The situation was difficult, with people frequently getting sick and dying while away doing corvée. Those who tried to return before their time was up were subjected to physical violence as punishment (Guérin 2003). Many Brao fled to remote areas or to Laos to escape paying taxes and submitting to corvée. Thus their spatial organisation was altered significantly.

Administering the Uplands and Winning Over the Highlanders

For the French, their ‘civilising mission’ justified colonial domination in the hinterlands of Indochina (Tully 1996). However, French authorities had a hard time administering the hinterlands, as villages were often well over 100 km from French posts,
making it very difficult to reach many areas. The French provided few resources for administering the hinterlands, as it was not a priority region.

While the relations between the Brao and the French were already tense in Cambodia as a result of the new tax system, it appears that the Brao of Attapeu did not begin to rebel against French colonial rule until the 1910s, when the rebellion on the Bolaven Plateau that Ong Keo and Ong Kommadam initiated in 1901 began to calm down. Although the emissaries of Ong Keo and Ong Kommadam successfully recruited some Brao to their cause,\textsuperscript{90} and other Brao were coerced to provide bands of rebels with rice,\textsuperscript{91} the Brao generally ignored the rebellion.

In 1910, a French administrator in Attapeu wrote that little could be expected from the Brao, as they had little to give the French. The administrator mentioned that the Brao refused to abandon the place where they lived, an area he described as being the poorest part of the country, difficult to access, even in the dry season.\textsuperscript{92}

In 1911, the French government in Cambodia was able to apprehend ten Brao from Attapeu who had attacked a Brao village in Cambodia. During the court proceedings it was mentioned that none of them spoke Lao or Khmer. Having killed three and captured 27, apparently in an act of revenge, three were released for lack of evidence, one escaped, three died of cholera while imprisoned, and one was killed, apparently while trying to escape. The remaining two were sent to Phnom Penh to be judged. As they were from Laos, they were considered 'foreigners', and only the Phnom Penh court had jurisdiction to judge them. Convicted of aggravated assault, arson, premeditated voluntary manslaughter, attempted premeditated manslaughter, illegal arresting, and false imprisoning, one of the two Brao was subjected to hard labour for life, while the other was sentenced to twenty years of hard labour. The French wanted to make a firm example of them. However, this justice contrasted greatly with similar cases decided amongst highlanders in Moulapoumok during this period. For example, in one case when Jarai and Brao kidnappers of eleven people were apprehended, the Jarai suggested releasing the prisoners and paying atonement in copper pots and gongs for two prisoners who died in

\textsuperscript{90} Tournier 1901. Rapport sur les evenements des Bolovens, Khong, le 17 August, 1901, CAOM Indochine 20756.

\textsuperscript{91} Residence Superior du Laos 1907. Rapport Politique de mai 1907, Saravane, le ler juin 1907, CAOM Carton F2.

captivity. Once the injured party accepted the payment, the matter was settled (Guérin 2003).

In 1909-10 the well-known explorer Henri Maître became the first Frenchmen to pass from Veun Say to Attapeu overland. He was warned that it was useless to attempt the journey from Veun Say directly to Attapeu, and that even the locals took the detour through Siem Pang “to avoid that wild country where the villagers are only just subdued, and their villages are hidden behind the most inaccessible slopes” (Maître 1912: 253). Despite a very difficult journey—including having to travel through some very steep areas with almost impenetrable vegetation—Maître encountered many Brao Kavet and Brao Umba peoples during his adventure. Maître was frustrated by the apparent indifference of the French authorities with regard to the highlanders. He commented that it was time to end this anarchic situation in Brao areas, and to give the people the new management system that he thought they needed; and the unity of organisation that he said they had never had. For him, their lack of organisation justified French intervention.

The French and the Brao in Attapeu

Meanwhile, in Attapeu, the traditional Lao hierarchy continued to be responsible for the administration of the Brao and other highland groups. Taxes were collected and given to the Chao Muang of Attapeu, as had been the case prior to the French (Rathie 2006). The Chao Muang then gave money to the French, in much the same way as he had given revenue to Champasak and Siam in the past. The Lao shifted from being the collaborators of colonial Siam to being the collaborators of the colonial French.

In 1913, Antonin Baudenne, the administrator in Attapeu, stated that the Lao were lazy and that the “Kha” (highlanders) were doing all the hard work for them. He thought that the most important job of the French was to free the highlanders from their lazy and demanding masters. Yet, one should not have the impression that Baudenne had much good to say about the highlanders. He complained about their houses, which he wrote were miserable and always in danger of being blown away by a strong wind. He mentioned that the Lové had poor hygiene, and wrote that, “By the age of 15 Khas reach their full level of abilities and then stagnate from then on, being unable to learn more”. However, he wrote that, “The Kha can develop. They are more intelligent than the Lao.
They must be trained by Europeans” (Baudenne 1913: 265). He mocked their taboos, and mentioned that the Brao, more than other groups, were adulterous, and that only a fine punished instances of adultery. He wrote that the “Lové only produce strictly the minimum amount of food they need to eat.”

Referring to highlanders more generally, Baudenne wrote that, “Morally they are very attached to their customs and inaccessible to innovation.” He commented that they were “jealous of their independence” (1913: 265). Although there was plenty of evidence to suggest that the Brao had a history of violent conflict with each other, Baudenne, somewhat surprisingly, wrote that, “The Kha, except for the Nya Heun and the Lové, are combative. They are all shy, discreet and believe everything” (1913: 266).

**Revolt Expands amongst the Brao in Southern Laos**

The Brao in Attapeu showed signs of rebelling against paying taxes to the French in 1914. Many Brao constructed fences on paths to their villages and covered them with pungi sticks to prevent outsiders from passing. There were two centres of rebellion; one in the southeast was led by Namavong, from the Ka-nying sub-group; the other in the southwest, led by Phya Ong, who had influence over villages in the Nam Kong basin. In response, the administrator of Attapeu, Monsieur Bazin, led a large group that included militia, coolies, the Chao Muang of Attapeu, and the two *Nai Kong* of the Brao to the places of resistance. Bazin provided considerable detail about how, with the help of some people from the Halang ethnic group, his group was able to eventually convince the rebellious village leaders, at least temporarily, to submit to French rule. However, the main ring leader, Phya Ong, disappeared with his followers, probably across the border to Cambodia, although he was eventually able to return to his village without being punished.⁹³

In 1916 Antonin Baudenne became Resident of Attapeu for the second time, and following up on Bazin’s 1914 efforts to quell Brao unrest, led three different campaigns in Brao areas at the end of 1916 and early 1917. The first two-week trip took place in

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⁹³ Bazin, 1914. Rapport de tournée chez les Khas Lovés (du 6 novembre 1914 au 30 novembre 1914), CAOM Resident Superior of Laos.
December 1916, and started as an inspection trip. However, some arrows were shot at the bamboo house in which Baudenne was staying in Pho Ngom village (later called Savanbao), indicating an impending 'Kha revolt'. Paths were closed off, pungi sticks were placed along paths, and Brao coolies deserted.

The second trip that Baudenne documented was one week long and took place in January 1917. His entourage traveled to the Brao area of Kong Moun in Attapeu, which took its name from a powerful Brao leader named Phya Moun; the specific objective was to calm down the people. Baudenne’s objective was to convince them to submit to French rule, agree to pay taxes, and follow the new social and spatial organisation system being promoted by the French, including locating in fixed villages. Some medical assistance was provided during the trip. The Lao and French had apparently only recently established their influence over the area. One powerful Brao leader, Phya Viang, who stayed with both the Hamong and their neighbours, the Kavet, was apparently encouraging people in the area to rebel and refuse to pay taxes or submit to corvée labour.

During this trip, Baudenne mentioned encountering Brao communities along the Sekong River, which he described as being generally 'submitted' and 'welcoming'. There were apparently, however, various social problems in these villages, which Baudenne commented on. He wrote that,

“All those centres are populated by human trash, on the edge of mental disease and old physical miseries, and there we understand the savage, when he approaches a higher civilisation than his too quickly, he becomes a bastard, degenerated, and tending to disappear.”

Essentially, it appears that the Brao were not adapting well to the rapid changes associated with living near 'civilisation'.

When Baudenne’s group arrived at villages along the Nam Kong River, however, he did not encounter people with the same sort of low-esteem that he found near the Sekong River. The Brao near the Nam Kong were much more confident, and

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96 He had a set of 'thai dooay' (a pair of the most valuable kind of music gongs) indicating his power.
demonstrated considerable resistance to Baudenne, with villages closing themselves spatially off in front of him. He described the situation as being as sort of “threatening deaf antagonism”. Nevertheless, Baudenne managed to survey the villages he passed, and continued to travel towards Phya Viang, even though other Brao tried to keep Baudenne’s group from reaching him. But after having a difficult time crossing the Nam Kong River, he finally found Phya Viang. After a Brao unsuccessfully tried to ambush Baudenne and stab him, the French administrator ordered the arrest of Phya Viang and a couple of other Brao who had been annoying him. After Phya Viang was arrested, the villages quickly submitted, opening up the roads and their villages. Spatially closing or opening Brao villages clearly had both important material and symbolic meaning.

Baudenne commented on the people of the area, stating that, “Nomadicism is less rooted here than with the Lové to the north.” In his final comments to the Resident Superior of Laos, Baudenne wrote, “Monsieur Superior Resident, in less than a week, I opened a domain that was until now full of obstacles, treachery and violence. I hope this result will lead to the submission of neighbouring Kha belonging to the Cambodian hinterland.” Clearly, the security situation in Attapeu was linked to the circumstances in neighbouring areas to the south.

The third of Baudenne’s trips into Brao areas in Attapeu took place in February and March 1917. It was directed towards stopping agitation amongst the Kavet, who were becoming increasingly rebellious. Baudenne reported that the Kavet were claiming that they could not be defeated. He thought they were operating a “den of thieves” along the Lao-Cambodia border. According to Baudenne, 25 years of French presence in the region had had no effect on these people. The Frenchman thought that the Lao and some “Kha” were afraid to go to the area, fearing that the Kavet would massacre them. However, Baudenne was prepared for his mission, bringing along 20 ethnic Halang warriors, all armed with spears.

When Baudenne arrived at a Kavet settlement, the inhabitants were, according to him, “aggressive and insulting”, refusing to provide information, and trying to run away. Baudenne’s men arrested those who insulted him, and they confiscated weapons in the

village until the next day when they were returned to their owners. Baudenne claimed that he had to ban Lao people from trading in the Brao villages he visited between November and January, since that is the period when taxes are gathered, and if traders arrived first, the highlanders would spend all their money, thus leaving nothing to pay taxes. He mentioned some rules that he imposed on the Kavet during his trip. Firstly, he implemented strict rules regarding reclaiming debts. Secondly, he banned village justice, which he claimed was a source of bloody fights. Thirdly, he imposed what he called “a final ban on slavery and capturing people.”

Baudenne was very annoyed about two “tricks” that the Brao commonly used against officials. The first was to flee their villages when outsiders arrived. The second involved different communities adopting the same names, which resulted in confusion amongst agents of the government. This was sometimes done because one community controlled another, so the dominated village would adopt the name of the dominating village. In other cases villages split but retained the same name.

Baudenne wrote that, “Despite terrible hygiene and economic conditions in the villages, the Kavet seem to be the most robust among the Lové”. He commented, when discussing the economic conditions of the people, that, “The cotton has a good result, but there was no analysis possible because of the disrespect of the Kha to foreigners and commercial relations. Do we have to say that they are poor?” Clearly, ideas about poverty and development were already important to the French.

**Government Policy and the Brao in Cambodia**

The situation in neighbouring Cambodia was quite different from in Attapeu. This was largely due to the conflicts that erupted amongst highlanders in the hinterlands of Kratie in 1912, which caused the French in Cambodia to fear that rebellion would spread north and affect the highlanders of Stung Treng and Moulapoumok. While the situation was initially calm in Stung Treng and Moulapoumok, by 1913 there was considerable upheaval, partially due to food shortages the previous year. This resulted in revolts, unpaid taxes, a decline in trade, and political unrest in some groups, especially amongst the Jarai and some Brao. Some villages fortified themselves, blocked off roads with
pungi sticks, and refused to perform corvée labour or pay taxes; others remained calm (Guérin 2003).

On June 23, 1913, fearful of what might follow, the government issued a royal order that substantially reduced the tax burden for the highlanders of northeastern Cambodia. Highlanders were no longer required to pay taxes according to the orders issued in 1902, 1903 and 1907. Instead, they would only have to provide 15 days of corvée per year. Moreover, the corvée labour no longer had to be serviced far from their homes. Instead, they could maintain paths between their villages and the Sesan River, etc. The duties depended on what the elected commune chiefs thought was appropriate (Guérin 2003). A Brao elder from Bang Geut village told me that during the time of Ya Chao Tham, and before him, the Brao did not actually pay taxes but were required to provide 15 days of corvée labour, which fits with the above. Ya Bun Chan, a retired deputy district chief of Taveng district and Brao Umba originally from Phao village, explained that Brao corvée labour was used to make and maintain a wide footpath to Laos that went between Hamawk and Umba streams.98

While this new fiscal policy was not successful in quelling unrest in Kratie, it seemed to have a very positive result in Stung Treng and Moulapoumok. The year after, even the rebellious Jarai were anxious to renew good relations with the French. Moreover, the population in Stung Treng was apparently not affected much by the murder of Maitre by highlanders in Kratie in 1914 (Guérin 2003).99 A crisis had been averted.

However, there were still problems with French attempts to khmerise the government administrations of Stung Treng and Moulapoumok. An ethnic Khmer governor was appointed for Moulapoumok in 1913, but he apparently did little to engender the kind of popular support that Ya Chao Tham had with the masses. Indicative of why he was not popular, he wrote in August of that year that, “because all these Phnong races are ignorant, they do not listen to whatever is ordered to them” (quoted in Guérin 2003: 137).

98 These paths are grown over and nobody travels this route between Laos and Cambodia anymore, a matter that will be discussed more thoroughly in Chapter 7.
99 Maitre was killed by the ethnic Bih chief, Pu Trang Lung, in the hinterlands of Kratie on August 5, 1914 (Bourotte 1955; Hickey 1982a).
With the onset of the First World War, the French made efforts to create new communication routes in northeastern Cambodia. For example, in 1914 a telegraph line connected Khong and Veun Say, paths were built into the highlands surrounding Veun Say, and roads and paths were built between Veun Say and Siem Pang, and Veun Say and Stung Treng. The Brao were the main sources of corvée labour for these projects. The French relied mainly on Vietnamese to manage Brao labour on these projects. French officials commented that progress was difficult due to health problems among the local population, associated with poverty, famine and epidemics (Rathie 2006).

Despite the initial success of the 1913 policy to reduce tax payments amongst highlanders in northeast Cambodia, there were soon problems with rich highlanders hiring other poor highlanders, or getting people indebted to them to do their corvée labour. While the richest did not have to participate in corvée, the poor often worked a month or more to cover their own corvée, as well as those of people whom they were indebted. Increased efforts to collect rice taxes, including inspecting people’s harvests, were very unpopular (Guérin 2003).

In early 1915, Chao Son, a member of the royal family of Champasak, apparently played an important role in pushing Jarai, Tampuon and Brao people in the Sesan and Srepok basins to rebel against the French (Guérin 2003). A major part of the unrest related to the Lao and the highlanders feeling oppressed by the Khmer. The highlanders were being affected by the downturn in the global economy. With the coming of the First World War, European manufactured goods being traded by the Chinese to the highlanders increased in price dramatically at the same time as prices paid for forest products declined. This resulted in more fiscal pressure being put on the people in relation to taxes (Guérin 2003). The Brao were confused, as the idea of global markets was still difficult for them to conceive. To try to return peace to the region, a Lao named Khamfong was appointed as Balat of Bokham, where bands of rebels were causing unrest. Chao Raxadanai, the King of Champasak (Photo 5.5), was called in by the French to help negotiate a resolution to the problem (Rathie 2006), indicating that Champasak continued to have considerable influence over northeastern Cambodia even ten years after Stung Treng had been severed from Laos.

100 Resident Superior of Cambodia, 1920, 392, 1919 - June 1920, CAOM, p. 69.
One of the ways that the French decided to try to address the unrest was to develop a mixed Lao-Khmer military force to control the subversive highlanders living along the border in Cambodia. During the First World War the French recruited some Brao and other highlanders to join the French army in Indochina, but the situation within the highlands remained tense, and it was often hard to recruit highlanders into the French military (Rathie 2006). However, over time the French were able recruit more Brao.

The First World War left the French with limited resources, and because they were already occupied with the rebellion in Kratie, they decided not to organise any military operations to quell the unrest in Stung Treng and Moulapoumok. Instead, a more conciliatory approach was adopted, in which a committee was set up to consider the peoples’ grievances. Not surprisingly, Ya Chao Tham was given a position on this committee, due to his continuing influence. Notably, however, nobody from the Cambodian administration was appointed to the committee, due to the distrust that locals had of them. In mid 1915, the Resident Superior of Stung Treng wrote that, “The Kha and Lao people still consider the Cambodian agents as the oppressors” (as quoted in Guérin 2003: 181). The grievances of the highlanders were considered for many months, until the indigenous representatives asked for a single tax of four piastres per registered person and the change of several agents at Moulapoumok, including the Khmer governor. There was a double dialogue going on between the indigenous peoples and the French administration, and between the French and the Cambodian administrations (Guérin 2003).

At first the Council of Ministers agreed that highlanders could buy ten of their 15 days of corvée for four piastres, but that the remaining five days had to be done in order to keep roads and paths maintained. Later, however, the French agreed that all the time could be bought for 4.5 piastres. It was agreed that their agricultural produce would no longer be taxed. In addition, many key Khmer officials in Moulapoumok were replaced (Guérin 2003). These measures had a positive effect, and by July highlanders were returning to Veun Say to trade their agricultural surplus (Guérin 2008). As the Resident Superior wrote,

“The wishes of the population mainly tended to have national and popular chiefs at their head, satisfaction was given to them by the royal order dated August 12th 1915, which entitled Governor of Moulapoumok the
influential chief Chau-Tham-Phouy hereditary ex-governor whose family control the country in reality” (cited in Guérin 2003: 182).

At this time the sons of Ya Chao Tham received important positions in the administration (Guérin 2008). Ya Chao Tham and his offspring were officially in charge again, but the French remained highly suspicious of Ya Chao Tham’s motives and resentful of his local popularity. They thought that Ya Chao Tham was abusing the power that the French had given him in August 1915, and accused him of inciting the “Khas” to show discontent with the level of French taxes, in order to get them reduced.101

French officials visited the Veun Say and Bokham areas, and found that local highlanders had entered into pacts with Ya Chao Tham. The French claimed that Ya Chao Tham was always ensuring the highlanders that he was working in their interests. The author of the report wrote that he was eagerly waiting until the end of the First World War,102 implying that the French could exert stricter direct rule over the area once the war ended, rather than relying on Ya Chao Tham, whose power and popularity with the highlanders was clearly unsettling to them.

A follow-up report in 1917 further clarified tensions between French officials in Stung Treng and Ya Chao Tham.103 It was explained that communities frequently hid their paths and moved their villages, often to avoid paying taxes. Ya Chao Tham was again accused of increasing his power at the expense of French interests. The author even went as far as to write that the “Kha” respected the authority of Ya Chao Tham more than that of the protectorate. The French needed Ya Chao Tham as a colonial collaborator, but the French were never able to control him as much as they hoped.104

New Brao Spaces and the Border

“Pa ta ti do, ti jo klim” (If it is hot in the north, it is cool in the south)

Kavet saying related to the moving across the border between Laos and Cambodia

102 Ibid. 1916.
103 Le Résident Supérieur au Cambodge, 1917. Situation politique de la haute région des tribus Khas de Stung-Treng, le 29 juin, 1917, Phnom Penh, CAOM Indochine 19175.
104 However, Ya Chao Tham was appointed governor of Moulapoumok at the end of 1917, a position he held until January 1920, when he was dismissed (Martin Rathie, pers. comm. 2008).
When the international border between Laos and Cambodia was shifted to the north in 1905, the new border left approximately half of the Brao in Laos and the other half in Cambodia. The significance of the spatial reorganisation of the region was probably not immediately evident to most Brao—as they were not consulted or even informed of the changes that were being planned—and the border was not surveyed until many years later, and demarcating it was never a priority. Furthermore, the Brao as an ethnic group did not constitute any conscious socio-political 'entity', and as such could not be ‘divided’ into two by the border. However, it apparently did not take the Brao long to figure out that while the French were in charge on both sides of the border, the policies and practices in southern Laos were not always the same as those in northeastern Cambodia. Sometimes they differed significantly, especially in relation to important matters like taxes and corvée labour.

As already explained above, many Brao in Cambodia were subjected to increased and new types of taxes in 1905. This led to considerable unrest and dissatisfaction, and illustrative of this, attempts to collect taxes from the Kavet led the people from many villages in Siem Pang to move to parts of Laos near Khong and Attapeu in 1906, 1909 and 1912 (Guérin 2003). As Baud & Van Schendel (1997) have pointed out, the creation of borders often have unexpected results, and the results of the creation of the Lao-Cambodia border is certainly illustrates this point. While the French wanted the border to support their administrative control over the region, the border instead provided the Brao with possibilities for subverting state control.

Most of the movement of Brao people across the border over the first ten years after Stung Treng was detached from Laos was from south to north. In other words, the Brao fled to Attapeu to avoid the heavier taxes being demanded in Cambodia. However, in 1915, taxes were reduced and corvée labour conditions were improved, and rebellion in the Kratie area to the south led the French in Stung Treng and Moulapoumok to further relax their efforts to make the highlanders to pay taxes. This resulted in the situation along the border reversing, and Brao people in Laos began to cross the border in order to settle in Cambodia.
Kavet elders from Kok Lak commune in Veun Say told me that Phya Viang, the Brao leader who was arrested by Baudenne in 1917 (see above), lived near the Lao-Cambodia border, and that when it was ‘hot’ in Cambodia, he moved to Laos, and when it was ‘hot’ in Laos, he went to Cambodia. He apparently moved between the two countries a number of times over the years. As the Kavet see it, Phya Viang and his followers utilised the border to create safe havens, Brao places of resistance designed to prevent the French from exercising control over them. After all, the Brao could cross the border whenever they wanted, but the French officials were more bound to the territory-based rules that made it difficult from them to act outside of their specific jurisdictions, at least without advance approval. Rathie (2006) reported that Lao and Khmer bandits based in Siem Pang also utilised the Lao-Cambodia border to create safe havens.

One of the most powerful Brao leaders of this era was Phya Vang. Originally from near the Ka-nyoo stream near the Lao border, Vang’s community later moved south to the Hamawk stream, north of the Sesan River, in order to escape from human-eating tigers. The Lao called him “Chao Muang Kha”. Tall and light-skinned, he is remembered by many as being a powerful but benevolent Brao leader. He, however, sometimes used his power to fine people for mistakes that they made. In this way, he acquired large numbers of buffalos and musical gongs, and eventually two sets of the most expensive and prestigious items that a Brao could own, ‘tha dooa’\(^{105}\) gongs. As one Brao put it, “If people did not listen to Phya Vang, they would be fined by him.” Phya Vang had eight families of debt slaves living with him. He apparently paid their debts, and then they became his slaves. Later in his life he let five go free, but the other three decided to stay with him until he died.

In December 1917, the Administrator of Attapeu reported that many Brao were fleeing Attapeu to live under Phya Vang in Cambodia. The Brao were attracted by Phya Vang’s calls, as little or no taxes were being collected in areas under his influence in Veun Say, and no corvée labour was required either.\(^{106}\)

\(^{105}\) The Kavet and Jree call them ‘\textit{tha dooay}’, and the Umba, Ka-nyoo, Hamong and Ka-nying call them ‘\textit{tha dooa}’.

Thus, it should be of little surprise that in 1917 senior French officials in northeast Cambodia thought the highlanders in the border regions were trying to avoid French colonial powers in Laos, Cambodia, Cochinchina and Annam. One official wrote that he expected that it would be necessary for officials from the four countries (Cambodia, Laos, Annam and Cochinchina) to coordinate their efforts in order to deal with these groups since they moved from country to country in order to avoid the different governments at particular times.¹⁰⁷

Still, movement of Brao people from Lao to Cambodia continued. In 1920, the capital of Attapeu province was moved to Muang Mai (new town) from Muang Kao (old town), and the French began using corvée labour to build a national highway between Pakse and Luang Phrabang (Rathie 2006). The use of Brao corvée for this road project may have been one of the reasons for the exodus of Brao from Laos to Cambodia in the 1920s, but the main reason was that the French were increasingly interfering in Brao areas. According to the personal notes of Pierre-Bernard Lafont (1962), there were 9,000 Brao in Attapeu, of which about 3,000 migrated to Cambodia between 1920 and 1930 (Le Bar et al. 1964).

Indicative of the porous nature of the Lao-Cambodia border during this period, on January 1, 1924, the Resident Superior of Laos sent a revealing report to the Governor General of Indochina. He stated that,

“The border is poorly or not even fixed. In principle, the Lové who drink the water of the Nam Kong and Houay Tanga are Lao subjects. The Lové drinking the Sesan depend on Cambodia. This is theory, and not in practice. All parts of valley of Nam Kong oriented south-north above Sene Hane are occupied by independent Lové not under our authority.”

The author of the report frankly admitted that, “On the Cambodia side, all the area, including the valley of Houay Tabok in Voeun Sai, are completely independent.” He complained that the tax systems were different in Cambodia and Laos, and that the “Kha” in Cambodia only had to pay taxes once every two years. He mentioned, for example, that the Brao chiefs Phya Viang and Phya Kham had led two entire villages from Laos to Cambodia, in order to escape taxes. These movements back and forth across the border

led the Resident Superior of Laos to suggest that the only way to address the problem would be to establish a “Moi” region that would encompass parts of different countries in French Indochina. Referring to the Brao, the author wrote, “Those people in Laos are soft, very afraid and very superstitious. They are very sensitive to being treated well and to the presence of a Commissaire.” He continued, “But like all primitives, they are lying and you cannot trust them unless you are very familiar with them. They are the most exploited Kha in the province. They just let things happen until the day they rebel and disappear. We can attribute all their little rebellions to their Lao chiefs.”

An Emphasis on Infrastructure Development

In the 1930s, the French put increased effort into upgrading and expanding road networks in northeastern Cambodia and the Brao and other highland groups constituted an important part of the corvée labour force required for this work. The construction of strategic roads to counter communist expansion in the highlands occurred during this period (Salemink 1999). Highlanders from Veun Say were recruited for roadwork in Siem Pang, and to help survey a rail network between Stung Treng and Khong. In 1934 highland corvée labour was transferred to upgrade the road between Veun Say and Siem Pang. Continuing with efforts to improve infrastructure in the region, in February 1937 road links between Stung Treng and Laos (Route 13), and the road between Stung Treng and Kratie road was completed. The latter road was seen as critical for linking Stung Treng to the rest of Cambodia. Existing roads were upgraded and new roads were built. Highlanders were recruited to do much of this work, often as corvée labour. Vietnamese coolies were also brought in by the French to help maintain the roads, and in 1937 the road between Stung Treng and Khong was completed, as was the road from Stung Treng to Annam. These roads were all suitable for seasonal vehicle use. This made it possible, for the first time, for Khmer to move around and begin to spread their influence into a region where they were still considered to be outsiders. In 1939, planning for an airstrip

at Veun Say was also undertaken, and during the same year the road link between Stung Treng and Phnom Penh was functioning better than ever.¹⁰⁹

But the development efforts of the French should certainly not be overemphasised. As Engelbert (2004: 255) put it, “The French colonial administration had contended itself with the introduction of money, the imposition of poll taxes, and the abolition of head-hunting and slavery.” Their practical goals were actually quite modest.

Corvée labour extracted from the people in southern Laos, including the Brao, was directed towards road construction and repair. One Brao elder in Phou Vong district told me, in 2005, that, “We used to have to work for the French. We mainly had to make roads.” However, the use of highland corvée labour for these projects upset the Brao and other groups, and was, according to one Kavet elder, a large part of the reason why they supported the revolution that would follow. Sometimes the use of corvée labour interfered with local agriculture activities, which negatively affected relationships between the people and the government (Rathie 2006).

One of the most important successes of the French colonial project related to Phya Vang, the former Brao leader of revolts against paying taxes to the French Cambodian administration. In 1935 he agreed to ‘collaborate’ with the French government. No longer considered a rebel, but rather an important asset for the French, he cut his hair short to symbolise his alliance with the French. His main job until he died in 1940 was organising corvée labour amongst the Brao.

**Reorganising Brao Space and Agriculture**

Most French administrators in French Indochina were very critical of swidden agriculture, which they believed was responsible for destroying the forests, promoting ‘nomadic’ lifestyles, and starving the population. Associated with their dislike of swidden agriculture, French officials were frustrated that the highlanders frequently shifted their villages. They seemed not to notice that that the vast majority of these moves were within particular territories. Even agronomical studies done in the highlands did not lead to changes in the view of the French. They remained convinced that stopping swidden

¹⁰⁹ Le Résident Supérieur au Cambodge, 1932-1939, 268, CAOM (provided by Martin Rathie).
agriculture and developing other means of agriculture was key to improving highland livelihoods and protecting the forests (Guérin 2008).

Antonin Baudenne was one of those who felt the strongest that Brao and other highland spaces should be reorganised to fit with the French colonial system. He advocated, for example, the internal resettlement and consolidation of Brao populations. In 1916 Baudenne wrote a report to the Resident Superior of French Laos about the Brao people of Attapeu that clearly illustrates the view of many French government officials at the time. It is useful to quote some parts here:\[10]\:

"The Lové do not have villages as such. A locality is constituted by different groups of houses on a specific territory, usually very distant from each other. That is a logical situation, considering their separatist tendencies. This situation is to the great despair of tax collectors. On that point, the Nai Kong [group leaders appointed by the French] have applied my way of doing things. Every day habitations are being built closer to each other, forming more centres than before."

Later in the report he wrote:

"Those incorrigible nomads are totally against fixed settlement in one specific place. They abandon the soil every 2-3 years, pretending that it is expired. They immigrate for stupid reasons—the evil song of a bird, bad things seen in dreams, death, or serious disease of an inhabitant... For those people to progress, they will have to settle down and radically change their way of life."

The French intended to take harsh measures against what they considered to be a serious threat to the forest, and several regulations were ordered by the French Administration in Indochina during the French colonial period. The French colonial government had already banned swidden cultivation on September 15, 1875 (Hickey 1982a). Still, the situation in Brao areas remained untouched by French preferences after 1893. On January 9, 1895 a Decree of the President of the Republic was ordered to prevent swidden agriculture. This was followed up with another order dated June 10, 1899, and the governor general issued still another one on October 17, 1905. In addition, in 1902 swidden agriculture was prohibited through a regulation from the Department of

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Agriculture, Forests and Trade, directly under the General Governor, which was
dedicated to protect high quality forests in Indochina.

On January 24, 1908, a Royal Decree was issued in Cambodia that ordered the
registration of swidden fields. This decree was, as in the past, inherently against swidden
agriculture, and specified that a piece of land had to be cultivated for three years before
someone could own it. Furthermore, any piece of land that was not cultivated for five
years became the property of the kingdom (Guérin 2008).

In November 1913, a new regulation was applied in Cambodia, with the intention
of protecting the forests and putting an end to swidden agriculture in the northeast. The
Resident of Stung Treng wrote, in a report about Siem Pang that he wrote in 1918, that,
"The Kha people are the ones who use the practice. They have already received
instructions saying that they should not make new slash-and-burn fields and they should
use the previous places for the cultivation of rice" (quoted by Guérin 2008: 14 of draft).
Finally, on October 17, 1921, a Royal Decree was issued ordering that land taxes be paid
regardless of whether the land was being cultivated or not. Again, the order was designed
to discourage swidden agriculture (Guérin 2008).

However, these orders did not make sense in the context of the uplands, because
had they been vigorously implemented there, the people would have not been able to
produce enough food for subsistence. Thus, the French seemed largely unable to stop the
practice, and coercive measures apparently had little real impact, especially in difficult to
access areas (Guérin 2008), like those inhabited by the Brao. Therefore, the French opted
for using the education system to fight what they considered to be the scourge of swidden
agriculture. The Resident of Stung Treng wrote, in 1918, that,

"It is with the institution of the post and of the public education that it will
be possible to bring over a long period of time some civilisation to some
people still savage like the Kha or Kouy people who use the barbarian
practices of the fire in forests for the cultivation of rice" (quoted by Guérin
2008: 14 of draft).

In 1938, a boarding school was opened for Brao and Jarai people in Veun Say, and
schools were made for highlanders at Bokham and Siem Pang. Students at Veun Say
dressed in kaki uniforms and studied in French and their mother tongues. One important
part of the curriculum was to learn about the evils of 'slash-and-burn' agriculture. Article
15 of the order from the Resident Superior stated, “It is necessary to teach them: - the habit of cultivating rice without using disastrous slash-and-burn practices” (cited in Guérin 2008: 14 of draft). During the three years that students attended school, they were taught lowland rice cultivation and gardening techniques.

The French administration advised the development of lowland rice cultivation, which they erroneously considered to be more productive than swidden agriculture (see Guérin 2001; Ironside & Baird 2003). However, the uplanders were unconvinced, as illustrated by comments made in a report written from 1915 by Governor of Stung Treng: “The farmers do not know how to plough the land like farmers of the South. I advised them to follow the example of their friends in the South. They said they cannot do it” (cited in Guérin 2008: 14-15 of draft). The French were frustrated by the inability of the highlanders to change their agriculture practices, and were dismayed that the Brao and Jarai students at Veun Say showed little interest in learning lowland rice cultivation, even though they excelled in other subjects. Illustrative of the lack of success in converting the Brao to lowland cultivation, only five Brao people owned lowland wet rice fields in Veun Say Commune in 1919 (Guérin 2008).

In addition, Guérin’s (2001) comparative study of swidden and wet rice cultivation yields in Stung Treng and Moulapoumok provinces from 1905 to 1919 clearly indicates why highlanders did not want to switch from swidden to lowland paddy farming. Guérin found that while French officials were convinced that lowland cultivation was more productive, the reality was that the highlanders were more frequently able to sell excess rice to lowlanders than the other way around. Furthermore, upland rice is harvested before lowland rice, and so highlanders were able to sell rice to the lowlanders at a relatively high price during shortage periods before the main lowland crop was ready to harvest.

In tandem with discouraging swidden agriculture and promoting lowland wet rice cultivation, the French promoted the expansion of cash crop agriculture, including the production of coffee, groundnut, soya, rubber, castor and tobacco. The results of these efforts were, however, quite poor. The examples provided by the French gave little incentive for the highlanders to change. In fact, the failures of the French in agriculture probably reinforced highlander suspicions about French advice (Guérin 2008). It was not
just that highlanders were stubbornly refusing to change their practices, but rather that they were unconvinced that doing so would be beneficial.

Nearing the Second World War

With the threat of the Second World War, the ‘Pan-Tai’ movement in Thailand, and the expansion of the Viet Minh, the French administrators increasingly recognised the strategic importance of the highlanders. Thus, during this period an increasing number of Brao men were recruited into the Garde Indigène.\textsuperscript{111} Whitaker \textit{et al.} (1973: 72) wrote,

“French army commanders looked upon the Khmer Loeu as an excellent source of manpower for the army outposts and recruited large numbers of them. Many Khmer Loeu have continued this tradition by enlisting in the Cambodian army.”

Roads were expanded and improved in order to provide the highlanders with more access to government services, and to give the government more access to the highlanders, especially for military reasons. On the eve of the Second World War radio links were established between the centres in northeastern Cambodia, improving regional communications (Rathie 2006). There was increasing concern about anti-colonial movements in French Indochina during this period, and roads and improved communications were seen as essential to counter rebels and ‘bandits’ (Rathie 2006; Fiasson 1961), as the highlanders were often referred.

Up until this point the French had still largely failed to strengthen the Khmer character of the bureaucracy in northeastern Cambodia. The civil services still relied on the Lao nobility to govern remote areas. Thus, the French tried to alter the education system, in order to emphasise the historical debt owed to the Khmer by the Lao for the development of their civilisation and culture. Pride in Khmer culture was promoted, and efforts were made to distance the Lao from the highlanders, but the links between those two groups remained close, albeit often exploitative in favour of the Lao. The French did manage to loosen some Lao patronage links between the Lao in Laos and parts of northeastern Cambodia, but it took many years (Rathie 2006).

\textsuperscript{111} The \textit{Garde Indigène} was, in fact, established in 1895 (Stuart-Fox 2001).
In March 1939, there was still some unrest amongst the Brao, and the Resident of Stung Treng reported that he had heard, when touring Veun Say, that Brao villages to the north in Laos were, once again, showing signs of rebellion. About a week later he received a telegram from the Resident of Pakse, reporting that two Brao villages were threatening to attack a third village. It is particularly noteworthy that the village being threatened was in Attapeu, but the aggressors were located on the Dak Mi and Trabok streams, both of which are in Cambodia.\footnote{Resident of Stung Treng, 1936. Message to Resident Superior of Cambodia (in French), March 29, 1939, Stung Treng, CAOM Resident Superior of Laos 448.} The border between Cambodia and Laos clearly meant very little for these people, even 35 years after it had been established.

The Japanese Period in French Indochina

In June 1940 France fell to Nazi Germany, and in the same month Japan signed a treaty of friendship with the Phibun Na Songkhram government in what had recently become Thailand (previously Siam). Poised to exert its influence on Thailand and French Indochina, the Japanese demanded, in August 1940, special permission from France’s Nazi-dominated Vichy government to use Indochina’s ports, cities and airports for troop movements. It was the beginnings of Japanese colonial ambitions in Indochina. In 1940, there were just 600 Frenchmen in Laos (Robbins 2000), and only a relatively small number were living in northeastern Cambodia and southern Laos, making the French quite vulnerable to dissention. The Governor General of Indochina, Admiral Jean Decoux, saw resistance to the Japanese as foolhardy and instead tried to negotiate. By September the Vichy government and Tokyo had signed a treaty allowing the Japanese to occupy the northern part of Indochina as far south as Hanoi.

By the end of 1941, the Japanese dominated French Indochina, which continued to be nominally controlled by the Vichy government. However, in 1945, as Charles de Gaulle’s French resistance prepared to liberate Indochina, and the Allies bombed parts of Indochina and threatened to invade, the Japanese began what was called the ‘\textit{coup de force}’ on March 9—taking full control of Indochina, and imprisoning all French citizens. By March 10 they occupied Attapeu. It was only then that the Brao recognise Japanese domination. On April 8, King Sisavang Vong in Luang Phrabang was forced to declare
an end to the French Protectorate in Laos (Norindr 1994). However, just six months later, the Japanese surrendered to Allied Forces (Dommen 1985).

Many Brao consider the Japanese colonial period as one of the most oppressive in history. The Brao remember many of the soldiers serving under the Japanese as being Ede, Bu Nong (Mnong) and Khmer. However, the Japanese presence was not felt heavily in many of the remote parts of the region, the types of places where the Brao frequently lived. A Kavet elder told me that some Kavet were stabbed with a sword and killed by the Japanese. He said that they were killed when the Japanese asked them if there were any French in the area, and they answered that there were none. However, other Kavet told me that the Japanese did nothing to harm the Kavet, and that they were only brutal with the French.

Other Brao elders in Tha Deua village, Sanamxay district, Attapeu province mentioned that their ancestors resisted paying taxes to the French, but that they agreed to pay the Japanese one time. The Brao feared the brutality of the Japanese compared to the relatively ‘soft’ approach of the French.

Japanese colonialism was significant as it greatly diminished the French administration, and most importantly, but even more importantly, they showed Asians that the French were not invincible, something that the nationalists and communists would remember after the Japanese departed.

The Rise of Communism

In 1929, the Vietnam Communist Party was founded, on the initiative of Ho Chi Minh, but soon after, in the same year, the Party’s name was changed to the Indochinese Communist Party (ICP), so as to be more inclusive of those in Laos and Cambodia, and satisfy the internationalist agenda of the global communist movement (Heder 1979; Robbins 2000; Goscha 2005). The ICP took up the task of organising the communists in Laos and Cambodia. However, in the early years Viet Minh ‘volunteers’ from Vietnam dominated the movement, and they were only initially able to infiltrate urban Vietnamese populations, as they lacked the cultural and language skills necessary to convince the locals (Heder 1979).
At the end of the Second World War, nationalists in both Laos and Cambodia demanded independence from French colonialism (Dommen 1985). Despite France’s success in regaining control of Indochina, between 1946 and 1948 the revolution began to grow in the eastern Annamite Mountains, although initially slowly (Heder 1979; Engelbert 2004). One of the most important boosts it got was the recruitment of Ong Kommadam’s son, Sithon, in 1946 (Gunn 1988) or 1947 (Engelbert 2004). However, Viet Minh cadres made various mistakes trying to gain influence over the population during this period, especially in not being culturally sensitive. By 1948 their high command acknowledged in a resolution that Laos and Cambodia still lacked a political basis to sustain a guerilla war (Engelbert 2004).

Thus, many Viet Minh cadres returned to Vietnam to study new tactics. Vietnamese cadres were required to make more efforts to learn Lao and understand local cultures, and people from Laos were given more visible roles politically (Engelbert 2004; Goscha 2005).

In 1949, as a result of the change in tactics, the ICP began making inroads west into Attapeu and Salavan. Efforts were focused on establishing a liberated zone along the Lao-Cambodia border, and on the Bolaven Plateau (Rathie 2006). On January 20, 1949, the Lao Issala army was formally established, albeit initially with very humble means and few members. The first liberated area in southern Laos was officially founded in Dakchung in the same year (Engelbert 2004), and in 1949–50 the Lao Issala continued to expand their influence to the west into parts of present-day Pathoumphone district, in Champasak province to the west. With more area under their control—at least during the nights—the communist rebels in Laos, with significant Vietnamese support, began putting more and more military and political pressure on the French and the Armée Nationale Laotienne (ANL) in southern Laos (Vongsavanh 1978; Engelbert 2004).

The Viet Minh and their Lao and minority allies worked to convince traditional leaders and elders of their cause, and once that was achieved, they established and mobilised various groups and committees within the villages to support their cause (Engelbert 2004).

Before 1953 there were apparently no Brao members of the ICP. However, some Brao were involved in the revolution from as early as 1947. Vietnamese recruited a
number of Brao Hamong to enter the movement in Phou Vong Neua and Brao Jree and Brao Kavet in Phou Vong Tai. The Brao were mainly used to recruit other Brao. Ethnic Lao people were only brought into Brao villages after the Brao revolutionaries had established first contact.

In Cambodia, although some Brao were recruited by the ICP to support the fight against the French in the late 1940s, highland cadres from the northeast only emerged in the early 1950s. Most of those who were recruited joined the revolution when working as labourers in the coffee plantations of the Bolaven Plateau in southern Laos, where many Brao from Taveng traveled to in the 1940s and 1950s.

While the ICP’s position was politically anti-imperialist and anti-colonialism, they in fact imposed their own variety of colonialism in Brao areas, since the early ICP was dominated by Vietnamese lowlanders, and they introduced new administrative and territorial norms to the spaces that they gained control over in Brao mountains areas, and as with other forms of colonialism, they relied on local collaborators, including many Brao.

Although there were instances of French brutality toward the highland population, the French were interested in gaining favour with the highlanders for military reasons. Therefore, in 1950 the French launched a paramilitary programme. In Laos, they worked with the Marquis to counter the increasing Lao Issala influence in southern Laos (Rathie 2006). This coincided with the Action Psychologique and Maquis programmes developed for the same purposes in Vietnam (Salemink 1999). The French utilised ethnic minorities in their counter-insurgency efforts, especially in areas under their influence near Pakse, Pakxong and Salavan. However, by this time many of the Brao and other highland groups to the east of the Sekong River in Attapeu had already been recruited by the ICP (Rathie 2006).

Whitaker et al. (1973) reported that during the French period resettlement projects were implemented in the highlands of northeastern Cambodia, but they were few in number and apparently were largely unsuccessful. Most resettlement in Laos and Cambodia was designed to hamper the growing communist insurgency, as was the case in neighbouring Vietnam, where highlanders were resettled from small, scattered settlements into large consolidated villages (regroupement des villages), in order to
prevent the Viet Minh from contacting villagers. In these new settlements highland youth were trained and led by the French to defend the villages (*organismes d’autodéfense*) (Salemink 1999).

In 1951 the Vietnamese communists organised the first large training for revolutionaries, in the Kreung village of Ga-ol, present-day O Chum district, south of the Sesan River. After the training, the trainees were sent back to their villages to spread political propaganda about the revolution in the villages.

While highlanders still had a very low status when it came to interactions with lowlanders, many appreciated the respect that the communists appeared to be offering. Many were impressed by revolutionary propaganda, which addressed the history of abuses that they had suffered under the Lao (Rathie 2006). Even though the communists were not pro-Animist, they initially made little mention of this in tribal areas, and anyway, many highlanders seemed to believe that sacrificing certain aspects of their culture was worth the equal social status that was being promised. By 1952 much of the Brao population was won over to the revolution (Engelbert 2004).

In 1952 and 1953, as the French faced more resistance from communist forces in the east, many highlanders sympathetic to the French began being relocated to the west, to present-day Bachieng Chaleunsouk district, Champasak province, including the two Brao villages of Km 19 and Km 20 (Map 2.1). More Brao would be relocated there in the 1960s with US support, also in order to move people out of communist areas of influence.

Brao people from Km 20 village in Champasak province remember seven or eight Vietnamese ethnic Kinh cadres showing up in their village in 1952. One of them had ‘gone native’ and could speak Brao. He even wore a loincloth (*janai* in Brao). The group stayed in the nearby forests until 1954, and the Brao sent rice to them frequently. Brao women would hide rice in their stomach area and say that they were pregnant, if any government soldiers inquired. Once a week, during the night, the group came to the village and did propaganda plays that the Brao enjoyed watching. The ant-corruption propaganda of equality appealed to many Brao. I heard similar stories from Brao people in northeastern Cambodia. During this period, Vietnamese in other parts of the region used similar tactics to recruit people to the revolution (Goscha 2005).
The French responded by inviting young Brao men for training. For example, in Muang Mai, the capital of Attapeu, self-defense militias were established, with the goal of having at least one militia in each Brao village. This made open revolutionary work by the Viet Minh difficult, but they managed to survive, thanks to the well-established networks amongst the local population (Engelbert 2004). The revolutionary Issala movement was continuing to grow. By 1953, there were five ‘liberated districts’ in Attapeu. Phou Vong Neua and Phou Vong Tai were the ones dominated by the Brao.

Conclusions

In this chapter I have tried to demonstrate how different forms of colonial domination operated, and how the Brao reacted. Each form manifested itself in different ways, but in all cases the powers involved intended to dominate the Brao in one way or another, and territorialisation was always part of the colonial efforts. For the early Khmer, colonialism probably mainly constituted brutally controlling people and making them into slaves, although some colonization might have occurred as well. For the Lao and Siamese this was also the case, and they developed tribute relations with some Brao, with their associated spatial implications. For the French, a much more bounded vision of control developed, one that was associated with the desire for a particular type of change presently understood to be a variety of social and spatial changes associated with ‘development’. While none of these powers attempted to fully colonise Brao upland spaces with large numbers of their own people, each party attempted to gain control of the people and space that they occupied in the uplands for their own purposes. However, in all cases they were unsuccessful in achieving total dominance. The Brao subverted their efforts in various ways, whether through running away to remote places to escape slavery in the Khmer, Lao and Siamese periods, or by not paying or paying only small amounts of tribute or taxes during the Lao, Siamese and French periods.

This chapter presented important information about the early years of border establishment between Laos and Cambodia. As Thongchai Winichakul (1994) has clearly pointed out, international borders are critical for defining what he calls the ‘geobody’ of the nation, and thus they create ‘state spaces’. However, the border between Laos and Cambodia, two territories under French control, did not appear until just over 100 years
ago, and even after it was demarcated it was less important than the one dividing French territories and Siam. The border was not well demarcated, and transport across it was still not limited in reality, but it soon became clear that it mattered a great deal what side of the border one lived on, as taxation and corvée labour policies were different on either side, and the officials that organised each side of the border were different people, with different tendencies and interpretations, and working with and through different local power structures.

Initially after the border was established in 1905, many Brao in Cambodia fled to Laos, as the tax situation there was favourable, but after tax and corvée rates in highland parts of Cambodia were significantly relaxed in 1913, many Brao from Laos fled the opposite direction from Laos to Cambodia. The Brao, who were able to move from one side to the other, were able to manipulate the state spaces created by the new international border. Even though they were subjected to an international border for the first time, they adapted quickly to it and were able to make use of it for their benefit and when it suited them. However, they ignored the border when that served their purposes. They were able to create places of resistance; spaces that were fundamentally affected by state power but were constituted in opposition to it. As Doreen Massey (1994) and Gaston Gordillo (2002a) have pointed out, new places are never self-enclosed, but are instead created in relation to other places, especially those associated with hegemonic affects. In this case, the Brao created new places in response to the spaces conceived by French border-making efforts, and made real by the administrative practices over the French attempts to control space and all that is enclosed in territory.

Apart from using the international border to their advantage, the Brao used the remoteness of the region to create still other places of resistance. The Brao did not simply submit to attempts to gain influence and control over the highlands, regardless of who was trying to gain control. They confounded the dominating powers by being highly mobile. In all cases they adopted a sort of geographically based form of resistance—one well suited to their livelihoods and traditions. They moved around to establish new swidden fields; and to evade slave raids, corvée labour and taxation. They were difficult to control. They occupied remote places that the dominating powers had a hard time entering, let alone controlling, and were not particularly interested in anyway.
During the French period, administrators had a lot of ideas for transforming highland landscapes, perhaps unlike their predecessors. For example, they wanted to affect the livelihoods of the people, including suppressing swidden agriculture and promoting ‘settled’ inhabitation of ‘permanent villages’. However, this was not achieved quickly or easily. In fact, the goals of the French administration in the highlands inhabited by the Brao were never fully realised.

There are various reasons for the slow pace and lack of success of the French colonial agenda in southern Laos and northeastern Cambodia, apart from the local strategies adopted by the Brao. The First World War, the Great Depression and the Second World War were among the most significant in both Cambodia and Laos. In Laos, the highland rebellion led by Ong Kommadam and Ong Keo crucially influenced the French’s attentions, and prevented them from imposing more aggressive attempts at promoting change amongst the Brao in Laos at the beginning of the 20th century. However, the situation was reversed in the 1910s after the death of Ong Keo. Just as the rebellion in Laos was dying down, highland rebellion in Cambodia south of areas populated by the Brao became serious. The unstable security situation in Kratie resulted in the French adopting very cautious policies for the highlands to the north, including relaxing taxation and corvée practices. The last thing that the French wanted was more unrest, as their resources were stretched already, and they could ill-afford another military conflict in the highlands. Thus, conflicts regarding other highlanders and the French indirectly affected the Brao, first in Laos and later in Cambodia. Again, this illustrates how the places occupied by the Brao were fundamentally constituted by events occurring in other places that they were not directly involved with. It was that the Brao planned it that way, but when opportunities arose, they often took advantage of them.

The French never organised any large-scale military operations in Brao areas, in either Laos or Cambodia. Generally, French human and financial resources in the region were simply too limited, and the emphasis was put on maintaining security by not upsetting the upland population, and reducing different forms of slavery and other forms of inter-village conflict, even if it meant being particularly tolerant at times. A moderate policy was adopted due to the realisation that being more aggressive was simply not feasible. The lack of attention to these areas was largely a product of geography and the
remoteness of the area, but was also related to the general contemptuous attitude the French had to the highlanders and especially the Lao in this region, even if it was mixed with cultural relativism during the latter French period.

Yet as French control over the highlands gradually increased, the Brao were faced with new pressures unlike any that they had previously experienced, as the French were interested in integrating the highlanders into Cambodia, altering their agriculture and residency habits, and collecting taxes to fund the development of the region. Education and road building also became important vehicles for the type of social and spatial change that the French hoped to bring to the highlands. However, the Brao and other highlanders did not have the same vision of ‘development’ as the French, preferring the relative independence that they had become accustomed to. Even by the end of the French colonial period, many Brao continued to ask for tax exemptions, flatly refused to pay taxes, or otherwise moved around in order to avoid paying. French ideas about transforming highlanders from being ‘nomadic’ to being permanent farmers were clear, but the French were largely unable to realise their dreams. The Brao could not see how doing so would lead to real improvements in their lives, and the French were unable to force their ideas on the Brao. However, following Jonsson (2002) and Walker (1999), dominant powers can have real impacts on people and places even beyond where states are able to enforce direct control.
CHAPTER 6
The State and Spatial Changes for the Brao in Post-French Laos and Cambodia

Introduction

The early post-French period—following the Viet Minh’s military successes in southern Laos and northeastern Cambodia, and the eventual ‘independence’ achieved for Laos and Cambodia after the 1954 Geneva Accords—brought on important changes for the Brao, both in Laos and Cambodia. Although this period is frequently referred to as ‘post-colonial’, here I argue that it instead constituted new forms of colonial dominance. Colonialism should not be conceived as being only European-based. It occurs in other situations when certain groups try to dominate other groups and the places where they live. Colonial domination operates in different ways, and in this chapter a number of forms of colonial domination of the Brao are described, including those initiated by Lao and Cambodian royalists, Lao and Cambodian communists, Vietnamese communists and even Americans.

The Early Post-French Period and the Brao in Laos

1954 represented a watershed year for Laos. The Geneva Accords brought an end to military conflict between French forces and the Viet Minh, and crucially, French rule. Initially, the Vietnamese and Lao communists sacrificed their military gains in southern Laos for peace and communist sanctuaries in Phongsaly and Sam Neua in northern Laos, where many communist-aligned southerners traveled in 1954, including some Brao.

The Royal Lao Government (RLG) inherited the administration of southern Laos, and while they adopted many of the modernising ideas of their French predecessors, the Lao retained prejudices about the uplanders that can be traced to the pre-French era. The post-French trajectory represented a hybrid vision, something that was embedded in French colonialist ideas, but not without integrating other more ‘indigenous’ ideas as well.
American Aid Comes to the Brao

With Attapeu back under the control of the royalists, the predecessor of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the United States Operations Mission (USOM) began operating in the province. They apparently had a 'shack' near the airstrip in Attapeu that they operated out of, and was probably linked to the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) operations. In 1958 they funded the establishment of Treo (now Oudomxay), a Brao village near the Sekong River in present-day Samakhixay district, as a 'Ban Phatthana' (development village) (Map 2.1). It was USOM/USAID's only Brao 'development village', and was considered a pilot for introducing 'progress' to 'ethnic minorities'. The way that the country was seen by the Americans at the time is important for understanding the approach to development that they adopted. In 1959, the director of American aid to Laos, Daly Lavergne (1959:1) wrote that Laos was “primitive nearly in all respects” and that “the entire country is still in its unchanged natural state.” Essentially, the Americans saw Laos from an ahistorical perspective, in which the human landscape was deemed 'primitive', 'natural' and in need of being transformed so as to bring Laos into the modern world. In many ways, their views were in line with the French civilising mission that justified previous colonial efforts.

Apart from justifying their efforts on development grounds, all aid from the US was somehow linked to politics and military strategy, and it was expected that successfully 'developing' the minorities would help prevent them from joining the communists (Corn 1994). As USAID’s termination report for Laos stated, “Economic assistance to Laos was planned and implemented in the context of the overriding political interests [of the United States]” (1976: 5).

Spatial reorganisation was clearly a key part of the American’s plans for ‘developing’ Treo, but it was filtered by Lao ideas about spatial organisation and development. The result was a plan that led to the three villages of Kong Meun, Thali and Treo being consolidated and moved from the east to the west side of the Sekong River.

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113 USAID was created by executive order in 1961, after the Foreign Assistance Act was signed into law.
114 William Sage, pers. comm. 2007.
where access was easier for government officials.\textsuperscript{115} Being closer to the road was expected to eventually link the village with the globalising market economy. Road building was the most important aspect of development work in Laos during this period (Halpern 1959).

The new village was reorganised from being circular with a communal house in the middle, as described in Chapter 4, to becoming a new ‘long village’, with houses lined up on both sides of a road. Once people were moved into their new environment—one considered to be spatially oriented so as to make it more conducive to development—US aid was used to construct a health clinic (‘souk sala’ in Lao) with three rooms and a zinc roof. Next, the Americans funded the construction of a 3-km road to the village from the main road, in order to link the village to the government and ‘the market’. In 1964, a two-room school was built. Each family received a buffalo, in order to support their transition to being lowland wet rice farmers. Treo was supposed to be a ‘model’ for other Brao communities.\textsuperscript{116} There was an expectation that development was associated with being sedentary and doing lowland wet-rice agriculture, and all the support provided was designed to achieve that vision. The ideas were top-down and imposed, as was frequently the case during this era of global modernising efforts. While initially only ten of the new village’s families did lowland wet-rice agriculture, USAID pursued its plans for a number of years, but after the security situation in Attapeu deteriorated, it was not possible for USAID to extend it ‘development’ efforts to other Brao villages.

As with the French, those with USAID saw ‘modernisation’ and ‘development’ as something that required spatial reorganising, including consolidating villages, reorienting village designs, and reorganising agriculture, education and health care. Although I have not been able to locate any documentation specifically related to the Treo project, or identify who exactly the Americans were who worked there, it is useful to refer to some of Joel’s Halpern’s comments about American aid and aid officials in Laos at the time. In his 1959 article about economic development and American aid in Laos, he argued that US officials were not culturally prepared for working in Laos. Many lived in compounds

\textsuperscript{115} During the pre-French or French period the villages fled to the northwest in other to escape from Jarai slave raiding.

\textsuperscript{116} USAID also chose to create another ‘development village’ amongst the Heuny (Nya Heun) ethnic group on the Bolaven Plateau, according to Brao informants from Treo village.
and spent little time with locals. History and culture were not adequately considered. Few aid workers spoke French, which was still widely used by government officials in Laos at the time, and “none of them spoke Lao” (1959: 155). Certainly, these officials were not linguistically or culturally equipped to deal with the Brao or other groups of ethnic minorities. Instead, their tendency was to uncritically apply American ideas, certainly mediated to some extent by the ideas of ethnic Lao government officials. Thus, Halpern (1959) suspected that US economic development aid was having important negative impacts on ‘traditional values’ in Laos. He wrote,

“It was merely assumed that American concepts apply. Political and economic matters are analyzed in detail, but no one has bothered to systematically compare Laotian and American values to see where they agree and differ. It would be considered sheer folly to build a road without first surveying the proposed route, but it is normal operating procedure, apparently, to plan an aid program with little if any foresight as to how it might affect the local population” (1959: 170).

As one ethnic Lao recently retired government official from Attapeu told me, “Development was done during former times too. USAID concentrated on Treo, and built a school and a hospital there. Three villages were put together into one. Now, we [the government] are still concentrating on developing that village.” America’s aid programme in Laos represented a particular form of colonialism, or perhaps neo-colonialism.

The Beginnings of the Ho Chi Minh Trail

After 1959 the Annamite Range between Laos and Vietnam became increasingly important for the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) and their Pathet Lao (PL) allies, after the DRV decided to firmly support and strengthen the guerrilla war in South Vietnam (Vongsavanh 1978; Goscha 2005). The transportation route that was to become known as the Ho Chi Minh Trail began to be expanded, with construction beginning on May 19th, 1959 (Robbins 2000). Initially, multiple footpaths, roads, and riverways served mainly as lines of communication for communist couriers and small combat units, but by 1962 the network was transporting large quantities of supplies to the Viet Cong rebels in South Vietnam (Vongsavanh 1978).
The North Vietnamese Army (NVA) moved supplies down the Trail in stages, concealing them in various storage depots along the way. There were rest and repair areas at intervals. Most transportation was by truck, but boats and rafts, and even bicycles and foot porters were used at times (Vongsavanh 1978; Van Staaveren 1993). While the Vietnamese transported most supplies on their own, highlanders, including some Brao, were at times recruited, coerced or forced to be porters. The Ho Chi Minh Trail transformed the spatial organisation of Brao lands near the Vietnamese border. The Brao could no longer travel as freely as before, and had to obtain permission to enter certain areas by the Vietnamese or PL leadership. The new networks of roads altered the landscape, making some areas more accessible, while restricting access to others. The Brao were subjected to yet another form of colonial dominance, one led by those with strong anti-imperialist and anti-colonial ideologies. This time the NVA occupied Brao uplands spaces.

**America Bombs Southern Laos**

The mountainous part of the Annamite Range in Laos began to be bombed by the Royal Lao Air Force (RLAF) and the US Air Force (USAF) in 1962, although initially at relatively low levels. Full-scale USAF bombing reportedly began on April 17, 1964 (Rathie 2006). While the war was a secret to the American people, it was a very scary reality for the Brao who lived in areas near the Ho Chi Minh Trail.

The US and RLG were particularly concerned not to openly violate Laos' official neutral status as defined by the 1954 and 1962 Geneva Accords. This meant that aerial bombing needed to be carefully implemented, in as discretely a way as possible. This frustrated US military commanders and pilots who felt that the US was being overly cautious (Van Staaveren 1993; Robbins 2000).

Beginning in 1965, the NVA initiated and increasingly upgraded the Sihanouk Trail as an extension of the Ho Chi Minh Trail, located southeast of Muang Mai, in Attapeu, cutting through areas populated by the Brao. NVA security was strong, and Colonel Vongnarath had—since taking command of RLA forces in Attapeu in 1960—a tacit understanding with the NVA that Royalist patrols would not range far from the
limits of Muang Mai town, and the NVA would not shell or otherwise interfere with his garrison (Vongsavanh 1978; Rathie 2006).

Map 6.1. Southern Laos, 1970

However, this agreement did not extend to the USAF, and in December 1965 they stepped up their bombardment of the southern-most part of Laos, including the Sihanouk Trail, which extended from southern Laos into Cambodia. By mid-1966 the anti-infiltration campaign in Laos further escalated, including the dropping of leaflets and expanding defoliation operations (Van Staaveren 1993). Agent Orange and various other chemical agents significantly altered the landscape in many areas populated by the Brao.
By 1969, NVA defenses, including anti-aircraft artillery, along the Trails in southern Laos were so strong that the RLAF had to stop its aerial attacks (Vongsavanh 1978). The people living on the ground certainly had a much different experience with the bombing than reflected by many military strategists and historians. For the Brao living in bombed areas, as soon as they heard the planes coming, they would jump into bunkers or simple pits that they were instructed by the communists to dig. It was a very scary and stressful time. Once the planes were gone, they would try to find time to do farming, including swidden agriculture. However, according to Brao people I have spoken with, despite the huge amount of bombardment that took place, casualties were low.

In April 1970, the NVA and PL decided to take control of Attapeu in order to gain control of the Sekong River, and before long they had defeated government forces in the provincial capitals of Attapeu and Salavan (Dommèn 1971; 1985) (Map 6.1).

**The CIA in Laos**

> “[The Laos operation] is something of which we can be proud as Americans. It has involved virtually no American casualties. What we are getting for our money there... is, I think, to use the old phrase, very cost effective...”


The CIA presence in Laos increased dramatically through the late 1950s and into the 1960s, especially after the 1962 Geneva Accords. Laos was the perfect place for the CIA to operate (Churchill 2000). As Blum (1986: 158) put it,

> “Laos was an American plantation, CIA playground. During the 1960s, the Agency roamed over much of the land at will, building an airstrip, a hangar, or a base here, a warehouse, barracks, or a radar site there; relocating thousands of people, entire villages, whole tribes, to suit strategic military needs.”

Those places where the CIA concentrated their efforts can be conceived of as being places of colonial domination, controlled in different ways compared to previous forms of colonialism.
The War and Resettling the Brao

The Strategic Hamlet Programme

In the early 1960s, US advisors in Vietnam began supporting the South Vietnam government in resettling highland villages for strategic military purposes. The ‘Strategic Hamlet Programme’, as it was called, was preceded by a number of different resettlement and rural development initiatives that the US had supported in Vietnam (O’Donnell 1967). The spatial and social implications of this programme were horrific for the highland peoples of South Vietnam (Hickey 1982a; 2000; Voth 1972). In 1961, the programme began being developed by USAID, which wanted to support the war effort using non-military means, emphasising the “political-economic-social-psychological aspects of the struggle” (O’Donnell 1967: 711), and in early 1962 a special task force was set up in Saigon, which was expanded in May. Rufus Phillips was the lead advisor (O’Donnell 1967).

The Strategic Hamlet Programme involved the geographical removal of people from areas where there were competing communist claims to their allegiance. They were moved into towns, refugee camps and especially ‘strategic hamlets’ (O’Donnell 1967; Hardy & Chinh 2003). The initiative took place all over South Vietnam, but was particularly evident and problematic in the highlands. Initially, provinces were asked to prepare ‘rehabilitation’ (Strategic Hamlet establishment) plans. Each proposal was then reconfigured so that it fit with military strategic objectives, and with the South Vietnam government’s objective to settle the ‘nomadic’ mountain people into ‘sedentary villages’ so that they could become more like the lowland Kinh (Hickey 1982b; 2002). People were moved into consolidated villages, and then village militias were set up to defend the new settlements, much as the French had done in the highlands in 1950 (see Chapter 5). O’Donnell (1967) argued that concentrating populations into small areas helped improve village solidarity and group cooperation, but he acknowledged that there were problems in some places when people were relocated too rapidly. In fact, this type of spatial reorganisation was fundamentally opposed to the lifestyles of most highlanders. The programme was heavily criticised by American observers in Vietnam, who saw the social and spatial organisation involved as being devastating to local livelihoods and cultures (Voth 1972; Hickey 1982b; 2002).
**Action Civic Programme**

The Strategic Hamlet Programme was a precursor for a similar project in Laos, called the ‘Action Civic Programme’, in which villages were resettled and consolidated in what were called ‘Ban Samakhi’ (Solidarity villages). The American, Philip Rufus, came over from the Strategic Hamlet Programme in Vietnam to advise the RLG on how to replicate what had been done in Vietnam (O’Donnelly 1967). Like the Strategic Hamlet Programme, the Action Civic Programme resettled people in order to remove them from spaces where they might encounter communists. Often the idea was to deny food and other support to rebels. Thus, many villages were moved west out of areas threatened by the communists during the 1960s and early 1970s.

Two examples of Brao ‘Ban Samakhi’ were Km 19 and Km 20 villages in present-day Bachieng Chaleunsouk district, Champasak province. In the 1960s many Brao ‘friendlies’ from the Kong Mi area (see below) were moved to these villages, which were in an area still under the control of the RLA.

Other types of Brao resettlement took place due to security concerns. According to Brao elders who presently live in Ban Na village, Pathoumphone district, Champasak province, people from the village were once members of four villages situated along the Lao-Cambodia border inside present-day Xe Pian National Protected Area (NPA). However, in the early 1970s the RLA was worried that these Brao might supply food to PL soldiers in the forest, and so they relocated them to the lowlands near the Mekong River. They too wanted them to stop swidden cultivation and switch to doing wet rice cultivation in the lowlands. Initially, the people were moved near a Buddhist forest temple. However, they were struck down with an epidemic and 41 people died. The survivors abandoned the area and scattered, moving into various ethnic Lao villages in the lowlands. After a number of years some of the Brao established Ban Na village on the west side of Route 13 South, and other Brao people, preferring to live with other people from the same ethnic group, gradually moved together at the same location where Ban Na exists today. Taong village, in present-day Pathoumphone district, was not relocated to the lowlands like Ban Na, apparently because they already had a small amount of wet rice paddy land in the forest in the 1970s (see Map 2.1).
Kong Mi

"War is perhaps one of the most neglected ethnographic occasions in the study of modern colonial discourse."

Salemink (1999: 282)

While many Brao sided with the communists during the Second Indochina War, some became aligned with the RLG, and their CIA mentors. Those who supported the government mainly became concentrated at the stronghold of Kong Mi,\textsuperscript{117} which was located 34 km southeast of present-day Attapeu town, centred in a valley surrounded by large mountains that were easily defendable. Known as PS-7 to Air America pilots who supplied the base, Kong Mi was one of the places where the CIA came into significant contact with the Brao. At Kong Mi, the Brao became aligned with the Americans, and the CIA worked closely with them there for many years. It was one of those places where the CIA came to dominate the Brao; new forms of social and spatial norms were introduced as part of this colonial project, and Brao collaborators helped make it work.

The French Period

Kong Mi, and the surrounding communities of mainly ethnic Brao Hamong and Kavet peoples, was named after a famous Brao leader, Ya Mi, who originally came from Phya Ong village, which was in the centre of the area that would become Kong Mi. The French colonial government in Attapeu appointed Ya Mi as regional leader, or Nai Kong, in 1917. He had been a Buddhist monk\textsuperscript{118} before serving as a trumpeter for the French colonial Garde Indigène.\textsuperscript{119} He was a respected Nai Kong for almost 30 years, until he died of old age in around 1945-6. He was one of those collaborators crucial to colonial powers.

\textsuperscript{117} Lat (DMS)14° 30' 58.52 N Long (DMS)106° 54' 22.82 E, 564 m. Altitude
\textsuperscript{118} Baudenne, A. 1917. Rapport de tournée chez les Khas Kong Mun de la province d'Attopeu du 24 janvier au 1 février 1917. CAOM, Résident Supérieur du Laos.
\textsuperscript{119} Resident Superior of Laos. 1924. Notes on the State of Attapeu Province (in French), Vientiane, January 1, 1924, CAOM Resident Superior of Laos E5.
The Second Indochina War Period

The PL began infiltrating the Kong Mi region, which included a large number of villages, in 1959, during the ‘han thit’ period, in which armed resistance by the communists against the RLG began after just five years of peace. The security situation for anti-communists in the area became increasingly precarious in 1960. According to Douglas Blaufarb (1972), the head of CIA operations in Vientiane between 1963 and 1966, irregular fighters were “hastily armed” by the CIA’s White Star programme throughout the country between 1960 and 1962. In 1960, or early 1961, a force of 60-70 paramilitary soldiers parachuted into Kong Mi. The force included a number of Brao; Ya Khamman, Ya Mi’s nephew, led the attack. Ya Tanh Homrasmy (Photo 6.1), a French educated teacher and the son of Ya Mi, was part of the group. It was hoped that the local population would join the attackers once they saw that Ya Tanh was with them. US air support was provided during the attack. The initiative was successful; Kong Mi was secured in just a few hours. Soon after, Ya Tanh became the new Chao Muang of Muang Lave, although his position was considered to be temporary. Muang Lave overlapped with the communist districts of Phou Vong Neua and Phou Vong Tai (Map 6.1).

The PL attempted to overrun Kong Mi twice in the 1960s—in the dry seasons of 1963 and 1964—but in both cases they were forced to withdraw after suffering heavy losses. Some time after the 1964 battle, in which the PL came close to taking Kong Mi, the area surrounding the stronghold was heavily land mined with CIA support (Conboy 1995).

After a time, Kong Mi gained the reputation as being undefeatable. One rumour was that this was because Ya Mi had dreamt that the mountain spirit “Arak Jundoo Poy Handeun Kambrok” had called Ya Mi his “very close friend” (kaleu in Brao), and that as a result Kong Mi could not be taken. Some believed that the spirit of ‘Chao Pha Deng’ protected Kong Mi. Every year the Brao at Kong Mi sacrificed a buffalo at a cave where the latter spirit was said to reside. It was thought that a very large python lived in the cave. It was believed to embody the spirit. This special place gave the Brao strength.

The CIA became much more interested in Kong Mi in 1965 when the Vietnamese began pushing their transportation routes into Cambodia and then to South Vietnam. The area suddenly became significant in terms of the war in Vietnam. The Sihanouk Trail was
located about 50 km from Kong Mi. Thus, it was very well situated geographically for monitoring the Sihanouk Trail.

**The Americans**

Mike Deuel was probably the first American CIA agent to work closely with the Brao to develop paramilitary and road-watch operations based out of Kong Mi. He was transferred to Pakse as a Far East Division officer in 1965 (Holm 2004). From there, he worked to revive the remnants of White Star’s Pincushion paramilitary operations to the east (Conboy 1995). Deuel trained small groups of highlanders to operate against the NVA and PL near the Ho Chi Minh and Sihanouk Trails. He worked with highlanders on the Bolaven Plateau (Conboy 1995), and at Kong Mi.

Known to the Brao as “Mr. Nyawk”—because he had prematurely gray hair—Deuel was the first American who the Brao remember working with to develop road watch operations. He used the code name Karl Aufderheide when in the field. However, the Brao from Kong Mi—when recalling him—immediately mention that he died in a helicopter crash. The crash occurred outside of Salavan in October 1965 (Gup 2001).

In April 1967 the CIA assigned two case officers to Attapeu town. The leader was Doug ‘Cobra’ Swanson, a former US Special Forces sergeant major, who had previously spent time at Houay Kong on the eastern Bolaven Plateau. Retired from the military and about 35-40 years old at the time, Swanson was not particularly tall but he was solidly built and tough. He was described as being “pugnacious”, and apparently fit the caricature of a typical American master sergeant. More concerned about getting the job done than following the rules, he was somewhat of a maverick and was described as being an “aggressive type of a fellow”. Like many of the other Americans who signed up to work in Laos, he wanted to be where the action was. He visited Kong Mi frequently from late 1967 until late 1968 or early 1969, after which time he was transferred to northern Laos (Conboy 1995).

His partner, Bob Parrot, was a very different sort of person. Described as being Doug’s “opposite”, he was in his early 20s, was tall and skinny, and hailed from a rural area in the mid-west state of Ohio. Clean-shaven with short dark hair, he looked even younger than he was. He was described as being “nerdish”. He often seemed somewhat
disoriented, but Doug took him under his wing. According to the Brao, Doug Swanson called him his “nephew” (even though they were not actually related), and Bob apparently came to be very loyal to Doug. “He would have jumped into a fire for Doug,” commented one American former CIA operative who worked at Kong Mi. They made a good team. Doug was the soldier; Bob had the clerical skills.

Swanson’s replacement\textsuperscript{120} remembers the Brao at Kong Mi as being “more difficult than other minority groups in southern Laos.” He sensed that they were closed and less willing to talk than other minorities he had come into contact with in Laos. He suspected that they spoke less Lao than the Nya Heun (Heuny) and Laven (Jru) highlanders that he had worked with on the Bolaven Plateau. When he took them away from Kong Mi for training, he felt as if he was exposing them to their first taste of “the outside world.”

**Developing a Stronghold**

“As the CIA succeeded in attracting more and more indigenous tribesmen into the ranks of its anti-communist units, there were fewer and fewer men left home to plant and harvest rice and other food crops upon which the villages depended for their survival. In time, so many men were enlisted into the ranks of the CIA-backed units that there might well have been widespread famine had it not been for the intervention of genuine AID missions in the region.”


The Kong Mi area covered approximately 5 x 5 km, and had to be supplied by air after all the surrounding areas fell to the PL in the early 1960s. Most supplies came from Pakse and Thailand. The CIA improved the runway at Kong Mi, and worked to transform the Brao young men at Kong Mi into “irregular warriors”. In Swanson’s words (quoted by Conboy 1995: 172),

“Eight village chiefs lived within the confines of Kong My, each with his own witch doctor and his own following. They were extremely primitive, without too much exaggeration just a step above bones in the nose. From this, 1,500 were organized into a local security network. Eighteen teams were then formed, some for road watch and some for action. All were given radio call-signs of various alcoholic beverages. Nearly all of the training was at Kong My, but the best, a 12-man road-watch team name Gin, was put through airborne instruction at Phitsanulok [Thailand].”

\textsuperscript{120} He has asked to remain anonymous, as he sometimes still works for the CIA.
With some rare exceptions, the Brao paramilitaries at Kong Mi were not supposed to directly engage the NVA or PL in combat, unless being directly threatened. Their main job was to watch the Sihanouk Trail, so as to provide intelligence that would be useful for organising USAF and RLAF bombing operations.

One CIA operative remembers being surprised at the number of land mines stored at Kong Mi. He thought that the area must have been one of the “most-mined areas in Laos.” The mines were undetectable by metal detectors. As he put it, “They were plastic, round and the size of a silver dollar; maybe just two inches thick. They were designed to blow a foot off.” In fact, he noticed that most of the victims of these deadly mines were actually the Brao soldiers at Kong Mi. Although effective in keeping the enemy away, these mines inadvertently maimed many Kong Mi soldiers and Brao villagers, and many of the villagers’ water buffaloes were killed too. Thus Kong Mi was a place of refuge from communism, but it was not a particularly safe place for those who walked in the wrong direction. It was bounded by land mines.

**Brao Allies from Cambodia**

As Doug Swanson claimed, above, there were initially only eight villages of Brao people at Kong Mi, but the US were intent on building this number up, as is often the case in colonial situations, both with Brao from Laos and with Brao from neighbouring parts of Cambodia. Pro-American Brao people were encouraged to congregate together in this same general area, although separated enough that swidden agriculture activities could continue as before.

Rathie (2006) reported that neighbouring parts of Cambodia south of Attapeu were a sanctuary for communist forces and off-limits to Americans and their allies after the Sihanouk Trail was built. However, Kong Mi road-watch teams were sometimes flown on secret and unapproved missions into parts of Ratanakiri province to monitor the Sihanouk Trail. Another major goal was to convince Brao people on the Cambodian side of the border to move up to areas controlled by Kong Mi.

Some Brao started to travel to Kong Mi as early as 1967. For example, the commune chief of Kok Lak, Ya Ha, and his chief military man, Ya Heum, led their
followers, including Ya Ha’s village, Phya Vong, to Kong Mi early on. Four or five Bell 
UH-1 series Iroquois helicopters, better known as the “Huey” (or kate lai in Lao), picked 
them up from a large natural mountain grassland called ‘Treng Tih’ in Brao (and Viel 
Thom in Khmer), well inside Cambodia. The group was whisked away just minutes 
before Cambodian communist soldiers were to arrive at the pick up point. A heavy 
firefight was narrowly avoided.

Later, other pro-American Brao from Cambodia were airlifted to Kong Mi by Air 
America military Sikorsky H-53 helicopters (kate khieo in Lao), after they walked 
through the forest to Phou Phi village, which was just across the border in Laos, and was 
under the control of Brao paramilitaries. That was the case for the Brao Umba people 
from Savanbao, Tampuan Reung, and Ke Kuang villages, along with some of those from 
Phayang and Phya Vang villages. The Brao Kavet communities that moved to Kong Mi 
from Cambodia were Vongvilai Tai, Kan Teung, La Meuay (Tih), Phya Vong, Phathainy 
and Viangkham. By the time all the pro-American Brao from Laos and Cambodia were 
gathered at Kong Mi, there were 25 communities organised in four Taseng, or sub-
districts: Kong Mi, Kok Lak (also known as Glang), Phya Vong and Phya Vang. The 
American neocolonial project required a certain type of organization that would fit with its 
military goals.

This situation shows that the Brao were not against crossing the porous Lao– 
Cambodia border when such a move seemed useful. As in the past, when things were 
‘hot’ on one side of the border, the Brao went to the other, and for those Brao with 
American sympathies, increasing Khmer Rouge (KR) dominance in northern Ratanakiri 
was made their villages very ‘hot’ indeed (see below).

La Meuay Tih villagers were contacted and taken away by Kong Mi soldiers in 
early 1968 at night, according to an elder from the village. Some of the men went first, 
and the women and children followed later. All traveled by foot. As the La Meuay

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121 Taseng Kong Mi included Kong Mi, Cham Phou Kaniang, Han Sana, Ban Yawng, Chan Don, Xen 
Louang, Seng Keo, Kham Phi Thoun, Nam Leu and Phou Phi villages. Taseng Kok Lak included Kok Lak, 
Phya Bao, Ya Jyee, Kok Lak Kreuy, Kok Lak Pho Kriam, and Kok Lak Jeuk villages. Taseng Phya Vong 
included Phya Vong, Pathainy, Kan Teung and La Meuay villages. Taseng Phya Vang included Phya Vang, 
Pho Yang, Ke Kuang, Tampuan Reung and Savanbao villages.

122 For example, Phya Vang sub-district had five villages of Umba and Ka-nyoo people from Cambodia, 
including Phayang, Savanbao, Ke Kuang Ke, Tampuan Reung and Phya Vang (Me Hamawk).
women and children were preparing to go, a group of 30 pro-communist Kavet from Rok and other villages already committed to the revolution were walking to La Meuay to try to convince people there to not “go with the Americans,” as a Kavet elder from Rok village put it. However, as they approached the village a group of 30 well-armed Kong Mi soldiers opened fire. The revolutionaries only had crossbows. After a small exchange the outgunned communists retreated, and the people from La Meuay fled with the Kong Mi soldiers.

Ke Kuang villagers first fled to Kong Mi in 1968. A Brao from Kong Mi named Pheo, whose father-in-law was Ya Tanh, initially led 50 Kong Mi soldiers to the village. A US airplane dropped rice and cans of fish and meat near the village a little after Ya Pheo’s group arrived. The people were given the food, and Ya Gleung, the Brao leader of Ke Kuang, traveled back to Kong Mi with Ya Pheo to see the situation there. Ya Gleung quickly became a soldier at Kong Mi, and before long he returned to his village, telling everyone that things were “fun” at Kong Mi. The people believed him, and everyone followed him back to Phou Phi village in Laos, where they were picked up by a helicopter and sent to Kong Mi.

However, after a year the people from Ke Kuang heard that the situation in Cambodia had improved, and so they abruptly returned to Cambodia. Pheo went down and convinced them to come back to Kong Mi again. The second time they walked all the way. From then they stayed at Kong Mi for seven years.

In another case, in around 1972, seven Brao Thahan Team soldiers from Kong Mi crossed the Cambodian border and visited the Brao village of Phayang. They noticed that a desk and some chairs were set up for a meeting, and they suspected that people in the village had been “studying” with the Communists. In fact, Ya Moy Cheum, a Brao communist leader had been teaching them for a month.

The villagers tried to deny that they had begun interacting with the Communists, but the Kong Mi soldiers were unconvinced. They left, and three days later the village was destroyed when the USAF dropped bombs and chemical defoliants on it. Fortunately, nobody was injured, as the Communists had already taught the people to dig pits to hide in when bombed.

123 Half the villagers from Phayang had already moved to Kong Mi between 1967 and 1969.
Three days later the Kong Mi soldiers returned, denying any knowledge of the attack. The soldiers told the people that they should come with them to stay at Kong Mi, and that conditions there were very good. If they stayed where they were, the village might be bombed again, and people could die, they said. The villagers felt that they had no choice but to go, so they walked two days through the forest until they reached the Kavet village of Phou Phi, where they were transported by helicopter to Kong Mi.

After a number of Brao villages had fled to Kong Mi, many of the remaining villages were moved south away from the Lao border by the KR, for fear that more people would flee to Laos. The spatial organisation of the population was critical for both sides. The Brao became the pawns in the expanding regional conflict.

**Road-Watching**

Although it may never be possible to know exactly how many Brao paramilitary soldiers were based at Kong Mi, most estimate that there were about 300 (all on the US payroll), as well as a large number of Brao civilians. However, a number of ‘phantom soldiers’ were listed on the books, so the documented number was higher, possibly up to 1,000. The Brao paramilitaries were trained and paid by the Americans, and were largely loyal to them. Those who were French soldiers before independence and then paramilitaries with the Americans were called *Thahan Phan*, and they often held senior positions. Then there were the *Thahan Ban* (or *Thahan TB*, as the Brao I interviewed frequently referred to them). These Brao were based at Kong Mi, but now live in various villages I visited in southern Laos.

Although the *Thahan TB* generally did not leave the Kong Mi area, there were exceptions. One former *Thahan TB* now living in Cambodia told me that he flew three or four times a year with American pilots and their Thai translators. He sometimes flew to Pakse, Vientiane, and he even made a few trips to Long Tieng, in northern Laos. These flights opened up his eyes to the world outside of Brao places.

The road-watch teams were the best-qualified and paid paramilitaries. Only those who were literate in Lao and were considered ‘smart’ were allowed to become *Thahan Team*, and the smartest of those were trained as radio operators. They did the road-watch work, and apart from receiving a monthly salary of about 36,000 kip, they also received
daily ‘danger pay’ (1,000 kip a day) plus bonuses for getting useful photographs. Each of
the cameras that they received could take 72 black-and-white photos.124

Ideally, each group was supposed to have 12-14 members, but in reality many had
less. Generally individuals remained in the same group for long periods. Doug Swanson’s
teams were amongst the first to deploy the CIA’s automated counting devises for
monitoring truck movements along the trail. Both magnetic and photoelectric sensors
were used (Conboy 1995).125 These electronic counting devises allowed road-watch team
members “to press picture-coded keys as many times as they saw a particular piece of
equipment pass by on the trail.” An orbiting aircraft would then be used to gather the data
from above (Castle 1993: 82).

Road-watch teams were individually heliborne into different areas for behind the
scenes surveillance and other military operations, often for 15-30 day stints. Usually two
or three helicopters would send out the group, with one being used to transport the team,
and another being kept as backup. They were generally Sikorsky H-53 or Huey
helicopters (Photos 6.2 to 6.7). The teams would first be planted about one or two days
walk from the target area. They would have food for about a week or ten days. When
food supplies got low, the team would make radio contact and request a supply drop.
These drops always occurred at night, close to dawn, and Pilotus Porters and CV-2
Cariboos were the planes mainly used to make the deliveries. The idea was for the planes
to make drops at night so as to reduce the chances of being detected by the enemy, and
then to return and land just as it got light out. It was no problem to take off during the
night, but landing at night at Pakse was not possible. After the mission of one team
ended, and they were extracted from the forest, another team would be dropped in to
replace it. This way teams are always operating on the ground.

Although few Thahan Team soldiers died during operations, there were instances
when soldiers were unintentionally left behind, leaving them to die, after becoming
separated from other members of their teams. This was sometimes the case during

124 The exchange rate was about 100 kip/US$ from 1963-1966, but later increased to about 500 kip/US$ in
the late 1960s and early 1970s. The rate remained similar for a number of years, until it changed to 800
kip/US$ at some point (Anonymous, pers. comm. 2007; Jim Chamberlain, pers. comm. 2007).
125 When Swanson was transferred to Luang Phrabang in 1969, he apparently used the same counters along
the Chinese road network in northern Laos. After Luang Phrabang, Swanson became a trainer for Lao
forces in Prachinburi, Thailand (Conboy 1995).
operations in Cambodia, but even there not many soldiers were lost. In 1968 six Brao solders from Kong Mi were sent into Ratanakiri to collect intelligence there, on the orders of Doug Swanson. They were given Cambodian money and flown to Phou Phi village. From there they crossed the border to Ratanakiri on foot. Five of the six returned to Laos, and the leader, Bree Sumbut, was left to collect intelligence. He was supposed to spend a month in Cambodia, but was never heard of again.

The road-watching units working in Laos were, at least sometimes, praised by the US for the valuable intelligence that they were able to gather (see Rathie 2006; Eckhardt 1999). However, despite all the investment in training and equipment, there were serious problems with the quality of the road-watch data that the Brao collected along the Sihanouk Trail. While the bonuses that they received for taking photos sometimes acted as incentives for them to take risks, they also led the Brao to falsify photos in order to obtain bonuses. For example, sometimes Brao Thahan Team soldiers would take off their uniforms and photograph each other from behind, claiming that the photos were of NVA soldiers. In other cases the paramilitaries would take off their uniforms, shoot holes in them, and claim later that they had been in a fire fight with the NVA. In one case Brao Thahan Team soldiers shot a douc langur, a large primate, and dressed its dead body in pants, a shirt and with a hat on top. They sat it down and took a photo from behind, claiming that the photo was of a NVA soldier. According to a Brao, an American case officer was initially pleased with the photo, but later, when it was analysed more carefully in Pakse, it became evident that the photo was of a dressed-up leaf monkey. The two soldiers who claimed that the photo was theirs were heavily reprimanded in Pakse.

Jay Lee Jaroslav was one of those who worked with this road-watch data. He told me that most of the data were “useless”. But he said that at the time the chiefs of stations wanted to look good by sending data to CIA headquarters. As he put it, “As long as it looked good, it apparently did not matter much that it was not really good at all.” Corn (1994) reported that it was expected that much of the road-watch data collected were falsified.

Most of the Brao who ended up working against the Communists came under American domination because of where they happened to live, and who their leaders were. Few were very committed to the cause. For most, being a paramilitary soldier was
simply a good way to make money. It is not that they worked for the Americans but secretly supported the Communists. Instead, most were essentially indifferent. “We were interested in the money more than anything. We did not want to fight. We knew that many of the Communists just over the hill were our relatives,” said one former Brao paramilitary. A Kavet man who lived at Kong Mi in the late 1960s and early 1970s explained that the Brao in southern Laos avoided conflict with each other. “The head of the Issala at the time was Blou, a Kavet, while the head of the soldiers at Kong Mi, A-lawng, was a Kavet. They did not want to fight each other.”

The Last Period

After 1973, when the ceasefire agreement was signed and a new coalition government was formed, road-watch operations ended and the CIA stopped working in Kong Mi. Although the PL certainly would have been happy if Kong Mi had fallen in the 1960s or early 1970s, they were not particularly concerned about taking the stronghold, as the troops there were not engaging in direct combat with them, and were largely ineffective after the surrounding areas were mined.

Most importantly, however, the Brao leaders at Kong Mi and PL and NVA forces had an unwritten agreement (see above). There was an unofficial border established, and conflicts were not supposed to occur as long as both sides stayed out of the territory of the other.

Bernard Hours (1973a) reported that the relocated ethnic Brao villages of Km 19 and 20 along the road between Pakxong and Pakse in Champasak province largely relied on the US-paid salaries that Brao men from the villages generated through their military work at Kong Mi. Much of this money was used to finance various kinds of sacrifices of chickens, pigs and water buffaloes. Former Kong Mi soldiers confirm that this was the case, although they claim that only Thahan Team road-watch soldiers could make large enough sums of money to buy large animals to sacrifice. They told me that the wives of Brao soldiers were flown into Kong Mi to visit their husbands every three months, and sometimes the soldiers were flown to Km 19 and 20 to visit their families there. The Americans organised Brao spaces as never before.
Most of the military personnel at Kong Mi finally surrendered to the PL on June 1, 1975, during the same month that Pakse was fully taken over by the Communists. The district of Muang Lave was dissolved, as were the two revolutionary districts of Phou Vong Neua and Phou Vong Tai. All of the northern area included in the above was incorporated into Xaysettha district, along with Muang Kao, while the southern part was included in the newly created Sanamxay district (Phone-nyaleu 2005).

Approximately ten senior Brao soldiers based at Kong Mi were sent for ‘re-education’ (imprisonment) in Attapeu in 1976. They were amongst 600 others also imprisoned southern Laos. Most were released after a year or two. Bong Beo Homrasmy, who replaced Ya Tanh as the head of Kong Mi in the early 1970s, spent longer in re-education than any other Brao, and was released seven years later, in 1982. After being released he moved to Vientiane.

**After the Fall of Kong Mi**

After the soldiers from Kong Mi surrendered, many Brao were fearful of the PL’s plan to resettle them from the mountains to the lowlands to do wet-rice paddy agriculture. Most were unfamiliar with and did not want to cultivate lowland paddy. Therefore some Brao decided to return to Cambodia, including those from Savanbao, Tampuan Reung, Phayang, and Ke Kuang Ke villages. In January 1976, KR operatives convinced the Brao that everything was fine in Cambodia. The Kavet KR leader Bua Khao visited Ke Kuang village on the Lao side of the border and told the people there that if they returned to Cambodia—which he emphasised was their own country—they could live in the mountains as they always had. However, it was all a ploy and the people were not allowed to live in the mountains as promised. Instead, once in Cambodia they were forced to walk to the mouth of Rok Stream. They then traveled down the Heulay (Lalay) Stream to Veun Say. After staying four nights in the ethnic Lao village of Kalan, on the Sesan River, they were moved to cooperatives along the Sesan River in Stung Treng province (see below).

When they left Laos they had no idea what suffering they would face once under the control of the KR. They certainly would have been better off if they had stayed in Laos. But they had limited information at the time, and they wanted to believe the KR
propaganda. "We just wanted to continue our lives in the mountains in peace," commented one Brao man. While years earlier the Brao from Phayang and other villages had moved to Kong Mi to try to stay in the mountains and avoid the conflict, the Brao tried to return to Cambodia to avoid being forced to the lowlands. They were looking for a place in the mountains where they could control their own lives.

Illustrative of the severity of their mistake, over 60 people from Savanbao village were executed by the KR when they tried to escape from a cooperative on the Sesan River in Stung Treng in 1977. They got about 10 km, again heading for a place or resistance represented by the border, when KR soldiers caught them. Everyone was killed—even the babies.

The situation for the Kavet village of La Meuay Tih was somewhat different. In 1973, when the agreement that was supposed to bring peace to Laos was signed, the people of La Meuay Tih agreed to cooperate with the KR, and left with them to establish a village in a remote area along the Lao-Cambodia border, not far from where they originated. However, in 1976 about one hundred KR soldiers were sent to bring the people down to the lowlands. The soldiers arrived in the village at night. The people had only a little time to prepare to leave. They had to abandon their rice stocks and pigs. Once down in Veun Say they were sent on to Svay Rieng cooperative on the Sesan River in Stung Treng province, where they remained until 1979. Forty five people of their village died during the KR period. Approximately 20 of those were killed at the cooperatives for "stealing food" to eat. Others died of illness and hunger. Clearly, it was a very difficult period for the Brao from Kong Mi who returned to Cambodia.

The Establishment of the Lao PDR

Once in full control, the Lao People's Party (LPP) created the Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR) on December 2, 1975. Many rightists and neutralists fled Laos, but most Brao remained. The Lao PDR retained villages, sub-districts and provinces within its administrative structure, which was not the case with the KR in Cambodia (see below). However, the district and provincial boundaries were reorganised, and the names of some districts and provinces changed. In the Lao PDR, poor
communication systems and the structure of the government provided much more power to lower levels of government, as compared to the highly centralised system of the KR.

While the revolution in Laos was highly dependent on support from highlanders and the rhetoric of the LPP supported equality for all ethnic groups, and specifically included ethnic minorities in their vision of the nation-state (Pholsena 2004; 2006), LPP policy implicitly promoted the assimilation of minorities, while at the same time discouraging ethnonationalism. Due to their cold relationship with the KR, the PL did not promote regionalism with Cambodia. Instead, national identities were reinforced.

Like Vietnam, Laos initially adopted the post-revolution strategy of trying to develop "socialist industrialisation". Although officially otherwise proclaimed, Engelbert (2004: 230) believes that the strategy was to develop national unity "through rigid unification as well as ethnic and social homogenization." It was nonetheless paradoxical that some aspects of ethnic culture were actually encouraged, apparently in appreciation of the ethnic minorities who had brought the PL to power. Thus, in Pakse the government started broadcasting radio in Brao, Laven (Jru) and Nye ('Nkriang) languages. However, the PL adopted the Vietnamese strategy of promoting the preservation of some aspects of 'good culture', while discouraging others. Hardy & Chinh (2003) have called this 'selective preservation'. Former Prime Minister, Souvanna Phouma, explained the GoL position to Time Magazine in 1983,

"It is necessary to build a new socialist man. But this doesn't mean that we must destroy everything. We are trying to keep the good and get rid of the traits like superstition and laziness that impede development."

Security Induced Resettlement of the Brao

In 1974-5, after the armed conflict was largely over, some Brao villages located along the Cambodia border were relocated by the government away from the border, in order to prevent the KR from entering the villages and forcing the people into Cambodia, as was occurring along much of the border with the Brao during this period (Lucas 1997). One village was Phon Sa-at, in Khong district, Champasak province. They were living near the border with Cambodia, and one day the KR raided their village with the intention of bringing all the people to Cambodia, since they originally came from there. During the

violent attack eight Brao were captured and two others were killed.\textsuperscript{127} The rest of the
community fled further into Laos. After moving around a bit, district government
officials decided that it was unsafe for them to live near the border, and in 1978 the
people were moved to their present village location, adjacent to Route 13.\textsuperscript{128} However,
this security-related resettlement was relatively minor compared to the large-scale
resettlement of the Brao in Attapeu.

Large-scale Resettlement of the Brao to the Lowlands

Although the PL were never as draconian as the KR, between 1975 and 1976 the
Lao government (GoL) did impose fairly radical changes on the Brao and other
highlanders in eastern Attapeu province. 11,000 people were forcibly resettled to the
lowlands during this period, and most of those were Brao from present-day Phou Vong
district. They were settled in lowland parts of Sanamxay and Xaysettha districts (Lucas
1997). One Brao woman who was relocated to the lowlands in 1975 told me that her
village originally refused to move, but were soon forced at gun point to walk to the
lowlands. “We all cried as we walked down the mountain,” she told me.

The reasons that the GoL gave for these relocations, as recorded by Lucas (1997)
were 1) to development lowland wet-rice paddy land in place of swidden agriculture, 2)
to encourage the people to participate in nation building in the newly established Lao
PDR, and 3) to protect the people from the war in Cambodia. Initially, a large number of
restrictions were enforced, such as a ban on killing domestic animals (Rathie 2006).

It was not easy for the people resettled to the lowlands by the GoL. Most people
moved to the lowlands received little assistance from the government and had to find
their own places to resettle, which required permission from the district government.
Others were assigned sites by the government. Many of the Brao were moved to new
agricultural cooperatives.

Illustrative of what happened in 1975 and 1976, 18 Brao Jree villages\textsuperscript{129} were
resettled into a single lowland agriculture cooperative that was established at Hat Phila

\textsuperscript{127} They moved from present-day Taveng district, Ratanakiri province west to the Siem Pang area during
the pre-French era to escape Jarai warriors from Sawp and Katang villages.

\textsuperscript{128} The government named the village Phon Sa-at, which means “beautiful hill”.

\textsuperscript{129} Hin Lat, Hat Tayeuk, Bra, Jeur Hiang, Ya Kou, Phya Viang, Katou, Vonglakhone, Jree, Nkan, Bok,
Brai, Hanaw, Hat Dao Noi, Takout, Daroin, Ndet, and Phat villages.
village, on the west side of the Sekong River in Sanamxay district. They did not adapt well, and by 1982 a large number were allowed to return to the mountains east of the Sekong River. Another big cooperative was located at Boung Vay in Xaysettha district, where the populations of approximately 20 small Brao Ka-nying villages were moved in 1975. Many there returned to the mountains in the late 1970s and early 1980s.

Another large cooperative was established on the east side of the Sekong River at a place in Samakhixay district called Don Xay, or Thep Sam. However, like Hat Phila and Boung Vay, the Brao who moved there were mainly not satisfied with living there, and in 2007 the last few families remaining at the former cooperative were preparing to move to Phou Vong district. Most moved away from the area many years earlier. Another area where Brao people were concentrated was along the Xexou River in Oudom sub-district, but like other places, many of those moved there in the mid-1970s were allowed to return to mountainous areas in the late 1970s and early 1980s. There was an unspoken admission by the GoL that the initial movement of the Brao to the lowlands had been a dismal failure. These problems with the resettlement of the Brao in the mid-1970s has also been reported by Sisouphanthong et al. (2000), and acknowledged by MAF & STEA (2003).

By 1984-5 approximately 5,000 people had returned to their old villages in present-day Phou Vong—about 50 percent of the people who had been resettled to the lowlands in 1975-6 (Lucas 1997). Many communities have moved frequently since 1975, having lived in three or four locations and never really finding an appropriate place to settle in the lowlands. The reasons the government allowed the people to return is not entirely clear. Lucas (1997: 125) did not receive a clear answer from people she interviewed. Some said only, “it was a shame to leave the mountains”.

Brao people told me that they were allowed to return because the situation was so bad in the lowlands that the GoL had no choice but to allow them back. However, not everyone was allowed to return. In 1995, a Brao leader living near the Xexou River in Xaysettha district told me that if the government let everyone go where they wanted, only 10 percent of the people would still be in the lowlands.

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130 This included Hat Xan, Keng Makkheua, Boung Vay and Don Ngieu villages, all of which are populated by Brao people.
Politics and Armed Struggle in Southern Laos

The PL had little time to relax after gaining power. Soon rebel right-wing forces were operating in southern Laos, supported initially by Thailand. While security in Brao areas, including Attapeu, was relatively good, the security situation in other parts of southern Laos, such as Champasak and Salavan was difficult.

On July 18, 1977, the Lao PDR signed an important agreement with Vietnam, a “25-Year Treaty of Mutual Friendship and Cooperation” (Goscha 2003). Vietnam sent about 50,000 soldiers to Laos to help deal with the growing resistance against the LPP (Rathie 2006). Although the Vietnamese were identified as ‘guests’ of the Lao PDR, many in exile consider that their influence represented another form of colonial domination.

The GoL tried to implement various economic reforms at the end of the 1970s, but international isolation and internal conflict, including anti-PL rebels financed after 1979 by China, kept the situation in Laos unstable, and the exodus of people continued up until the mid-1980s when conditions in Laos finally improved and the refugee camps in Thailand began scaling down and closing.

The Early Post-French Period and the Brao in Cambodia

As in Laos, 1954 brought an end to the French colonial period in Cambodia, but it did not bring an end to colonialism in Brao parts of Cambodia. It just brought in a different form of colonial domination, one with its base in Phnom Penh rather than in Paris.

The Sihanouk Era

“During the French period I used to have to do 15 days of corvée labour a year. The French only rarely came to the villages; they mainly stayed in Stung Treng and Veun Say, but when they did come to our village they would shake everyone’s hands and give us big bags of salt, tobacco, and sometimes also clothes, like short pants. The Khmer were much more brutal than the French ever were.”

Brao villager from Taveng (2002)

Norodom Sihanouk’s Sangkum Reastr Niyum (People’s Socialist Community) government took control of the newly ‘independent’ Cambodia in 1954. It had much
more important social and spatial implications for the Brao than the French government from which it inherited power.

According to Charles Meyer (1979)—one of Sihanouk’s advisors during the Sangkum period—Khmer officials of newly ‘independent’ Cambodia were shocked and disappointed when they visited the northeast and found that non-Khmer peoples, including large numbers of ethnic Lao and highlanders, lived in the region. This differed from Laos where officials were more familiar with highlanders. In addition, Sihanouk and many of his Khmer colleagues were already concerned that Cambodia’s larger neighbours, particularly Vietnam, could gradually consume the country. Thus, the new Cambodian government focused on ‘building up the Khmer nation’ (Burchett 1970). Khmer nationalism emerged not only in response to French colonialism, but also in the context of historical events involving the Thai and Vietnamese (Grabowsky 1997).

Soon, the Khmer began enforcing their cultural norms on the highlanders. Initially, it was just small things. For example, Brao men had to cut their hair short. But soon the government started promoting change at all levels, whether linguistically, culturally, spiritually or with regard to livelihoods. Encouraging spatial change was a critical part of their plan. In line with my own views, Meyer (1979) described the government’s efforts at the time as a form of colonisation, in which the economic role of the highlanders, or their rights to remain settled on their ancestral lands, were not recognised. But the Cambodia media generally applauded the government’s efforts, and in 1962 a Cambodia Daily article stated, in relation to government efforts in the northeast, that “Until now, poverty seemed irremediable. Today, hope is reborn” (quoted in Bourdier 2006: 177). One can see how development discourses justified government interventions in the highlands, much as the ‘civilising mission’ of the French had justified the form of colonialism that preceded it.
The Creation of Ratanakiri Province

In May 1959, the Sangkum government combined Moulapoumok province and Lom Phat district of Stung Treng province to create Ratanakiri province (Map 6.2). Sihanouk found it convenient to mould history to fit his vision for the highlands. He emphasised that Ratanakiri and Mondolkiri had been Cambodian since the "dawn of time," and that they had the same rights as other provinces. Charles Meyer (1979) believed that he was probably sincere in his sentiments, but that the contemptuous and patronising way in which he viewed the local population was easily recognisable. The new province of Ratanakiri was put under military leadership, with the army eager to exploit the rich natural resources of the province (Ruohomaki 2003; Meyer 1979).
Roads and Gaining Access

The first important instructions from the Sangkum government for northeastern Cambodia, dated 1958, were to improve and extend the road system. This order was inspired by strategic need, in order to enable the rapid intervention of military units against enemies (Meyer 1979). It was, in fact, during this period that the highlanders in northeastern Cambodia began political activities against the Sihanouk government (Rathie 2006), such as organising meetings and recruiting members, but these activities were very limited and were only carried out in some areas.

Education and Khmerisation

Sihanouk insisted on the use of education as a means for rapid Khmerisation of the local population, along with the regular presence of health care services (Meyer 1979), and by June 1957 education was seen as key to the government’s Khmerisation efforts. The idea, as quoted by Meyer (1979: 685-6), was to “Gather the Phnongs—make them feel the need to learn how to speak, read and write Khmer—teach them how to get dressed—teach them how to work.” Classic forms of ‘modernisation’ were expected to bring about the dramatic loss of cultural identity among the highlanders. The government wanted the highlanders to exchange their traditional dwellings for Khmer ones, their traditional clothing for Khmer attire, and their languages for Khmer. They expected them to convert from Animism to Buddhism.131

Creating Khmer-friendly places was seen as crucial to these efforts. People needed to be removed from Brao lands in the mountains and resettled in the Khmer lands in the lowlands (see Chapter 4). Khmer teachers from the lowlands were recruited to educate non-Khmer people living in these new spaces about Khmer language and culture. As reported by the US Library of Congress (2006: 2),

“The goals of this program were to educate the Khmer Loeu, to teach them Khmer, and eventually to assimilate them into the mainstream of Cambodian society. There was some effort at resettlement; in other cases, civil servants went out to live with individual Khmer Loeu groups to teach

131 According to Whitaker et al. (1973) some Khmer Leu were converted to Buddhism as a result of government-endorsed missionary work among them. However, most probably mixed Animism and Buddhism.
their members Khmer ways. Schools were provided for some Khmer Loeu communities, and in each large village a resident government representative disseminated information and encouraged the Khmer Loeu to learn the lowland Khmer way of life. Civil servants sent to work among the Khmer Loeu often viewed the assignment as a kind of punishment.”

The measures adopted for changing the Brao Umba and Kavet were more drastic. In 1959 a large number of ethnic Brao Umba people living in 15 communities north of the Sesan River in present-day Taveng district were forced to move down from the mountains to create a new two kilometre-long village along the north bank of the Sesan River, after being told to prepare to move in 1958. As part of the same programme, Brao villagers from Tanaich, Siang Sai and Hamawk were told to study in another school downstream along the Sesan River at the mouth of the Hamawk Stream in present-day Taveng Kroam commune. They were told to reorganise into linear villages. Children from Phayang and Ke Kuang villages came down to study there, even if their parents did not. The ethnic Kavet people from present-day Siem Pang district were forced into similar villages adjacent to the Sekong River. Putting it in spatial terms, Bourdier (2006) pointed out that the Sangkum government was trying to move Brao villages north of the Sesan River to the south, towards the ‘centre’. Certainly part of their motivation must have been to move the people from Lao influences along the border with Laos.

Apart from the establishment of schools and the strengthening of military posts, the government decided, based on prestige rather than practicalities, to spend large amounts of money to build expensive concrete government buildings in the provincial capitals of Mondolkiri and Ratanakiri provinces, a move criticised at the time by young Cambodian economists, and by Charles Meyer (1979), who complained about the heavy investment in building Buddhist temples in Lom Phat, Lebansiek and Veun Say.

The Khmer had little experience in the northeast, and the teachers sent there from the south did not easily integrate into the new environment; the diseases and evil spirits thought to be common in the region were a great concern to many.

132 On the north side, from west to east, were Pareu Tih, Bong, Pajong, Bang Geut Ke, Jarong Laik, Lieng Veny, Trabok and Gang Dak villages, and on the west side of the school, from east to west, were Vieng Chan, Phao Thi, Tampuan Reung, Savanbao, Phao Ke, and Bang Geut Thi (Ironsie & Baird 2003).
The schools and the associated resettled villages were both ill conceived and poorly planned, as there was little concern regarding how the people would feed themselves. Initially, there was forest near where people could do swidden agriculture near the schools, but within a couple of years people needed to move farther away to find suitable land for agriculture.

By 1964 all the schools north of the Sesan River were abandoned. The Brao were fed up with the Sangkum government’s policies, and began moving back into the mountains in the north and east. Many did not, however, return all the way to where they used to live, near the Lao border, as that was too far for them to move all their possessions in one year. Most went about half way. As one Kavet elder put it, “It was during this period that people began to enter the revolution in large numbers.” Sihanouk’s soldiers initially tried to follow the Kavet into the mountains, but they encountered large numbers of pungi sticks on the paths, which impeded their movement.

Khmer Immigration to the Northeast

During the late 1950s and 1960s, the Sangkum government promoted the ‘Khmerisation’ of the northeast through what it called “a broad civic action programme”, handing over responsibility for its implementation to the Forces Armées Royales Khmeres (FARK) (US Library of Congress 2006). This involved organising the migration of ethnic Khmer groups of families to the northeast, so as to colonise the territories of the highlands and ensure that these areas would continue to be firmly linked to Cambodia (Guérin 2003).

Khmer immigration into the region was especially promoted beginning in 1958, a decision that was apparently inspired by similar efforts to promote Vietnamese immigration to the highlands on the other side of the border, in Dak Lak and Kon Tum provinces (Meyer 1979; see, also, Hardy 2003). While many returned after becoming ill

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133 Philip Short (2004) is mistaken in believing that the original homes of many highlanders were situated adjacent to the Sesan River before they were moved into the ‘high mountains’ by the Khmer Rouge in the late 1960s for security reasons. He was apparently unaware that most had been moved from the mountains to near the Sesan River at the end of the 1950s.
and failing to find the conditions for settlement suitable, some continued to live in the northeast.

In addition, the army promoted what it called “military colonists”. This involved encouraging Khmer soldiers and officers who were about to retire to move to the northeast. They received three years of salary, a house on a 2,400 m² piece of land, and five hectares of good agriculture land and the means to exploit it. In this way—at great expense to the state—300 Khmer families were convinced to migrate into four villages in the Lebansiek area. While some of them were able to farm the land and even establish private rubber plantations, the military did little to promote a smallholder model of rubber production, such as had been developed in Malaysia or Thailand. As Meyer (1979: 687) put it, “[T]he military leaders...were immensely incompetent.”

The Sangkum government Khmer nationalist policies ‘followed the logic’ of the French administration that preceded it, except that the Khmer were favoured. Yet overall, Sihanouk’s plans fit well with the ‘civilising mission’ of the hinterlands that the French colonialists had promoted (see Chapter 5).

Reorganising Villages

Reorganising village spaces was critical, and Ruohomaki (2003: 80) has stated that, “In order to better control the population, it [the government] favored highland villages to be arranged in parallel lines along roads, according to typical lowland patterns.” One elder from Bang Geut village said, “We always had circular villages until the Sihanouk period.” Having linear villages was seen as both practical and symbolic. It provided easier access to outsiders into the village via the road and was supposed to be better suited for long-term habitation as well as make it easier for parcels of private lands to be established for perennial fruit tree planting. The linear shape symbolised openness to the outside, and a willingness to integrate into Cambodia.

The Sangkum government implemented other measures fundamentally designed to reorganise Brao space. For example, some of the Brao Tanap villages in western Ratanakiri province were coerced into resettling to areas where officials expected that the highlanders could be converted from being swidden cultivators to becoming lowland wet-

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134 Malaria was a serious problem in Ratanakiri (Whitaker et al. 1973).
rice farmers. A 1964 editorial in the review *Cambodge d'aujourd'hui* described swidden agriculture in the northeast as “wasteful agriculture” (quoted in Bourdier 2006: 176), a view that dominated much of Khmer society. Kantriang village in Labang 2 commune, Lom Phat district, for example, was one of the villages that the government forced to make a long village in 1959. Similarly, in 1961 Prang and Wawng villages were moved from Poy commune to the lowlands in Veun Say district to do lowland paddy agriculture. They were instructed to make a long village.

**The Khmer Rouge**

After independence in 1954, and the migration of many Cambodian Communists to Hanoi, since there were not any communist sanctuaries declared in Cambodia as in Laos, the Communist movement immediately following independence was very weak and suffered various crackdowns and setbacks at the hands of the Sihanouk government.

For example, in 1958 many revolutionaries were arrested after Penn Yuth and Siev Haeng, the former secretary of the Khmer People’s Revolutionary Party (KPRP), defected to the government and openly betrayed their former colleagues. Moy Cheum (Pateng village), Ya Janeeat (Rok village) and Ya Kala (Haleum village) were amongst the Brao arrested and imprisoned in Phnom Penh. They were not released until 1960. However, other Brao revolutionaries, including the Bun Mi, managed to remain at large in Veun Say.

By 1968, the KR launched its first military operations, initially without the support of the NVA, despite the US and Sihanouk finding it politically convenient to link the two. Soon, the development goals of the Sangkum government had to be abandoned, as security concerns became crucial. Violent conflict increased, driving most of the Brao population—except for those who had fled to Kong Mi in Attapeu—into the forests where they joined the ranks of the rapidly growing KR.

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135 His name is frequently incorrectly spelt as Moy Chheub (eg. Colm 1996; Rathie 2006).
136 His revolutionary name was Meil.
Rubber Plantations

Although the Khmerisation programme of the Sangkum government was already upsetting the ethnic minorities of the northeast, it was still decided, in the late 1950s, to establish a large commercial rubber plantation in Ratanakiri. The government was convinced of the desirability of applying classical methods of promoting western capitalist economic growth: the creation of large agro-industrial companies, the expropriation of the best land from the people, and the exploitation of local labour to develop the companies’ interests. Not surprisingly, these government efforts were to greatly help win support amongst the local population for the Communists.

In fact, the initial push for the expansion of large French-owned rubber plantations into Indochina began during the French period (Guérin 2008). The French thought that the soils along the Lao-Cambodia frontier were suitable for growing rubber (Rathie 2006), but as with other French dreams for northeastern Cambodia, it was not until Cambodian independence, and the new form of colonialism that came with it, that any important steps were taken to develop large rubber plantations in the northeast. French historian Alain Forest was paraphrased by Vachon (2006) as saying that Cambodia’s French heritage developed as much in the 1950s and 1960s when Sihanouk ruled the country as during the 90 years of French administration. In fact, this sort of mimicry of European colonialism frequently occurs within ‘postcolonial’ states (Gregory 2000).

An 8,000-hectare rubber concession was granted by the central government in Cambodia to the Preah Sihanouk State Rubber Plantation in Ratanakiri (Colm 1996). Most rubber planting, at a density of 625 trees per hectare, occurred between 1961 and 1967. 500 ha were planted in 1961, and by 1966 2,200 ha had been sowed, mainly near the military post at Lebansiek. The goal was to further expand to 3,700 ha by 1969 and to have the whole 8,000 ha planted by 1980. The plantation was state-owned, but many thought it was French owned, as a French company was hired by the Cambodian government to manage operations (Meyer 1979). The rubber plantation in Ratanakiri, along with those in central Cambodia, would become centres for mobilising opposition to the Sangkum government (Colm 1996; Chandler 1991).
Apart from the main plantation, mainly Khmer officials and senior military commanders established smaller rubber plantations. The ethnic Khmer Lom Phat-based governor of Ratanakiri at the time, Ong Nyot, had his own private 100-hectare rubber plantation.

Not surprisingly, the expropriation of large amounts of land by the state, government officials and settlers from the south displaced and greatly upset the land’s original occupants, the Brao to the west, and the Tampuon to the east. No compensation was given to the original owners of the land. They were simply forced to uproot themselves and move. The Brao were forced to the west and southwest.

The Brao Tanap villages directly affected by losing all of their land to the rubber plantation were Kanchaign, Tang Kap, Panteung, Chet, Taong and Tuh. Other villages, like Kantriang, were partially impacted. According to those who remember being relocated, the French got a truck from the rubber company and used it to move the people to the edges of the plantation, where they were dumped and expected to re-establish themselves, without any compensation. Those who resisted expropriation of their lands for the plantation or providing labour for the plantations faced military detachments sent to teach the people a lesson, by “plundering, raping and killing”, as Meyer (1979: 686) put it.

Apart from losing land there were other restrictions. If a highlander’s cow ate any rubber seedlings, the owner of the cow would be fined. The same happened if pigs and chickens caused damage. The people were upset with the plantations from the beginning, but most did not dare oppose the Cambodian military and the French-managed company.

One of the immediate problems that the development of rubber plantations faced in Ratanakiri was a lack of labour (Whitaker et al. 1973), as the state plantation alone required a continuous labour force of over 1,000 workers (Meyer 1979). In that the local highlanders were not initially interested in working on the plantations, and the government found it difficult to convince Khmer from other parts of the country to migrate to Ratanakiri, it was deemed necessary to force locals, including those who had been kicked off their land, to ‘participate’ in the development of rubber. In other words, a

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137 This village split in two, Tuh Peung (Tuh Leu) and Tuh Kandrom (Tuh Kroam). Jacqueline Matras did all her research on the Brao in the latter (Matras-Troubetzkoy 1983).
form of corvée labour was reinstated with the highlanders having to spend time working on the plantations whether they wanted to or not. They were paid for their labour, but declining to participate was not presented as an option. According to a Kavet elder who, as a young man, twice traveled from north of the Sesan River south to work on the plantations, the district government of Veun Say would send representatives to the villages to demand that all able-bodied men rotate as labourers on the rubber plantations. Those who refused were threatened with being fined a pig and a jar of rice beer. Therefore, groups of 20-30 Kavet would travel to the rubber plantations, where they would work for between ten days to over a month. A Kreung elder said people from Kok Poy village, O Chum district had to work for 15-day periods. “Men were paid one 15 ‘lien’ a day for their toil, while women got ten ‘lien’ for a day of work,” he said.

For some, the plantations became a source of employment, especially in the rainy season when villagers needed income to buy rice (Mallow 2002), but for most the domineering style of the Khmer managers at the rubber plantations made the highlanders bitter, and open to talk of revolution. The importance of the labour issue in mobilising anti-government sentiments has sometimes been underestimated in comparison to the land issue, but it was in fact critical for many highlanders. As one Kavet put it, “If we had not been forced to work on the rubber plantations, there would not have been a revolution. It might have happened eventually, but it would have taken much longer to begin. We did not lose any land, but we were still upset.”

Economically, there were other problems. Rather than encouraging the local population to cultivate food to supply the work force of the plantation, the managers continued to be almost totally dependent on supplies from Phnom Penh, over 550 km away. This was not economical, as transport costs were high (Meyer 1979).

**Resistance against Rubber Begins**

The people from the Brao Tanap village of Kanchaign, in present-day Labang 2 commune, Lom Phat district (Map 2.2), were amongst the first in the vicinity of the rubber plantations to rebel. Kanchaign was at the heart of the main rubber concession, and was created by consolidating what were six smaller villages before 1954. All the people at the new location were expected to act as cheap labour for the company. This
attempt to capitalise both on the land and the labour of the highlanders backfired terribly for the Sangkum government, who overestimated their power and underestimated the independent spirit of the highlanders. By 1962 some Brao had joined the communists in the forests. In 1964 there were clashes between Khmer settlers and highlanders in Ratanakiri, spurring more highlanders to join the underground. This was followed, in 1966, with Brao, Kreung and Tampuon villagers clashing with local authorities over land expropriation for the rubber plantation (Colm 2008). Some Tampuon and Brao villagers started pulling out rubber seedlings at night when the managers were asleep.

**Resistance Grows**

Although resistance was initially relatively passive, outside of a few instances, this changed over time, especially after the military responded viciously to early resistance. Debré (1976) reported that the Brao were in revolt in Ratanakiri in January 1968 when he visited the province. He mentioned that many of the Cambodian soldiers sent to the northeast were Khmer Kroam from Vietnam, who were generally very negative about the highlanders, as they spoke different languages, and were seen as being different from the Khmer. They were also negative towards the highlanders’ spatial organisation, including the frequent movement of villages and the ‘burning of their spaces’ (swidden fields). They tended to be lumped with the hated Vietnamese, thus causing relations to rapidly deteriorate.

As conflict escalated, the French plantation manager, Bonzon (known by the Brao as ‘Mong Song’) was forced to leave due to security concerns in April 1968. A Khmer replaced him, but by March 1970 the rubber company had to abandon the plantation entirely, just days before the Lon Nol government conceded the northeast to the communists (see below). Once the plantation owners were gone, villagers cut some areas of plantation down, in order to reclaim their land. But, before long the Cambodian Communists prohibited any more rubber trees from being destroyed (Meyer 1979).

**Armed Revolt Begins in the Northeast**

The KR launched its first military operations in the northeast at the end of March 1968. As Pol Pot later wrote,
"In the Northeast, we rose up on 30 March 1968. Only four or five guns were seized from the enemy. Coupled with the four or five guns we had for the protection of our Central Committee headquarters, we were armed with less than ten guns with which to face the enemy in the Northeast" (quoted in Heder 1979: 13).

The military hit back hard, resulting in large numbers of killings and arrests (Colm 1996). Lon Nol’s soldiers gained a terrible reputation for bad behaviour, including raping young women and confiscating livestock and other items from villagers (Zweers & Sok 2002).

In early 1968 200 ethnic Kreung launched a demonstration in Ratanakiri after soldiers burned down several houses in their village in present-day O Cham district. This resulted in government soldiers killing a number of villagers in retaliation (Colm 2008).

Sihanouk himself argued that the Sangkum regime must be “pitiless” in dealing with its enemies (Heder 1979). In May he announced at Stung Treng that he had personally ordered several dozen highlanders shot without trial, bringing to about 200 the number who had been executed (Short 2004; Colm 1996). “I do not care if I am sent to hell”, he stated defiantly, “I will submit the relevant documents to the Devil himself” (Short 2004: 176). But if anything, these harsh actions helped mobilise highlander support for the rebels, and by August Sihanouk acknowledged that the movement had grown and covered half of Ratanakiri and Mondolkiri provinces (Colm 1996).

Kreung elders from Dong Krapu village explained how their community became engulfed in the revolution. They had no intention of rebelling in 1968, and since the deputy commune chief lived in the village, communist propaganda had not yet reached them. However, things suddenly changed when Lon Nol soldiers showed up and the leader of the group used a pistol to unexpectedly shoot the welcoming deputy commune chief, Ya Jrim, in the face, killing him instantly. Ya Jrim had apparently been incorrectly accused of being a communist sympathiser. After he was dead, the soldiers went on a rampage. They shot at the communal house where most of the villagers had gathered, killing 11 people in total. “Blood was flowing like water under the rong,” I was told. The Lon Nol soldiers then massacred all the chickens, pigs and buffaloes they could find, and burned down all the houses in the village, forcing those who survived to flee to the forest. One elder said, “We had to flee, and only the Communists were there to help us. So we joined them.”
Although the Brao used pungi sticks and crossbows with poison arrows in March 1968, by September they had more guns (Debré 1976). Still, the Cambodian Communists had few arms, as the NVA continued to refuse to provide them with direct military support, although when NVA soldiers were short of food, they sometimes traded guns and ammunition for rice and produce, but on a small scale (Rathie 2006). As resistance grew, so did the response by the government, and by late 1968 the Cambodian airforce was dropping napalm on Brao villages believed to be in revolt (Pomonti & Thion 1971).

**US Bombing in Cambodia Escalates**

In March 1969, the new American President, Richard Nixon, and his National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger, replaced the limited attacks across Cambodia’s borders with sustained ones, including B-52 ‘carpet bombing’ of the northeast. Although Sihanouk protested a bit, he tacitly supported the efforts to drive the Vietnamese from Cambodia. In addition, Sihanouk wanted to improve relations with the USA, which he was able to do by mid-1969, when the US recognised Cambodia’s borders and re-established diplomatic relations with Cambodia (Heder 1979).

Between March 1969 and May 1970 no fewer than 3,630 B-52 bombing raids were flown over Cambodia. To reduce their vulnerability to these aerial attacks, the NVA moved their forces further into Cambodia, and the B-52s followed, leading to a concomitant increase in civilian casualties. B-52 carpet bombing, defoliants and napalm dropped from planes destroyed large areas of forests in the east (Bourdier 2006), and defoliation due to chemical drops by the USAF negatively affected crops (Whitaker et al. 1973). The US administration played down the impact of the bombings, even to the extent of falsifying military records (Blum 1986). Yet despite government efforts to crush the rebels, its position became increasingly tenuous.

**Lon Nol Takes Control, Sihanouk Goes into Exile**

The political orientation of Cambodia changed drastically on March 18, 1970 when Lon Nol and Sirik Matak orchestrated a *coup d'état* against Sihanouk when the prince turned politician was out of the country in Moscow. As soon as Lon Nol took
control, Cambodia abandoned being neutralist and began fully supporting the political and military agenda of the US and their South Vietnamese allies.

Meanwhile, Sihanouk based himself in China, where he lent his popular support to elements in Cambodia opposed to Lon Nol. The Front Uni National du Kampuchéa (FUNK) was established in Beijing on March 23, 1970.\textsuperscript{138} It aligned forces loyal to Sihanouk, communists aligned with Vietnam, hard-line KR, and intellectuals. However, the KR retained real control inside Cambodia, including the key portfolios in the Gouvernement Royal d'Union Nationale du Kampuchéa (GRUNK)—such as Defense, Interior and Information—although Sihanouk’s strong image among the local population in some parts of the country was used for recruiting (Rathie 2006).

**The Evacuation of the FANK from the Northeast**

In early 1970, Lon Nol’s forces became increasingly embattled in Ratanakiri. The highlanders turned the roads built to facilitate transportation against their enemies. One Kreung elder explained how groups of ten or so rebels were organised to ambush Lon Nol’s soldiers. These groups were poorly armed, with usually just one rifle for a whole group. The rest carried traditional hunting crossbows. When a jeep carrying soldiers would travel along the road between Lebansiek and Veun Say, the man with the gun would use it to shoot out the tire of the vehicle. Then, when the vehicle was forced to stop, and soldiers came out from the back, the others would be ready to fire their deadly crossbows, while concealed in the surrounding forest. In one case, a group of 30 Kreung attacked a group of about 50 government soldiers. About 15 Lon Nol soldiers were killed with crossbow arrows. One of the scariest things for the Khmer soldiers was not being able to see their enemy or hear where the crossbow bolts were being fired.

In other cases, pits were dug in roads at night, and camouflaged with banana leaves on top. When trucks or jeeps came along the next day, they would fall into the pits and then be attacked by an onslaught of crossbow-wielding highlanders. Many soldiers died or were injured in these attacks. Highlanders rarely died in these attacks, and before long most of the roads in Ratanakiri had been cut off by rebel activities.

\textsuperscript{138} This was followed, on May 5, by the establishment of the GRUNK, with Sihanouk as head of state and Penn Nouth as Prime Minister.
By early 1970 the KR had gained considerable strength, especially in the northeast, and their ranks had grown to 4,000 regular soldiers and 50,000 local militia nationwide. They formed the Revolutionary Army of Kampuchea (RAK) to increase their military power, and clashes with government forces continued in the northeast, causing the security situation to deteriorate for the Forces Armées Nationales Khmeres (FANK), which replaced FARK after the March coup d'état (Sutsakhan 1978). This prompted US advisors to recommend that Lon Nol withdraw all 9,000 government soldiers, their dependents, and some villagers from Ratanakiri (Whitaker et al. 1973).

At the end of March 1970, the two infantry battalions and one engineer battalion of FANK troops were withdrawn from Ratanakiri by road. However, the NVA launched military attacks on the FANK on March 29, shocking Lon Nol's forces and isolating large concentrations of troops in Ratanakiri and Kratie. Plans were made with US Military Assistance Command Vietnam (MACV), and the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) to evacuate the remaining FANK troops, civil authorities and their families from the northeast. The US took the lead in organising the operation (Sutsakhan 1978), called Binh Tay 4 (US Library of Congress 2006).

Thus, in April 1970 all the commune chiefs, village headmen and others who feared the Communists and wanted to leave Ratanakiri were directed to gather in Bokeo. Apart from evacuating FANK soldiers and Khmer officials and their families, a large number of highlanders, including many Brao Tanap and Kreung, and others who had been digging for gems in Bokeo, were evacuated. Six large US transport planes, probably C-123 Providers, were used to ferry a large number of people to Pleiku over a three-day period. Whitaker et al. (1973) reported that 5,000 Khmer troops, their dependents and civilians were evacuated to Vietnam during this operation.

A Kreung elder from Kok Poy village said that no advance warnings of the evacuation were provided, and so mainly only those living relatively close to Bokeo were able to leave. The elder told me that he was actually on the stairs to go up into one of the planes, but decided not to go, as his wife and children had not arrived in time, and he did not want to go alone.

The FANK evacuation from Ratanakiri and the rest of the northeast was critical for providing the KR with a more secure base area for training and recruiting (Colm
The KR leader Koy Thuan (quoted by Colm 2008: 4) emphasised that, “The geography of the Northeast Zone is the big foundation; the big asset for us. It has a lot of land—comprising nearly one-fourth of the country—and there are mountains, flood plains, and water flowing everywhere.” However, FANK’s abandonment of the region made it possible for the USAF to bomb the area freely without concern about any potential impacts on ‘friendlies’. KR bases were moved around in order to avoid being targeted, but it was still a difficult time. The Communists controlled the land, but they did not control the air. While few highlanders allied with the KR died as a direct result of being bombed, the fear and trauma of always having to hide from the bombs had a huge effect on people’s lives. Many had to live in the forest. Highlanders believe that the bombing caused serious forest and wildlife destruction (Zweers & Sok 2002).

Bombing of northeastern Cambodia, especially Brao areas near the Vietnamese border, continued on a daily basis from 1970 to 1973 (Colm 1996; Shawcross 1979; Conboy & Bowra 1989), forcing many people to hide in the forests, where they lived with the rebels. It was during this period that the Brao Ka-nying living in the Dragon’s Tail fled north to Laos, where the bombing was less intense. Once again, when in trouble in Cambodia, the Brao fled to Laos.

Although daily bombing of Cambodia by the USAF began in 1970, it was not acknowledged as taking place by the US government. Richard Nixon, the US President, maintained that the areas were unpopulated and that only Communist troops—legitimate targets—were there. When Kissenger was confirmed as Secretary of State in 1973, he declared that, “It was not a bombing of Cambodia, but it was a bombing of North Vietnamese in Cambodia” (quoted in Shawcross 1979: 28). He was either not aware of—or more likely found it convenient to ignore—the Brao civilians that were living near the NVA bases, not only soldiers but the elderly, women and children. One Kreung man from ‘Nchuay village, situated along the Sesan River in present-day Taveng district, said, “During the bombing period we couldn’t live in our villages. The villages were empty. We couldn’t do swidden agriculture or live in our houses. We had to hide. We were running around like monkeys. We didn’t even have any clothes to wear. Some forest areas were totally leveled. There was no forest. Everything changed.”
In 1972, as revolutionary forces gained increasing support, large numbers of ‘Khmer Hanoi’, the Cambodian Communists who had left to study in Hanoi in 1954, returned to Cambodia. Others like Bou Thang and Soeuy Keo had, however, already returned in the late 1960s. The Khmer Hanoi all returned via the Ho Chi Minh and Sihanouk Trails. The group consisted of about 3,000 people, including dependents. They walked from Hanoi and eventually arrived at Lao Grai Stream, north of Veun Say town, an area inhabited by the Kavet. The group stayed there for two months. The Kavet had large amounts of rice stocks in the mountains at this time, with most households having two or three barns of rice. They were able to feed such a large group of people for two months and still have enough rice to meet their own needs. However, even the Kavet’s large rice stores were not enough to feed such a large group indefinitely, and so it was decided to send the Khmer Hanoi to various locations. Most were put into vulnerable front line positions, and died in combat soon after arriving. Only a few were put into senior positions, and most of those would be purged and killed over the coming years.

In January 1973, when the Paris Peace Agreements that were supposed to end the war in Vietnam and Laos were signed, the KR walked out of the talks despite Vietnamese recommendations to the contrary. The result was increased US bombing of Cambodia beginning in February (Kiernan & Bou 1982). The campaign finally ended on August 15, 1973, after which time the US only sanctioned military aid and unarmed reconnaissance flights over Cambodia, although many in Cambodia had no idea why the US stopped its air campaign. Reconnaissance flights ended in October (Colm 1996). Some believe that the bombing in Cambodia actually strengthened the KR and convinced Cambodians to join the movement (McFadden & Lor 2005).

When the bombing finally stopped, most of the Brao and other highlanders in the northeast were happy. But, in fact, they were about to face an even greater threat—a threat from within.

The Beginnings of Radical Change

In the 1960s, and even the beginning of the 1970s, the KR in Ratanakiri province were not nearly as dogmatic as they would become (Colm 1996). Although the KR had been encouraging the end of religion since 1968-9, in 1971 they stepped up their ban on
religious practices—including Animism—and began promoting sedentary wet-rice agriculture in the northeast (Rathie 2006). Many highlanders had, in fact, already been put to work expanding paddy fields and building irrigation projects since 1971 and 1972 (Colm 1996). But in 1973 the KR became more adamant and determined. Markets were closed to stop private commerce. The KR stepped up their ban on highland religious practices, including confiscating cows, elephants, gongs and beer jars (Rathie 2006; Colm 1996; 2008). Gongs, for example, were taken to make bullets, material possessions were prohibited, and drinking jar rice beer was seen as wasteful. People were forced to enter spirit forests where people were previously prohibited by taboos from going, and to eat foods that were previously taboo (Colm 2008; Zweers & Sok 2002). Ethnic Lao revolutionaries in Ratanakiri remember changing from using Lao as the main language of communication to Khmer.

But in early 1973 the KR leadership scaled up their plans for socially and spatially reorganising the country. Ironically, many of their ideas were similar to those previously advocated by Sihanouk, but they were intertwined with radical Maoist views. Directives from the Standing Committee of the Central Committee (Angkor Leu) started becoming more and more draconian, and by the second half of the year the KR began fully implementing their agenda. A new form of colonial domination was in place, one that was different from the early KR period. By then, they were in undisputed control of the northeast.

During the same year the KR began physically moving people in Brao areas to places deemed appropriate for lowland rice paddy development. The Brao Tanap village of Kantriang was moved into the lowlands just south of the Plateau. They were located along both sides of a newly built dirt road, and the people were taught how to grow wet-rice paddy in the lowlands close-by. Villagers were encouraged to grow cassava in the hills to the north. People began to be moved around more frequently. Then, in 1974-5 small-scale cooperative agriculture began being established (Colm 2008).

Those who opposed the new policies were accused as being “Yuan” (a pejorative for Vietnamese), members of the CIA, or both, and were executed in the forest. A climate of fear rapidly developed (Colm 1996). All in all, the KR’s attempts at establishing
hegemony over the Brao during this period represented a new form of colonial domination, with its own social and spatial implications.

**Brao Discontent with the Khmer Rouge Grows**

As KR efforts to radically re-make Cambodia intensified, many Brao began questioning the wisdom of the Central Committee, and various forms of resistance emerged. For example, Khamteuang—the Brao Umba deputy chief of Taveng Kroam commune in the early 1970s—explained to me how he deliberately failed to implement certain decrees. Orders like “Don’t eat until you are full”, were changed to “Eat until you are full.” He also received orders to stop religious practices, but he ignored them. They would eat communally when officials from the district or province were there, but once they left the Brao returned to eating on a family basis. They occupied a particular place of resistance, a place that they controlled most of the time, a place constituted by the fact that everyone there could be trusted; they were all Brao.

KR hatred for anyone connected with Vietnam increased dramatically. Many Brao had supported Vietnamese Communists against the French during the First Indochina War, and had already spent considerable periods with Vietnamese Communists. Thus, many Brao perceived to be pro-Vietnamese became targets for KR purges and the executions.

The first Brao to flee to Vietnam from Ratanakiri were from the Brao Umba village of Bong, which was located in Trabok commune, Veun Say district, which is in present-day Taveng Leu commune, Taveng district (Map 2.2). A group of 79 Brao fled to Vietnam in 1973 after the village’s leader, Siang Noi, refused to arrest his brother, who had committed a social transgression unacceptable to the KR. The Brao were continuing their long history of maintaining control over their own social and spatial organisation, and as before the border allowed them the required space to do that.

Later in 1973 many other Brao Umba in Taveng were ready to flee to Laos and Vietnam. However, the Vietnamese did not believe that the KR were so negative about the Vietnamese. Therefore, they initially denied permission for the Brao to cross into

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139 Siang Noi’s younger brother had an affair with a woman even though he was already married. This kind of behaviour was not tolerated, and the KR was preparing to arrest/kill him.
Vietnam. However, the Vietnamese sent a spy back with Brao people to observe the situation, and later returned with proof of what was happening.

Over the next year, from May 1974 to early 1975, a series of events unfolded that eventually led the Brao leaders from Taveng, Bun Mi and Khun to escape up the Sesan River from Veun Say. On the way, they told the leaders of all the villages along the Sesan River in Veun Say to prepare to flee to Laos in three days. The Tampuon village of Kachoan prepared in time, but the other villages in present-day Veun Say were too slow. But virtually all the people from Taveng set out for the Vietnamese border as planned. The civilians went first, and the soldiers protecting them followed. By this time Khun and Bun Mi had received confirmation from the Vietnamese that they understood the seriousness of the situation, and were willing to accept the group from Cambodia as refugees. KR troops were in hot pursuit of the main group, but they were unable to stop the 3,000 people from fleeing.

The group arrived at the Vietnamese border at ‘Ya Geum’, just inside Vietnam in Ya Pawk commune, Dak Klang district, Galai-Kon Tum province. There, Vietnamese officials greeted them. The group agreed that half should go to Laos, led by Khun and Khamteuang, while Bun Mi would stay with the other half in Vietnam. The group of 1,500 people arrived at the Lao border in April 1975. The people were initially divided up into groups of ten families, each of which was assigned to a village where they would temporarily stay, and which would be responsible for their welfare.

Later, in May 1975, Moy Cheum, who had not prepared in time for the main group, led the Brao from Pateng, Potang, Lang Ao, Hamawk and Siang Sai villages directly to the Lao border. These Brao were initially divided into groups of ten families per host Lao village, but by their second year in Attapeu they were allowed to establish their own fully Brao village, called Don Khen, near the Xexou River.

Others would arrive later, including some Kavet from Siem Pang, and in total well over 5,000 people ended up fleeing for Vietnam and Laos in 1975. Most remained in Laos and Vietnam until 1983. However, at the end of 1978 some returned with the

\[140\] Phao, Bang Geut, Soin, Ke Kuang Tih, Lieng Veny, Viengchan and Jarong Laik villages were the Brao village that stayed in Laos.

\[141\] Hamawk, Siang Sai, Bong, Trabok, ‘Nchuay, Taveng, Pleu Thom, and Pleu Toich were the Brao villages that stayed in Vietnam. The Tampuon village of Kachoan also stayed there.
invading Vietnamese. According to the UNHCR, 10,400 Cambodians fled to Laos as refugees in 1975 (Kiljunen 1984). Although some ethnic Lao and Khmer people left, most were Brao.

Those Who Remained—the Beginning of a New Era

Phnom Penh fell to the KR in April 1975, and Pol Pot took control of all of the newly declared Democratic Kampuchea. The calendar was changed; it was year zero—the beginning of a new era of social and spatial change, a new intensified form of colonial domination.

Plans were made for the evacuation of towns, including Phnom Penh, the suppression of money, and the severing of relationships with the Vietnamese. But not everyone in the higher echelons of the Party agreed with Pol Pot’s vision, and there was lively debate. Ney Sarann—known as ‘Ya’ to most, including the Brao—was one of those in favour of a more moderate policy. He was in charge of the Northeast Zone, and was generally more moderate than other KR leaders (Rathie 2006; Colm 1996). Yet, the leadership of Democratic Kampuchea was clearly ready to move ahead with radical change, as they had control over most of the country.

The highlanders—due to their designation as ‘base people’ (neak moulethan) or ‘full rights people’ (neak penh sith)—were granted some measure of trust and were subject to less extreme treatment than those in other classes (Colm 2008). Pol Pot suggested that people living near the country’s frontier with Laos should be relocated to the interior. The KR began to try to encourage the Brao and other highlanders to use their own languages as little as possible (see, also Mallow 2002). For example, a Kavet man told me that during meetings in the cooperative where he lived in Stung Treng, Khmer had to be used, although Brao could still be used in houses.

Many Kavet gained leadership positions in the KR, and large numbers of people were killed at cooperatives where the Kavet were in charge, such as O Ranong in Siem Pang. The Kavet were seen as straight and honest, able to unquestioningly follow tough orders, and were considered “fierce.” Other highlanders were also entrusted with leadership positions in highland areas, especially the Jarai who became the bodyguards of
Pol Pot and were feared. However, Khmer people dominated the top positions, even if the highlanders were generally more trusted than the Khmer (Colm 1996; 2008).

The KR became increasingly strict about banning religious practices of all kinds. Ceremonial jars and gongs were confiscated with even more determination than before. Much like the Sangkum government, the KR wanted to Khmerise the people. For example, they banned highlander clothing, such as colourful decorations on their clothes, and highlander jewelry, including necklaces and wrist and ankle bracelets (Colm 1996). They also pushed assimilation, but with more determination than the Sangkum government had ever demonstrated. They rejected highlander taboos. For example, in 1974 they forced a group of Kavet to climb the sacred mountain of Haling–Halang, a place where hunting and collecting forest products is prohibited or greatly restricted by custom, and where the spirits only tolerate Brao language being spoken. The Kavet in the group told the Khmer not to talk, and burned candles and chanted to appease the powerful mountain spirits.

The KR dismantled and restructured the spatial organisation of the land. In order to give Angkar (the name given to the Party of the KR) at the top as much power and control as possible, regional and zone commands were emphasised. For example, in early 1976 Kratie, Mondolkiri, Ratanakiri and Stung Treng were combined in a new Northeastern Zone. The KR also changed the names of administrative areas. For example, Veun Say was called 55 Kaw, Kok Lak became known as 55 Khaw, while Taveng was called 55 Ko. Much emphasis was put on centralised planning coming from the highest levels of Angkar. Rice production was stressed, although projections were much too high and unrealistic (Rathie 2006).

By 1975-6 full-scale cooperatives were enforced in Brao areas, each with about 1,000 people (Colm 1996; 2008). All were forced to move to one. One of those was in a lowland paddy field area north of the Sesan River and upriver from the mouth of the Trabok Stream. Some Kreung were sent to cooperatives in Kon Mum district. Another was at the ethnic Lao village of Srekor (Na kor in Lao), on the southern banks of the

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142 However, this was not always the case. In ‘Gumroo’ cooperative in present-day O Chum, there were apparently about 600 people.143 Martin Rathie, pers. comm. 2006.
Sesan River in Stung Treng province, which was made the regional centre, or the *Phum Phia* in Khmer, of the KR (Map 6.3).

Although there were fewer long-distance population movements than in other parts of the country, and most cooperatives consisted of people from the same or similar ethnic groups, spatial change was still critical. For example, these cooperatives were divided into groups of 30 people, called *Kong*. Groups of youth 15 years old or more were organised into mobile work brigades, or ‘*Kong chalae*’, which traveled around to work on special projects like large-scale forest clearance and dam building. Those 11 years and up were organised as ‘*Kong koma*’ (Colm 2008).

Most people had to give up swidden agriculture in order to concentrate on lowland wet-rice cultivation. People had to give up all private property, and were left with just a bowl, a spoon and minimal clothing. Rice rations were reduced substantially, with each person getting approximately 62 grams of rice per day, as compared to 250
grams per day between 1973-5, and over twice that amount before the war began (Colm 2008). There were no specified rations prior to 1973.

In that the KR wanted to wipe the slate clean, and rebuild from the bottom up, they were interested in maintaining total control over the lives of all the people in Cambodia. Thus, the KR’s strategy had important spatial dimensions, including intensively reorganising social space in order to achieve drastic social change.

In August 1976 the KR unveiled a four-year plan, which included ambitious objectives for rice production in the Northeast Zone. Double rice cropping was an important part of the plan to increase production, and large numbers of irrigation projects were developed, using the labour of those in the cooperatives. Colm (1996) reported that in Ratanakiri province about 60 irrigation projects were constructed during the KR period. Some worked well, others never functioned properly. Some were designed to take advantage of hilly terrain, but most were poorly conceived. By the time the Vietnamese invaded, about 7,000 ha of lowland paddy was under cultivation in Ratanakiri.

Indicative of the total social and spatial control that the KR had over the general population, in 1978 the KR were eager to rapidly increase the population of Cambodia so as to have two million soldiers to fight against the Vietnamese. To boost the birth rate, mass weddings were not only organised, but newlywed cadres were required to consummate their marriages in long wooden ‘love homes’. As Sihanouk wrote about the matter in a letter written in 2006, the couples were ordered to “make love like industrial machines”. In one case in Ratanakiri province couples were given three to seven days to make love (Thet & Kinetz 2006: 16).

**Vietnam Loses Patience with the KR**

By 1978, the Vietnam Communist Party (VCP) had lost patience with the KR, which had become increasingly belligerent, including raiding ethnic Kinh villages in Vietnam near the border with Cambodia and killing as many inhabitants as possible. In July, Laos joined Vietnam in criticising China for its policy of supporting the KR in Cambodia (Rathie 2006).

According to Brao informants now living in Ratanakiri, the Vietnamese began training Brao refugees to fight against the KR on July 7, 1976, much earlier than is
generally recognised. Initially only Brao people located in Ya Pawk commune, Vietnam, were trained. In early 1978, however, the Vietnamese sent Bun Mi to Laos to try to convince Brao Cambodian refugees to join them. The GoL agreed to these efforts at the highest levels, but Bun Mi was initially only able to attract a small number of volunteers. Therefore, Soeuy Keo led a second trip to Laos later that year, and was much more successful in attracting the Brao to Ya Pawk. These refugees, as well as Khmer refugees to the south, were organised together into the Khmer National United Front for National Salvation (FUNSK).

Vietnamese propaganda was stepped up, and in April 1978 Radio Hanoi began broadcasting in Khmer, encouraging the Cambodian people to rise up against the KR (Rathie 2006), and in May the Vietnamese launched their heaviest assaults against the KR to date, advancing ten kilometres along Route 78 inside Ratanakiri province before being pushed back (Colm 1996).

Tensions declined over the rainy season, but on December 23 the KR launched a number of attacks into Tay Ninh province, Vietnam. The Vietnamese responded swiftly, decimating three Cambodian regiments (Rathie 2006). This provided the justification for invading Cambodia, and on December 25 the full-scale Vietnamese assault began (Chanda 1986).

The Vietnamese attacked the KR in the northeast together with mainly Brao FUNSK soldiers. Most of the Vietnamese invaded from Vietnam, but some entered from Laos. FUNSK forces included 1,800 highlanders, including a few ethnic Lao Cambodian refugees in Vietnam as well as over 500 more mainly Cambodian Brao who had been refugees in Laos. Three divisions were created, even though there were not enough soldiers to fill them. Kham Chan, a Brao from Trabok, headed the first, and two other non-Brao highlanders, Bou Thang (later to become Defense Minister, presently National Assembly Representative for Ratanakiri) and Soeuy Keo (presently a senator in Phnom Penh) headed up the others. They joined with others from FUNSK, including Heng Samrin, Chea Sim and Hun Sen (see, also, Joint Task Force 1994a & c). Rathie (2006) claimed that there were 20-30,000 FUNSK troops in total, along with 100,000 Vietnamese troops, but it seems likely that there were actually fewer FUNSK soldiers.
Clearly, the Vietnamese military was responsible for defeating the KR, and forcing them to flee to the Thai border to try to regroup. In fact, the Vietnamese were so concerned about ensuring the survival of their Brao comrades that apparently ten Vietnamese soldiers were assigned to protect each Brao invader. By January 3, 1979, Lom Phat and Stung Treng had fallen, and by January 7 the Vietnamese had full control of Phnom Penh (Chanda 1986; Rathie 2006).

In 1979, the KR military commander in Veun Say forced mainly Kavet to the north to Viel Thom (Treng Tih in Brao), in present-day Virachey National Park (see Chapter 8). They then continued up to Laos. Many of the old and weak died along the way, and those who could not go quickly enough were killed. After hiding out in the forest they eventually got to the Mekong River in Khong district, Champasak province, in September 1979. They tried to cross the Mekong River back into Preah Vihear province in Cambodia. It is unclear how many attempted to cross the fast-flowing waters, but one source told me that there were originally 3,000 in the group, of which hundreds died. The survivors continued on to KR camps in the Dangrek Mountains along the Thai border (Colm 1996).

Land mines on the Thai side of the border took their toll, as did hunger and disease. A Brao man told me that fewer than 100 actually made it across the Mekong and on to Ubon alive. Another Brao said that 30-40 Kavet died trying to swim across the Sekong River in Cambodia at night. Others told me that they drowned; some said that the KR on the Cambodian side of the river fired on the Kavet, killing many.

One ethnic Lun man from Siem Pang told me that after the Vietnamese invaded, hundreds of Brao from Lun Vang, Baw Khe, Ta-ngao, Tranuel and other villages in Siem Pang traveled up to Laos, after initially crossing the Mekong River to try to reach Kompong Thom province. He said that they then traveled on to Kampong Sralao (Tha Peuay in Lao), trying to make it to Thailand, but could not go further so they returned to Parakhan village, still on the Cambodian side of the border. They had no food, and so after five days they decided to cross the Mekong River to Laos. First they went to Long Island, then to Khong Island and finally to Khinak, Champasak province. Nobody drowned. However, the Lao authorities would not let them stay, fearing that the KR
would attack them if they did. After a month, 20 trucks showed up and resettled them in Attapeu, where they stayed for eight years.

Although the KR had lost power, and the damage to Brao culture as a result of the draconian policies of the KR was severe and in some cases irreversible, the Brao and other highlanders were generally treated less harshly than people in other parts of the country (Colm 2008). Fewer people were executed than in other regions (Colm 1996), but even so, about 13,000 people, or nine percent of the estimated population in 1977, perished from all causes in the Northeast Zone during the KR period, including illnesses, starvation and malnutrition, and execution (Colm 2008).

**People’s Republic of Kampuchea**

Once Vietnam and the FUNSK had firm control over most of the country, including Phnom Penh, they set up a new government for the People’s Republic of Kampuchea, mainly installing those who had been refugees during the latter-part of the KR period as the new leaders. This marked still another era of colonial domination of the Brao, although this time the Vietnamese were in charge and working through Brao local leaders, thus dampening their negative impact on the Brao. It was, in a sense, a sort of ‘indirect’ colonial rule.

There were 62 members of FUNSK at the time of the invasion of Cambodia, of which 18 were ethnic Brao. While ethnic Khmer took the highest profile positions, highlanders were given important positions as well. For example, the ethnic Tampuon, Bou Thang was made the Minister of Defense, and in 1981 Brao people were made governors and party secretaries in all the northeastern provinces, including Ratanakiri, Stung Treng, Mondolkiri, and Preah Vihear (US Library of Congress 2006). Although these Brao were not well educated, the Vietnamese and the Heng Samrin government—as it became known as after December 1981 when Heng Samrin became Party Secretary, replacing the Vietnam-trained Pen Sovann (Vickery 1984)—did not trust those who lived under KR rule, and so chose loyal Brao (mainly Umba) over those with administrative skills.

Despite a lot of propaganda against the Vietnamese, including many outrageous accusations, during this period, the government was relatively moderate, especially when
compared to the KR (Vickery 1984). In Brao areas, people were no longer forced to stop speaking their languages or doing Animist rituals, and were generally allowed to follow their traditional ways of life, including practising swidden agriculture (Mallow 2002; Ruohomaki 2003). It is not that such practices were necessarily encouraged, but the government was more interested in keeping the people happy and from joining the KR than anything else. Working through Brao leaders certainly helped. Some practices even became reinvigorated, but others never did, and in some cases Animist rituals were abandoned or reduced in importance and frequency (Mallow 2002). Ruohomaki (2003) suspects that the highlanders were mainly allowed to do what they wanted due to a lack of any coordinated policies toward them during this period. Furthermore, poor transportation links and continuing security problems resulted in Ratanakiri becoming largely cut off from lowland parts of Cambodia. However, the Heng Samrin government issued guns to highlanders to defend themselves against KR rebels, and this is believed to have resulted in considerable reductions in wildlife (Zweers & Sok 2002). Some highlanders continued doing some lowland wet-rice paddy agriculture, but most returned to doing swidden agriculture, either abandoning their wet rice fields or significantly reducing wet rice cultivation.

According to a 1984 resolution of the People’s Republic of Kampuchea’s National Cadres Conference entitled "Policy toward Ethnic Minorities," the minorities were considered an integral part of the Cambodian nation, and they were encouraged to participate in collectivisation. While more sensitive than previous governments, government policy was still aimed at transforming the highlanders into modern Khmer. The elimination of illiteracy was an important goal. However, minority languages were respected and each tribe was given the right to write, speak, and teach in its own language (US Library of Congress 2006). This new government represented a new form of colonialism, albeit a less draconian form, with its own particular ways of organising things, but often following models developed in Vietnam.

**Moving Back**

Once in control the Vietnamese directed the highlanders who had lived under the KR to return to their original villages, and by the end of 1979 most Kreung and Brao
Tanap peoples were in the general areas where they lived before the war. Villagers from Wawng Kroam village told me, “After 1979 people were allowed to go where they wanted. People did not have to stay in the lowlands and do lowland wet rice agriculture like they had to do before.”

However, for those who had lived north of the Sesan River, moving back to where they came from was not an option, as there were still serious security concerns due to the KR. They had to establish villages along the Sesan River in present-day Veun Say and Taveng districts (Map 6.4).

![Map 6.4. Northeast Cambodia, 1986](image)

While there was little pressure put on people to change their livelihoods or spatial organisation for ‘development’ purposes, security concerns did affect spatial organisation during this period, and people were frequently located adjacent to roads.

When the majority of Brao Umba and Kreung refugees from Laos and Vietnam returned to Ratanakiri in 1982 and 1983, they were initially unable to go to Taveng.
district, due to the continuing presence of groups of KR, many of who were Brao, north of the Sesan River. They had to settle near the provincial capital of Ban Lung until 1984-5. By 1986 Taveng district was established, but the people there were forced to live south of the Sesan River, again for security reasons. It was not until the mid 1990s, when the security situation north of the Sesan River in Taveng improved, that the Brao Umba originally from north of the Sesan River began to farm and live there again.

The situation was even more difficult for the Kavet, many of whom supported the KR right up to the late 1990s. In both Veun Say and Siem Pang some of the most notorious KR leaders were Kavet, and when the Vietnamese invaded in late 1978 most Kavet fled approaching Vietnamese troops. A large number ended up in the mountainous forests near the Lao border in the general vicinity of the Ratanakiri-Stung Treng borders, where they suffered greatly during the 1980s. Faced with frequent Vietnamese attacks, the Kavet were always on the run, unable to produce sufficient food to eat. Many died as a result of military conflict, or due to illnesses at least partially attributable to malnutrition, and in some cases even starvation. However, the KR leaders told the Kavet that the Vietnamese would kill them if they gave up, and so the Kavet naively continued to live a very difficult existence. However, in 1987 the situation was so bad that some finally decided to surrender, little by little. Over 1,000 Kavet gave up during the following months, with between 30-70 Kavet coming down with other Kavet who went to bring them down each time. Those who surrendered were relieved when the Vietnamese did not punish them.

As the Kavet surrendered, they were initially settled on the north side of the Sesan River, east of the mouth of the Heulay Stream. However, their swidden agricultural practices in such a small area soon depleted the forests near the Sesan River, and by the early 1990s the villages of Rok, Heulay, La Meuay and ‘Ntrak, were allowed to move a few kilometres north, on both sides of the stream.

**Organising Villages**

The Heng Samrin government continued to promote the idea of linear rather than circular villages, just as the Sangkum and KR governments had done before them. However, officials were less rigorous in their implementation of measures that might
upset the location population. However, when villages were located in certain places for security reasons, the Brao were encouraged to make long villages, which continued to be seen more as a symbol of modern development, but were easier for the government to monitor. For example, in 1980 people from the Kreung village of Kalai were told to settle in a linear village along both sides of the road between Ban Lung and Veun Say.

**Civil War**

During the Heng Samrin era, which continued until October 1991, security was generally poor as a result of the continuing civil war in which the Vietnamese and their Cambodian allies battled the armed forces of the Government of Democratic Kampuchea (CGDK), a loose coalition made up of the KR’s National Army of Democratic Kampuchea (NADK),$^{144}$ the Sihanouk-supported National Army of Sihanouk (ANS),$^{145}$ and Son Sann’s Khmer People’s National Liberation Front (KPNLF). The CGDK opposed Vietnam and the Vietnam-backed government in Phnom Penh.

Ironically, many of the frontline KR soldiers fighting against the government were highlanders, including some Brao, while the main frontline soldiers on the government side were often highlanders, again including many Brao. As in the past, the highlanders were considered to be good soldiers (see Chapter 5). Therefore, highlanders often ended up fighting highlanders on the front lines, while the Khmer took up the rear guard. Thus, many Brao were injured or died during the years of civil war, causing a lot of hardship, but many Brao also learned how to read and write in the army, and became more familiar with Khmer ways of doing things and the Khmer state as well. Many Brao on both sides of the conflict ended up fighting in various parts of the country, often giving them their first opportunities to travel in other parts of Cambodia and learn more about the country.

Involvement in the civil war as soldiers gave highlanders the chance to interact with people from other ethnic groups, be it highlanders, ethnic Lao or Khmer. For example, one Brao Umba man from Taveng told me that he learnt to speak Lao language during the time he was a government soldier. This affected their identities, and now many

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$^{144}$ Under the control of the Party of Democratic Kampuchea (PDK)
$^{145}$ Under the control of the *Front Uni National pour un Cambodge Indépendant, Neutre, Pacifique, et Coopératif* (FUNCINPEC).
Brao consider that one of their important ‘inherent’ skills is as soldiers. Few remember how they used to flee to the forest when the French went to Brao villages to recruit soldiers during the French colonial period (see Chapter 5).

Conclusions

In this chapter I have considered the main political, development and military events that affected the Brao in Laos and Cambodia during the turbulent period following the end of French colonialism in 1954.

Through examining the circumstances of the Brao in this chapter and the last one, it should be evident how closely linked the ideas professed during different periods of history have been, even when the players have espoused quite different political ideologies. As Ruohomaki (2003: 80) has pointed out, “The process of state penetration to the hinterland has always been about defining and controlling space and property rights over resources within that space.”

In both Laos and Cambodia, the so-called ‘postcolonial period’ was not really ‘postcolonial’, in the sense that it was a period following the end of colonialism. Instead, it can be more accurately referred to as the ‘post-French period’. It did indeed mark the end of a particular variety of colonialism promoted by France, but it marked the beginning of new periods of colonial domination, in which different powers tried to gain social and spatial control over the Brao. The French and Viet Minh conflict led to the 1954 Geneva Accords, but after that Vietnamese communists tried to dominate Brao areas, as did ethnic Lao and Khmer royalists and communists. Even the Americans introduced their own particular form of colonialism. The Brao often felt obliged to join one side of another, and thus they became increasingly engulfed in regional conflicts, but the efforts of the different powers were never completely successful in controlling the Brao.

It is now time to turn to the present period and the various forms of colonial domination that have come to characterise the circumstances among the Brao in Laos and Cambodia. Chapter 7 deals with Laos while Chapter 8 covers the situation in Cambodia.
CHAPTER 7
Development Today and the Brao in Laos

Introduction

By 1979, 14 percent of the population of Laos had fled the country, indicating the high level of dissatisfaction with the GoL. Kaysone Phomvihane, the Prime Minister, realised that things needed to change, and so during the same year he began to introduce various neoliberal economic reforms that would have important socio-spatial implications for the people of Laos, including the Brao. The government lifted the ban on private trade, adopted a more efficient price structure, increased wages, and ordered a dramatic 60 percent devaluation of the Lao currency, the kip. Crucially, collective agriculture was abandoned (Milloy & Payne 1997). Kaysone declared, “It is inappropriate, indeed stupid, for any party to implement a policy of forbidding the people to exchange goods or carry out trading. Such a policy is suicidal.”

These reforms were followed, in November 1986, with the adoption of a new policy called the ‘The New Economic Mechanism’, or ‘chintanakan mai’ in Lao. The GoL increasingly embraced an open door policy to foreign investment from non-Communist countries, especially after the collapse of the Soviet Union in the late 1980s. Laos experienced relative peace and stability beginning in the 1990s, especially in the south, where armed rebel activities ended in 1990 (Ruohomaki 2000). The places where Brao people live, it could be argued, have recently experienced the longest period of peace since at least the French period, or even the Lao and Siamese colonial periods.

Although still tightly controlled politically (Stuart-Fox 1996), Laos’ adoption of more trade and investor-friendly policies has led to what Lao people now call ‘samai phatthana’ or the ‘development era’, the focus of this chapter. With the on-again, off-again, guidance of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank (ADB), and various other international organisations and bilateral donors, the economic policies of the GoL have changed considerably in recent years. Not surprisingly, Vietnam and, more recently, China, are playing important roles in influencing these changes.

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Government attempts to use explicit spatial tools to bring about social change have been important, and have been frequently intertwined with development efforts funded by international aid. Despite espousing differing political ideologies, it is ironic that many of the GoL's present ideas about reorganising the Brao are similar to those of French administrators from the beginning of the 20th century, like Antonin Baudenne (see Chapter 5), or USAID development officers working with the Brao of Attapeu in the 1950s and early 1960s (see Chapter 6). Yet Laos has maintained a development policy much the same as Vietnam, which has advocated the 'fixing of villages', and the eradication of swidden agriculture (see Hardy & Chinh 2003). More broadly, this type of spatial simplicity is desirable because it gives states more control over human populations (see, for example, Scott 1998).

In previous chapters it has been demonstrated how various parties—especially governments—have tried to socially and spatially reorganise the Brao over history, within the framework of various forms of colonialism. However, it has been recently, during this 'development era', that systematic efforts to socially and spatially reorganise the Brao in the name of 'development' have reached a historical peak. In the past there was limited access to many areas, and there was much more emphasis on military factors. Crucially, the neoliberal development discourses and the influence of international aid agencies have increased substantially. This chapter looks at the colonial domination that is occurring today.

I argue that the present period, despite being frequently considered to be postcolonial, continues to be dominated by colonialism, especially in Brao areas. On the one hand, the GoL is, more than ever, trying to integrate and assimilate the Brao into the Lao nation-state. But as is frequently the case in colonial situations, these efforts are intertwined with ideas related to international development, thus resulting in a form of domination heavily influenced by neoliberal global development discourses and practices.

This chapter investigates the ways in which these new forms of colonialism are socially and spatially transforming the Brao, through discourses and real life practices. In particular, I examine agriculture, the organisation of village territories, and internal resettlement, the main issues affecting most of the Brao population in southern Laos, but
I extend the scope of my inquiry to other important issues that are affecting the way the Brao spatially organise, including house design and organisation, regional economic and political integration, road construction, commercial logging, and the development of a large hydroelectric dam on ‘Brao land’.

But first, a brief review of the role of development assistance in Laos is crucial for putting international aid in context with what is happening in Brao areas.

**Development Agencies and the Brao in Laos**

Laos receives more foreign aid per capita than most countries in the world, and is highly dependent on international assistance for much of its rural development initiatives. Overall, 45 percent of the GoL’s annual budget is supported by foreign aid, and more than 70 percent of the country’s ‘Public Investment Programme’ is internationally funded. Clearly, foreign aid is a crucial component of the development trajectory of the country, including in Brao areas. These development efforts, despite being generally presented as technical inputs designed to improve the quality of life for ‘poor people’ in Laos—following Ferguson (1990) and more recently Li (2007)—ultimately have important political implications as well, points that will be touched on in this chapter.

In 1973 USAID stopped working in Laos, ending direct US involvement in development efforts in the country. It has not returned since, and the rest of the western international aid community shunned Laos during the Cold War. After the PL came to power in 1975, only a few western private aid agencies supported development efforts in Laos. For example, the catholic development organisation, CIDSE, the American Friends Service (Quakers) and the Mennonite Central Committee provided ‘solidarity’ assistance throughout the Cold War period. Most aid, however, came from Communist-block support. This assistance provided was not inconsequential, and between 1975 and 1990 the Lao PDR reportedly received close to US$3.5 billion in foreign aid from the Soviet Union, not to mention various forms of aid and other assistance from other countries in the Soviet-block.

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It was not until 1987 that the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) became the first large international development agency to return to Laos, and by 1990, as the country increasingly opened up, a large number of international development organisations began arriving in the country (Milloy & Payne 1997); and the number has grown substantially since then. Now there are about 45 international organisations, and at least 63 international non-government organisations (NGOs) operating in Laos, of which 12 claim to be working in Attapeu province and seven in Phou Vong district,\textsuperscript{150} the only district in Laos with a predominantly Brao population.

Japan, Germany, Sweden and Australia are the most important bilateral donors to Laos, and the ADB and World Bank are the main multilateral funders of development. In 2001 foreign aid was estimated to be US$150 million per year, of which 70 percent came from large international organisations, like the ADB, World Bank, and various UN agencies.\textsuperscript{151} Between 1990 and 2005 the GoL reportedly received a total of US$3 billion in foreign aid,\textsuperscript{152} and while support provided by NGOs has been much less than has been provided by multilateral and bilateral agencies, it has dramatically increased from US$950,000 in 1987, to more than US$16,000,000 in 1997 (Ruohomaki 2000), and is now estimated to be about US$36,550,000 per year (Isabelle Decout, INGO Network in Lao PDR, \textit{pers. comm.} July, 2007).

**Ethnicity and Development Discourses in Laos**

The agenda of the international aid community in Laos is best understood through considering ideas developed by Michel Foucault—that the objects of development must first be included within discourses that legitimise the knowledge-base and actions of outside developers (see Foucault 1972; 1991[1978]). That means depicting the ‘target’ population of international development—especially ethnic minorities—as ‘underdeveloped’, ‘disadvantaged’, ‘poor’, or even ‘backwards’. It frequently requires depicting minorities like the Brao as ignorant destroyers of the forests, and savages that are a danger to themselves and others, due to their swidden agriculture practices and

\textsuperscript{150} According to the Internet directory of NGOs in the Lao PDR (http://www.directoryofngos.org/), accessed July 19, 2007.


frequent forest-use. The corollary is that the people are in need of ‘civilisation’ or more politically correctly, ‘development’, and who better to provide what the people need than the international development community. The opening up of Laos has made it possible for modernising ‘development discourses’ to become hegemonic, even as developers preach bottom-up planning and local participation more generally. Development has become the justifying mantra for increased government and donor involvement in the lives of ethnic minorities like the Brao, for a new form of colonialism that fits in with ideas of strengthening government control over the hinterlands in the name of nation-building. No wonder it is attractive to governments.

Before explaining how ‘development discourses’ have led to real social and spatial changes amongst the Brao, it is important, as a back-drop, to provide a bit more information about the GoL’s policy towards ethnic minorities like the Brao, as ethnic identity issues are important for understanding the GoL’s development agenda and the role of international aid agencies in supporting it.

In 1975 the GoL promoted what Milloy & Payne (1997) called an ‘All Lao’ policy: assimilation under the ideals of communal socialism. The ‘revolutionary cadres’ in charge of Laos hoped to create a national administration where ethnicity would no longer be a barrier to or a significant factor in the growth of a socialist Laos. This policy was based on the Leninist principles of ‘social harmonisation’, ‘a theory that espouses the idea that ethnic clashes were instigated by bourgeois or colonial forces and would be removed during the revolutionary period” (Milloy & Payne 1997: 435). After achieving initial revolutionary success, the PL wanted to create a country where ethnicity was no longer important, “a pluri-ethnic ideal”, as Milloy & Payne (1997) refer to it. This translated into huge pressures coming to bear on the Brao. As one Brao man put it, when referring to the post-1975 period, “After 1975 the government made a lot of changes. It did not want us to do Animist rituals. We still did some secretly, but we could not be as open about it as in the past.”

The process of transformation promoted by the GoL was linked to attempts to consolidate the Party’s post-liberation hold on national power; in the face of Thai-Chinese-and US sponsored rebel activities in the late 1970s and 1980s. In any case, this ideal was more of a dream than reality, and it soon became evident that erasing ethnicity
in Laos was both impossible and potentially dangerous in terms of upsetting the local population. Therefore, after 1979 greater cultural diversity began to be acknowledged, even if still falling under the ‘Lao first’ umbrella. While the policy of assimilation declined in importance, it never disappeared from the unspoken political realities in Laos. Ethnic background may no longer be seen as key, and ethnic minorities are generally not vilified as openly as they sometimes are in Thailand (Milloy & Payne 1997), but they have still been subject to marginalizing discourses (Ireson & Ireson 1991), and these discourses have continued to proliferate and make highlanders feel inferior, even if they have changed and evolved over time.

In 1981, Kaysone Phommvihane stated in a speech that, “the people must strive to overcome traditional attitudes of condescension and superiority.” He then suggested that the state create “economic, political and social models in nationality areas so that they can be imitated by our fraternal ethnic minority people...thereby creating conditions for achieving true equality among our fraternal nationalities” (quoted in Kampe 1997: 138).

Although the rights of all people, regardless of ethnicity, are enshrined in the 1991 Lao constitution, the GoL does not recognise the rights of particular ‘ethnic minority’ or ‘indigenous’ groups of people to be any different from those of other citizens of Laos (Ruohomaki 2000). In fact, the idea of being ‘indigenous’ is not accepted by the GoL, and there is no sense that people from particular ethnic groups should be given special rights over certain landscapes based on ethnicity.

Today ethnic diversity is widely reported on and supported in official government discourses (see, for example, LFNC 2005), but the GoL’s policies and practices are often contradictory. For example, the GoL claims to support local cultures, but has refused to sanction bilingual education for ethnic minorities, even though the country’s ‘Ethnic Minority Policy’ of 1992 states that there would be school instruction in indigenous languages.

In many ways, the GoL continues to support the assimilation of minority groups into the dominant ethnic Lao society, either directly or indirectly. Assimilation is never mentioned as an explicit objective of the GoL, but it is strongly implied in political and development discourses, which combine one-party socialist politics, international development ideas associated with modernisation, ‘Marxist-Leninist modernisation
theory’ that is tied to the evolution of humankind into ‘socialist men’, and long-standing lowland prejudices against the ethnic minorities living in mountainous parts of the country. There are many spoken and unspoken contradictions that contribute to the present circumstances, some of which will become evident in this chapter. As Jan Ovesen (2004: 215) wrote, “[E]thnic diversity is not only allowed, but positively promoted—as long as it is done on ethnic Lao cultural premises.”

Swidden Agriculture

Swidden agriculture is the most widespread type of tropical soil management technique in the world (Warner 1991), and is most commonly defined as an agricultural system in which an area is cleared—usually with fire—and cultivated for short periods before being fallowed for longer periods than the land is cultivated (Conklin 1957). Swidden agriculture is frequently considered to be a synonym for shifting cultivation, at least in mainland Southeast Asia, but the term actually has a more specific meaning, and refers to a form of agriculture that involves fire for clearing and fertilising the land. Shifting cultivation often makes use of fire, but by definition it does not require its use. Swidden agriculture is frequently conceptualised as a part of broader agro-ecosystem approaches (Warner 1991). Slash-and-burn is another term used for this type of farming, and is technically the closest in meaning to swidden agriculture, since it requires the use of fire in clearing the forest, but its use, at least amongst native English speakers, generally has more negative connotations than the term swidden, since it emphasises the impressive fires set in new fields at the end of the dry season, and implies a more primitive form of cultivation. Here I use the terms ‘shifting cultivation’ and ‘swidden agriculture’ synonymously, despite their subtle differences in meaning. I prefer not to use the term slash-and-burn agriculture.

Swidden agriculture can be applied to a wide variety of upland farming systems involving forests and fallows (Warner 1991), and the types of agriculture practiced by the Brao generally fit well with what is considered to be swidden agriculture, as the Brao always shift from field to field, use fire to clear and fertilise fields, and maintain fallows for longer periods than fields are cultivated (see Chapter 3 for details of Brao swidden practices).
Depending on soil and weed conditions, a swidden plot is sometimes used for just one year before being fallowed, so that the forest can re-establish itself easily (as is the case with most Brao living in Attapeu province). In other cases, swidden agriculture may take place on the same plot for two or more years, but historically this has generally only been the case when soils are exceptionally good quality (such as with most Kreung populated red soiled areas south of the Sesan River in Ratanakiri province, Cambodia). Baird (2000) has shown that Brao swidden agriculture, like other local livelihood activities, requires considerable local ecological knowledge to ensure success and improve the chances of sustainability. Illustrative of how many Brao view forests and agriculture, a Brao Umba elder once told me that the key to protecting forests is not protecting the trees but looking after the soil.

Swidden cultivators have often been blamed for destroying forests, even when it has not been the case (De Koninck 2000). Although swidden agriculture is typically labeled as being both an unproductive and inefficient use of resources, and destructive to the environment, the reality is that it is not necessarily either. It is now clear that swidden agriculture has often been unfairly blamed for being unsustainable and leading to deforestation. Most researchers working on agriculture now recognise that swidden agriculture systems are complex and frequently misunderstood, and not necessarily destructive (Dove 1983; Warner 1991; Fairhead & Leach 1996; Fox et al. 2000; Guérin 2001; Walker 2001; Ducourtieux 2004).

In fact, swidden agriculture can help ensure that all the landscape remains under forest cover virtually all the time (Ironside & Baird 2003), which is not the case with the cultivation of fast-growing tree plantations or other forms of ‘fixed agriculture’ involving cash crops. Providing that human density is not high, allowing forests to regrow naturally can result in minimal environmental impacts. This sort of agriculture can even benefit various types of wildlife and biodiversity (see, for example, Steinmetz 1996).

One important advantage of long-fallow swidden systems is that there is no tillage required, and therefore runoff is limited. Sediment and carbon losses on sloping land are reduced (Chaplot 2005). Furthermore, external inputs, including chemical or natural fertilisers, are only very rarely used in swidden agriculture, and swidden systems promote intercropping many different plant species (Warren 1991). For the Brao, a large variety of
crops are frequently planted together with rice (Baird et al. 1996). These systems are very intricate, as are the knowledge systems that drive them (Baird 2000).

Although the French in northeastern Cambodia and southern Laos generally erroneously believed that swidden agriculture was less efficient for producing food than lowland wet-rice cultivation (see Chapter 5), Guérin (2001), Meyer (1979), Ironside & Baird (2003), and Baird (2000) have effectively argued that yields from Brao swidden fields were historically higher than those from lowland wet-rice cultivation, and both ethnic Lao and Brao elders that I have spoken with have frequently confirmed this to be the case, as have those in the lowlands that used to buy rice from the Brao in the past.

As Leif Jonsson has pointed out, there is more to highland swidden agriculture than just ‘rational thought’ or the maximisation of ‘natural resources’ from a strictly utilitarian perspective.153 Swidden agriculture is part and parcel of larger socio-cultural domains. He wrote,

“Swidden farmers live in a world that is systematically misunderstood by anyone taking the “rational” premises of the development paradigm, or of state culture more generally, for granted as “natural”. The various dimensions of their curing, agriculture, and so on, get systematically “mis-translated” in terms of conceptual and political economic schemes that do not match the reality at hand. This kind of misunderstanding makes the forest people inherently “projectable”, in much the same way as the “heathens” have been to missionaries, given the global dimensions of modern state culture and the territoriality of modern nation-states” (2007: 562).

It seems, however, that considering all the evidence that has been presented about swidden agriculture since the time of Conklin (1957), that it cannot just be a matter of people misunderstanding the reality. It seems more likely that the misunderstanding is more intentional, at least at a sub-conscious level, representing an attempt to simplify agriculture in a way that fits well with the facilitation of state control (see Scott 1998). It is linked with the forms of governmental power that Foucault (1991) wrote about.

153 Note that Scott (1998) makes the compelling argument that utilitarian discourse replaces the word ‘nature’ with the term ‘natural resources’ in order to remove the sacred from nature.
Ecological Classification and the Brao

Local ecological knowledge is critical for agriculture, and for understanding broader ecological issues. In relation to the Brao Kavet of Cambodia, Baird (2000) documented 108 basic land-based categories recognised and named by the Brao Kavet. Kavet descriptions of habitat types are hierarchical, based on scale, and can range from very broad to very specific. These knowledge systems are orally transmitted and incorporate Brao experiences, culture and beliefs. Brao systems are essentially based on two general Brao language ecological terms: 'bree' and 'dak'.

**Bree** is often translated as 'forest' in English, but in fact it means 'the condition of the land' (Gerard Diffloth, pers. comm. 1999). A 'bree' can be a forest, since forests often dominate the 'condition of the land', but it can be used to describe areas that are not normally categorised as forest, such as grasslands, which the Brao call 'bree treng' (short second vowel), and salt licks, which are called 'bree graik'. Areas covered entirely by flat slabs of granite are known as 'bree ta tar' or 'bree ta maw ta tar'. Bree types are sometimes named after dominant species of plants or trees, but the term bree is not used to describe individual species. It is applied to ecological areas, or 'biotopes' (Baird 2000).

**Dak** localities are located within river and streambeds, and ponds, up to the top of their banks. Dak is 'the condition of the water'. Therefore, seasonally inundated forests in riverbeds are not called bree in Brao, as they are a condition of the water (Baird 2000; 2001a).

Of the 108 basic Brao land classifications documented by Baird (2000), 21 represent broad ecological classes, 12 are based on topology or landform features, six represent forest succession stages, seven are applied for soil characteristics, 57 are associated with dominant plant species, and five fall into the 'miscellaneous' category. Brao creative use of these various terms is not standardised, and there are a potentially large number of possible combinations, depending on meaning and emphasis (Baird 2000; 2001a).

This ecological classification system is critical for Brao swidden agriculture, as it indicates to farmers the types of habitats they are dealing with, and makes it clear to them whether particular areas have potential to be successfully farmed. Many ecological areas are considered generally unsuitable for swidden, while others are marginal, and still
others are preferred. Although many people believe that swidden farmers randomly choose their farming sites and haphazardly move from one place to another, research with the Brao indicates that considerable attention is given to choosing suitable locations for swidden agriculture. However, the GoL is making it very difficult for the Brao to follow their local knowledge (Baird & Shoemaker 2005; Gonzales et al. 2005; Baird 2000; 2001a; SPC 2000).

Swidden Agriculture and Lao Government Policy

The fact that swidden agriculture has historically been the dominant form of agriculture amongst the Brao and other highland groups in Laos is generally considered to be an important constraint to development by the GoL, and since 1975 the GoL has promoted policies and practices designed to eradicate or sharply reduce the prevalence of swidden agriculture.

In development discourses poverty is frequently linked to the need for development, including by the official Lao media, and in the Lao context the need for development is frequently linked with eradicating swidden agriculture, even when it may in reality be having the opposite effect (see SPC 2000). These linkages are convenient for the GoL and developers to adopt, even though there is plenty of evidence to the contrary (see Goudineau 1997; SPC 2000; Evrard & Goudineau 2004; Baird & Shoemaker 2005; 2007). That is because it provides justification for the GoL and development agencies to intrude on the lives of ethnic minorities in the name of ‘progress’ and ‘development’. Thus, the GoL’s position on swidden agriculture has become the most important government policy affecting Brao livelihoods in Laos.

Olli Ruohomaki (2000) believes that while government discourses in Laos have tended to depict minorities as forest destroyers, in order to justify certain development initiatives, the real reasons behind anti-swidden campaigns and associated ethnic minority resettlement are maintaining strong control over peripheral areas. Thus, the importance of territorialisation as a part of colonial practices is again evident. Ruohomaki has pointed out that the promotion of wet-rice agriculture is an integral part of what he


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calls "the civilizing mission" (2000: 70), drawing on French colonial discourses (see Chapter 5). This has included either banning or at least belittling many of the Animist rituals conducted by the Brao. For example, Lao discourses about buffalo sacrifices tend to focus on its wastefulness and savagery, rather than its inner meaning to the people involved (Ruohomaki 2000).

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, the GoL—increasingly with the encouragement of large donors—expressed considerable concern over the swidden agricultural practices of ethnic minorities. The 1990 Tropical Forestry Action Plan (TFAP) for Laos—supported by the United Nations Forestry and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), the UNDP and the World Bank—reported on and implicitly supported the resolution adopted at the First Lao National Conference on Forestry in May 1989, that by the year 2000 there would be a permanent change in the lifestyles of 60 percent of the 1.5 million people engaged in shifting cultivation. The plan was expected to affect 90,000 people a year over the following ten years (Evrard & Goudineau 2004). The idea was to promote agricultural intensification, land tenure reform, and industrial forms of forest exploitation, such as commercial logging and fast-growing industrial tree plantations. Development agencies did not just support GoL policies against swidden agriculture; they played a crucial role in promoting those policies, through providing both funding support and international legitimacy. But the GoL took things a step further, and in 1995 the Politburo of the Central Party Committee of Lao PDR adopted a policy to eradicate all shifting cultivation from the country by the year 2000. Several major donors moved to support the government in this endeavor (SPC 2000; Evrard & Goudineau 2004; Baird & Shoemaker 2005).

Initially, few in the international development aid community in Laos questioned the need to eliminate swidden agriculture, even though some donors seemed to be aware of the hardships being suffered by local people (see Ireson & Ireson 1991). Many donors primarily saw the campaign against swidden agriculture as being concomitant to reducing deforestation and protecting biodiversity. Human ecology was rarely considered in much depth, let alone the political ecology of altering, reducing and eradicating swidden agriculture. As concerns grew over the impacts on food security and associated resettlement, however, some reassessment began to quietly occur, especially due to the
impacts it was perceived to be having on the food security of upland communities. While an important rationale for the initiative was to conserve upland forests, some observers began to notice that there was simultaneously a large increase in commercial logging in these same forests, facilitated by the central government and the military and involving very non-transparent revenue management (Anonymous 2000a).

Some types of ‘pioneering’ shifting cultivation, as practiced by particular ethnic groups, can be problematic, but even these problems are often exaggerated, and in any case, ‘rotational’ forms of swidden agriculture are the norm for the Brao. However, rather than using a moderate approach that carefully considers all the pertinent factors, on a case-by-case basis, harsh broad-brush blanket restrictions against swidden cultivation have frequently been applied in Laos, including against the Brao.

Anonymous (2000a) pointed out that the Lao term for swidden agriculture, or ‘het hai’ in Lao, is now often replaced by local people and government officials with the term ‘het souan’, which means, ‘to make gardens’. I have noticed this to be the case in many Brao villages in Laos, including Phou Xay village in Phou Vong district, where villagers tried to transform the image of their full-size swidden fields by calling them ‘souan’ (gardens). When visiting the community in 2003, together with a group of Brao people from Pathoumphone district, the Brao headman from Houay Ko village, upon observing the situation there, told me that Brao people often like doing swidden “in their livers” (gleum means liver in Brao) (equivalent to “in their hearts” in English), but that due to government policy they must do lowland paddy (na in Lao and Brao) and a little ‘gardening’. The term souan is much more politically acceptable. Some people even joke that nobody grows rice in ‘swiddens’ (hai in Lao; meur in Brao), but that they frequently grow it in ‘gardens’.

Not surprisingly, efforts to reduce and eradicate swidden agriculture faltered in the late 1990s, and it became increasingly evident that it was not going to be possible to achieve the very challenging goal of stopping shifting cultivation by 2000. Thus, in 2001 the deadline was extended to 2005 at the 7th Party Congress, and more recently the GoL has reported that the deadline is now 2020, with significant progress expected by 2010 (Baird & Shoemaker 2007).
Although the GoL remains committed to reducing and eventually eradicating swidden agriculture (Baird 2006c; 2007b), there has been some reconsideration of the policy in certain parts of the government (Baird 2004; 2005a; 2006c; 2007b), and there has been a notable reduction in the rhetoric critical of swidden agriculture in recent years (Baird 2007b). Indicative of the subtle changes that have been occurring, the Deputy Governor of Savannakhet province told me in 2003 that ‘pioneering’ shifting cultivation (hai leuan loi in Lao) is banned, especially when large trees are cut down, but that rotational shifting cultivation (hai moun vian in Lao) is allowed, and is not the target for swidden agriculture eradication efforts (Baird 2004). In addition, Samanh Viyaket, a Politburo member and the Speaker of the National Assembly of Lao PDR, said, when addressing the National Assembly in May 2005 that the government wanted to “lout phone neua thi het hai” (reduce the area used for swidden agriculture), not eradicate it. The replacement of the word “eradicate” (lop lang in Lao) with “reduce” (lout phone in Lao) is significant, and indicative of how development discourses are constantly shifting, sometimes slowly and other time quickly. Some in the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry in Vientiane have even stated unofficially that changes are in the works, although it may take years for them to become evident to local people (Baird 2004; 2005a).

In April 2002 the Prime Minister’s Office (PMO) released a Lao-language policy document that is very significant for questions regarding swidden agriculture and internal resettlement of communities from the uplands to the lowlands in Laos (PMO 2002). It appears that the document was not adequately distributed at the time it was first released, or maybe those who received it did not initially take it very seriously. In any case, it was re-released by the GoL in 2005, apparently to try to re-emphasise the document’s importance at the local government level. It reiterates that pioneering swidden agriculture is not allowed, but significantly, it states that internal resettlement should not be promoted except under extreme circumstances when all other options to achieve ‘asip khong thi’ (permanent occupations) have failed.155 In other words, the purpose of the

155 It appears that the idea of ‘fixity of abode’ as being a pre-requisite for ‘civilisation’ is something that has existed in various other ‘colonial’ situations (see, for example, Tsing 2003; Harris 2002; Jonsson 2002; Scott 1998), even in the face of evidence that those with more mobile livelihoods were often better off before they had to settle down (see Harris 2002: 275).
document is to encourage local governments to avoid using internal resettlement as the main tool for reducing or eradicating shifting cultivation. It is unclear how much this document is having an impact in rural Laos, but it is noteworthy that Brao government officials in Phou Vong district made me aware of it in 2006, so it is at least having an impact there. This policy document is apparently one of the reasons why the government in Phou Vong is considering not resettling Lamong village (see Map 2.1), one of the last Brao villages in the mountains.¹⁵⁶

Research on Internal Resettlement in Laos

Recent studies from different parts of Laos clearly show that the eradication and severe restriction of swidden agriculture, and associated internal resettlement, is often associated with chronic food shortages, increased and over-exploitation of forestry and fishery resources, decreased human and animal health, and increased soil degradation and other types of biodiversity degradation caused by adopting fallow cycles that are too short to allow for forest or soil regeneration. The end result is an increase in livelihood problems and poverty, and various socio-cultural and health problems (Chamberlain 2007; Gonzales et al. 2005; Baird & Shoemaker 2005; 2007; Evrard & Goudineau 2004; Ducourtieux 2004; Vandergeest 2003; Daviau 2001; 2003b; Chamberlain 2001; ADB 2001; SPC 2000; Goudineau 1997). Certainly hundreds of thousands of families have been affected by restrictive shifting cultivation policies throughout the country, and in the late 1990s 280,000 families or 45 percent of the villages in Laos were dependent on shifting cultivation for their subsistence (SPC & NSC 1999). While there is not a province in Laos that has not been impacted by the GoL’s swidden agriculture policy, it has been especially significant for mountainous northern and eastern parts of the country.

Yves Goudineau (1997) and his colleagues prepared the first important study about internal resettlement in Laos, looking at different parts of the country, including Attapeu province in southern Laos. He found that internal resettlement was having serious negative impacts on those being resettled. In particular, large numbers of recently resettled peoples were found to be dying of various illnesses, especially diarrhea and

¹⁵⁶ Khamsone Phonenyaleu, Phou Vong district government, pers. comm. 2006.
stomach-related ailments (see, also, Evrard & Goudineau 2004). Lucas (1997) did fieldwork in Brao areas in Attapeu as part of the study.

In 2000 the SPC (2000), funded by the ADB, studied poverty throughout Laos, focusing on the poorest parts of the country, including Brao areas (see, also, Chamberlain 2001; ADB 2001). They found that many of the people considered by the government to be ‘the poorest in Laos’ actually consider themselves to be newly poor, and many attribute their poverty to government programmes, including land and forest allocation and associated internal resettlement, often associated with efforts to reduce swidden agriculture. Brao people frequently refer to the situation in this way, thus constituting Brao ethnicity with meaning in term of class.

This was followed up by a follow-up ‘participatory poverty assessment’ in 2006 (Chamberlain 2007) that has shown that as a nation Laos has made considerable progress in reducing poverty, but that these gains have been very uneven, with people from disadvantaged ethnic minority groups living in the poorest districts fairing considerably worse compared to the national average. For these people, lack of land for agriculture is often considered to be a major problem. Villages visited in 2000 were revisited for the 2006 study, and were generally found “to be either about the same or worse off” (Chamberlain 2007: 11).

Alton & Ratanavong (2004) studied rural livelihoods in the context of internal resettlement in parts of Luang Nam Tha and Sekong provinces. Their findings largely complemented the results of other studies, indicating that the resettlement process is often accompanied by various livelihood problems.

Baird & Shoemaker (2005; 2007) studied how international aid agencies, including NGOs, bilateral, international organisations and multilateral development banks, like the ADB, are involved in supporting internal resettlement in Laos, either directly or indirectly, and sometimes with their knowledge and sometimes without it. They found that most international aid agencies were either purposefully, indirectly, or ignorantly supporting internal resettlement in Laos, and that most organisations did not know enough about the situations they were involved with to make good decisions about what they were supporting.

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157 Poverty apparently declined from 39 to 33 percent between 1997-8 and 2002-3 (Chamberlain 2007).
Gonzales et al. (2005) conducted an in-depth study of a number of upland districts situated in areas where the populations largely belong to ethnic minority groups and are deemed vulnerable to internal resettlement to lowland areas and along roads, including the Brao district of Phou Vong. They revealed that in the vast majority of areas upland populations are slated for resettlement or have already been resettled.

There have been a number of other studies that have indicated various problems associated with internal resettlement in Laos, including Daviau (2001), Daviau (2003b), Vandergeest (2003) and Ducourtieux (2004; 2006); just to name the main studies covering this subject. Some authors have, however, pointed out that while resettlement is often problematic, the issue of resettlement and area development is complex and is not the same everywhere (Rigg 2005; Raintree 2003), something that I have emphasised in past writings (Baird & Shoemaker 2005; 2007; 2008).

**Internal Resettlement amongst the Brao**

While not presented as an explicit policy objective, internal resettlement is an important tool used within the GoL to reduce or eradicate swidden agriculture (Evrard & Goudineau 2004). Internal resettlement has been used to bring peripheral ethnic minorities, like the Brao, into the nation-building project, and resettlement is often seen as important for providing minorities with more access to markets and government services like health care and education, and for security and population control reasons (Baird & Shoemaker 2005; 2007). Thus, the resettlement of the Brao and other highland groups has been closely linked to development discourses and practices. The following are the key policy tools utilised by the GoL in their attempt to control the space of ethnic minorities, including the Brao.

**Land and Forest Allocation**

"The Brao used to have their own borders, but those borders have dissolved. Now the government controls the borders. Before there were Brao borders, now there is land allocation."

Brao government official in Phou Vong district, Attapeu province, 2004
Land and Forest Allocation (beng din beng pa in Lao) is a government-controlled process that fits well into the type of development that is, following Tania Li (2007), ‘rendered technical’. Designed to classify land-uses and improve ‘natural resource management’, land allocation is a technical way of organising land and nature that ultimately presents increased government control as a-political and even ‘bottom-up’. Initiated in 1994 as part of a strategy to allocate land to farmers, intensify agricultural production, conserve forest areas, and clarify borders between villages (Watershed 2004), the programme was developed by the GoL with technical assistance from Vietnamese advisors. Swedish government development assistance was crucial for supporting and shaping the process, as was assistance provided by other development agencies.

Land and Forest Allocation is often seen as being potentially useful for lowland communities not dependent on swidden agriculture (MIDAS 1998), but when employed in upland areas it has severely restricted the land available for swidden cultivation. In fact, one of the main objectives of the programme is to reduce and eventually eradicate swidden agriculture, and its implementation requires that fallow times be drastically reduced to just two or three years, thus making the proliferation of weeds a serious obstacle to achieving good harvests. This has led to the rapid deterioration of soil quality, and increased agriculture pests and disease problems (SPC 2000; ADB 2001; Chamberlain 2001). One can recognise that the idea is quite similar to what French administrators like Antonin Baudenne thought was suitable for the Brao back in 1913 (see Chapter 5). While Swedish aid has probably helped make the programme more ‘bottom up’ and ‘participatory’, the goal of reducing swidden agriculture is within the political realm, an area that Swedish aid agencies have not wanted to force, since they are only operating on the technical side of things. Furthermore, many Swedish foresters support improving the utilisation of the forest for development, and see highlander uses of the forests as fundamentally inefficient.

While not explicitly associated with internal resettlement, the severe restrictions applied to swidden agriculture in upland communities, and the resulting impacts on their food security and livelihoods more generally, have been a major ‘push’ factor in inducing highlanders to resettle to the lowlands or elsewhere. Conditions for conducting upland agriculture are often made so difficult that upland farmers feel obliged to follow
government recommendations for them to relocate. Considering all the restrictions, they often cannot see a future in the uplands. Importantly, Land and Forest Allocation is crucial for achieving the spatial reorganisation of people. It is a type of territorialisation that necessarily accompanies forms of deterritorialisation (Goudineau 2000). This involves suppressing ideas about particular places, and the histories that are associated with them, and replacing them with new systems of spatial dominance. For example, indigenous ways of spatially organising, like those involving the deployment of spatial taboos, and the Brao seven spatial scale of organisation (see Chapter 4) are smothered and replaced with new government-sponsored forms of territorial management.

Donors, including international NGOs, are often asked to support Land and Forest Allocation as part of area development programmes. In some cases, the requests are just for the per-diems and expenses of local officials when they undertake the allocation work, but in other cases full-scale funding support is provided. Given the problems that have been associated with poorly conceived and implemented Land and Forest Allocation, this has sometimes put international aid agencies in the position of funding activities that are harmful to the livelihoods of the people that they are supposedly assisting (Baird & Shoemaker 2005; 2007), or that could even be considered to be complicit in violations of fundamental human rights. But ultimately, aid agencies tend to blame these failures, when forced to acknowledge them, on failures in implementation. Thus, the technical side again becomes the focus, rather than the political.

There have been efforts to review and correct flaws in the Land and Forest Allocation Policy (see, for example, Jones 2002), and MIDAS (1998) tried, largely unsuccessfully, to adapt the Land and Forest Allocation Process for national protected areas, but so far few substantial changes in the programme’s approach to swidden agriculture appear to have occurred at the local level, because aid agencies can only explicitly provide input at the technical level, even when the only way that fundamental problems can be solved is through addressing the conceived and the political. Some NGOs and other aid agencies are working on newer strategies that may resolve some of the problems seen in the past, and end up having a positive impact, and some are trying to affect the political side of things, even if they do not openly acknowledge that, but many
remain faced with the problem that they can only work at the technical level. In any case, none of these alternative programmes are occurring in Brao areas.

**Focal Sites**

“It is unfortunate to note that a number of foreign aid organisations such as the Asian Development Bank and some bilaterals have helped to create some morally dubious resettlement programs through their funding agreements.”

Olli Ruohomaki (2000: 69)

Focal Sites (*Khet Chout Xoum* in Lao) are, as Jan Ovesen (2004: 231) put it, “clearly defined geographical areas to which development efforts shall be confined.” They have existed in Laos since the 1980s, and revolve around directing development resources to particular areas—state organised spaces, often funded by international development agencies. These may include existing and long-established communities, but more commonly they are formed after people have been resettled (Baird & Shoemaker 2005; 2007). They represent the GoL’s most powerful tools for socially and spatially dominating and reorganising the Brao.

For the Brao in Phou Vong district, Attapeu province, there are a number of Focal Sites, including at Viang Xay, Phou Hom and Houay Keo. The capital of Phou Vong district, Vong Samphan, is the equivalent to an unofficial Focal Site (see Map 2.1), as many people have been relocated there or nearby, but it is not officially called one. Critically, all these places are strongly associated with internal resettlement. Brao Jree people populate Viang Xay, Kavet people populate Phou Hom, Brao Ka-nying people populate Houay Keo, and Brao Hamong people largely populate Vong Samphan (see Chapter 3 for descriptions of Brao sub-groups).\(^{158}\)

The establishment of Focal Sites has had many important implications in relation to spatially controlling the Brao, as the government creates particular plans for many spatial aspects of life, including the distribution and orientation of houses and other infrastructure, agriculture, transportation routes (roads), etc. Illustrative of this, in the new Somboun sub-district Focal Site (Map 2.1), the houses are organised in a grid system,

\(^{158}\) However, the designation of particular Brao sub-groups to particular Focal Sites appears to be more of a function of geographical location of those sub-groups rather than any particular efforts to locate people from the same sub-groups into the same resettlement areas.
quite unlike the concentric circular pattern that is typical for Brao villages (see Chapter 4). There are government-made signs in front of surrounding parcels of forest land that state the future uses of these spaces, such as ‘industrial area’ and ‘market area’. Government officials often associate this grid organisation and associated planning processes with what is known in Lao as ‘Ban Chat San’, which translates into ‘organised [or more appropriately reorganised] village’. It is much like the geometric order of grid settlements mentioned by James Scott (1998), which were created to achieve state simplification. It is certainly a very different spatial reality from the circular villages that the Brao had in the past. While many Brao people appear, by their continued tendencies to establish houses outside of ‘reorganised villages’, to be unconvinced that this spatial organisation is really beneficial to them—in much the same way as Cole Harris (2002) has described for native people put onto small reserves in British Columbia, Canada—at least some, especially the younger generation, are gradually adopting the spatial concepts of those that dominate them. Attempts by colonised or dominated peoples to mimic their oppressors are, indeed, a common outcome of colonialism (Gregory 2000).

It is notable that in Laos—as in British Columbia, Canada—one of the reasons why governments did not want minorities to have control over large spaces was because it was thought that not having sufficient resources on their land would force them to integrate into society, become wage labourers, and become more efficient in utilising what limited resources they were allocated. They were expected to become part of the capitalist machine. However, it appears that this strategy has largely failed in both ‘colonial’ situations (see Harris 2002).

**Village Consolidation—Concentrating Populations**

Village Consolidation (*tao hom ban* in Lao) involves combining scattered smaller settlements by resettling people into larger ‘permanent’ villages. Again, it is technical in nature, and framed by the GoL in relation to development. The Village Consolidation programme is much like the Focal Site programme, albeit operating on a smaller scale. The idea is to create a smaller number of more densely populated communities, and to integrate people into the dominant economic and ultimately cultural system of the Lao nation-state.
Village Consolidation has been taking place in Laos since the 1970s. However, while it was associated more with security issues in the past, in recent years it has become increasingly central to the GoL’s development strategy, the rhetoric of which is mimicking donor calls for more closely linking development efforts with ‘poverty alleviation’, a priority for many international aid agencies. If they want us to work with the poor, we had better move them into one place where we can better control them and turn them into ‘non-poor’ people like us, is the dominant idea, one reminiscent of French ‘civilising’ colonial discourses (see Chapter 5).

In 2004, the Politburo of the Central Party Committee of Lao PDR issued an order declaring that lowland villages should not have fewer than 500 people and that upland villages should not have fewer than 200 (Lao Revolutionary Party Political Central Committee 2004). This has had a dramatic impact on communities throughout Laos (Baird & Shoemaker 2005; 2007). For Brao people, their villages were generally under 200 people in the past, but nowadays villages are much larger (see Appendix 1).\textsuperscript{159} Phone-nyaleu (2005), for example, reports that 92 percent of the inhabitants of Phou Vong district, the vast majority of them who are Brao, now live in ‘permanent villages’, which means resettlement or ‘consolidated’ villages in the lowlands or government organised villages in the mountains.

Given the concerns over resettlement policy in Laos, the GoL has tried to distinguish village consolidation from resettlement. For example, in a 1998 appeal to donors, the GoL (1998: 21) prepared a document, with UNDP support, that stated,

“Village consolidation is our term for the establishment of permanent occupations. The promotion of permanent occupations encapsulates several national objectives such as rice production, commercial crops, stopping slash-and-burn agriculture and improving access to development services. This objective has often been wrongly identified with ‘resettlement’, partly because the term ‘resettlement’ has been used in some of our own documents, partly, because the problem that has to be attacked has not been clearly identified.”

\textsuperscript{159} Also note that the average Brao village size in Cambodia is smaller than in Laos, since there has been less emphasis on consolidating villages there (see Appendix 1). Phone-nyaleu (2005) reported that in the past Brao villages in southern Laos needed to have just ten to 20 households to justify the construction of a communal house (rong).
Note the particular focus on the idea of ‘permanent’ villages, a critical aspect (see below). Since around 2002 there has been an increase in Village Consolidation in southern Laos, including in Brao areas. International aid agencies are often being asked to fund these new consolidated communities, or ‘mini-Focal Sites’ (Baird & Shoemaker 2005; 2007).

At best, villages populated by people from the same ethnic groups are being consolidated, but sometimes people from different villages and ethnicities are put into the same resettlement spaces. This spatial change has important socio-cultural implications. It contributes to acculturation and the loss of the use of minority languages. Some Brao have been moved into ethnic Lao villages, such as in Tha Hin and Samakhi villages in Attapeu province, and in Km 19, Km 28 and Khou Touay (Phaosamphan\textsuperscript{160}) villages, Champasak province (see Map 2.1), Brao people have been mixed with people from other highland groups, thus leading to Lao becoming the general lingua franca. In all cases this has contributed to Brao assimilation, and cultural degradation, especially in cases when mixed into ethnic Lao villages.

In Tha Hin and Km 28 villages, however, even though the Brao live mixed with people from other ethnic groups, there are social divisions between the spaces occupied by the Brao and those occupied by other ethnic groups. This has helped augment Brao identity and culture, slowing the assimilation process to some extent. When I was in Tha Hin village in early 2006, I asked a young Lao man in the village what it was like living with the Brao. “We don’t usually go to their village,” he replied. I then asked, “Aren’t you in the same village as them?” He responded, “Yes, officially, but they are in a different area. The Brao are all in the same area.” He finally commented, at the end of our short conversation, “We get along fine, but language is difficult. They like to speak their own language, but they speak Lao with us.” He admitted to not speaking any Brao, despite having lived a few houses down from the Brao for many years. In fact, Lao people rarely learn to speak Brao well, although there are a few notable exceptions. Those who speak Brao appear to have not only adopted the Brao language, but Brao customs as well. Most ethnic Lao appear to feel that learning an ethnic minority language is concomitant with integrating or at least fully accepting the society associated with the language, which most Lao do not, even if they might not consider themselves to be racist.

\textsuperscript{160} ‘Phaosamphan’ means ‘the relations of different ethnic groups’ in Lao language.
Village Consolidation—A New Form of Village Administrative Reorganisation

In 2006, the GoL adopted a new policy regarding a second variety of Village Consolidation. Not requiring the physical resettlement of people, it is a sort of administrative village consolidation, in which villages that are already geographically close to each other are consolidated under a single village administration.

In Pathoumphone district, Champasak province, the villages of Ban Na and Houay Keua, both of which are Brao-dominated communities (Map 2.1), were consolidated into the Lao village of Houay Mesang in 2006. Thus, the previous village heads of the Brao villages have become deputy headman of Houay Mesang. While the villages are not expected to physically move together, in the case of Ban Na the government plans to reorganise the arrangement of houses so that they are in a grid pattern, rather than being circularly organised as they are now. The justification is so that vehicles can more easily enter the village.

In early 2006 the Brao village of Tha Deua in Sanamxay district, Attapeu province (Map 2.1), was administratively consolidated into the village of Mitsamphan, together with Tabak and Hat Nyao villages, both of which are dominated by ethnic Oy people. Together, the new ‘development village’, or ‘Ban Phatthana’, as it is called in Lao, includes more than 500 families. The headman of the new Mitsamphan is the village head from the previous village with the same name, and each former village headman from the other villages have become deputy headmen, responsible for their respective ‘khoum’ (sections) in the new village, just as has been the case in Champasak.

In Phou Vong district there is even more administrative consolidation of villages taking place. In 2006, Dak Joor (Nam Souan) and Houay Le were officially combined, and Phou Yang and Sai Den were administratively consolidated that year (Map 2.1). In 2006, I heard from Brao government officials in Phou Vong that a number of other villages in the district were going to be officially combined, but that more investigations and consultations had to be conducted before the government’s plan could be officially

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161 ‘Mitsamphan’ means ‘Friendly relations’ in Lao language.
implemented, between 2007 and 2010. But the government already has a goal. For example, it wants to combine Vong Vilai Tai, Vong Vilai Neua and Tra-oum into a single village, and Palai and Mak Kiang villages (Map 2.1). There are other combinations being considered.

One Brao government official explained that once the number of villages is officially reduced, the government expects to focus their development efforts on the few official villages remaining, including getting ‘development teams’ of officials to base themselves in these new expanded villages in order to provide development support. In many ways the idea of concentrating development efforts fits with the Focal Site strategy and the views of many international aid agencies more generally. Once again, the physical resettlement of these consolidated villages is not planned, but there seems to be an expectation that over time these communities will become physically consolidated on their own, or at least socially united as one. For now, many Brao are concerned about the administrative problems involved with only having a village headman in another village. For example, since only village heads can sign some documents, it will now be necessary for people to travel farther for certain permits, such as to sell livestock.

**Internal Resettlement in Phou Vong District**

Phou Vong district was established as the first majority Brao district in the Lao PDR, on August 5, 1991. It took parts of Xaysettha and Sanamxay districts and combined them (Phone-nyaleu 2005). At present, it is considered to be the third poorest district in Laos. It is dominated by ethnic Brao people, and has experienced some of the GoL’s most intensive swidden agriculture eradication efforts.\(^\text{162}\)

In 1992, Phou Vong district officials devised a new development plan that envisioned the resettlement of all the Brao remaining in the mountains (Lucas 1997), and

\(^\text{162}\) Brao people in other districts in southern Laos have also faced swidden suppression. For example, in Pathoumphone district, Champasak province, four Brao from Khoua Touay village were put in jail for doing swidden agriculture without asking permission from the district in 2005, and a few years before that four Brao families from Ban Na village were prohibited from doing swidden agriculture on the edge of Xe Pian National Protected Area. They were forced to replant the swiddens with Eucalyptus trees, a poorly conceived idea, as fast growing trees do not go well with nature conservation. In Phon Sa-at village, in Khong district, the Brao have also been restricted from doing swidden agriculture over the last few years, and this has resulted in some Animist ceremonies associated with swidden agriculture being abandoned, thus having important cultural impacts on the people.
a considerable surge of internal resettlement took place in the following years, especially in 1996 and 1997. This included planning to move all those who had returned to the mountains in the late 1970s and early 1980s (see Chapter 6). Over half of the total population of the district has been moved since 1992. Many smaller villages have been consolidated into larger villages (see Appendix 1), and some communities have been resettled along roads in upland areas near the Vietnamese and Cambodian borders, especially along Route 18A (see below). Most, however, have been moved to the lowlands (Map 2.1). Not surprisingly, Phou Vong district has experienced many of the problems of internal resettlement that are typical for other parts of Attapeu and the country.

**Viang Xay Village**

Viang Xay village is a good example of a Brao community in Phou Vong district that has been affected by international donor-supported resettlement and Focal Site-style village consolidation (Map 2.1). People from three other villages—Phya Viang, Vong Lakhone and Houay Kiang—were moved to Viang Xay in 2002. Most did not want to be resettled or consolidated together, but the local government made it clear that they were not going to take no for an answer. In 2004, there were officially 600 people in 160 families in Viang Xay, although the village is spread out over a number of kilometres along the road between the Nam Kong River (*Dak Grawng* in Brao) and the district centre of Phou Vong. The justification for moving the four villages together in the lowlands was to promote development, including attracting foreign aid. In that many aid agencies want to be able to easily reach the places they support, it is not surprising that the GoL wants to bring the people to roads and development aid.

Before being resettled, most people were self-sufficient in rice, but in 2003 only two families were able to produce enough to subsist on. This was partially due to poor rains the previous year, but even if the rains had been good most would not have been able to have grown enough rice to eat, as many do not have sufficient skills or large enough lowland paddy fields, and some lack buffaloes and appropriate tools. Apart from rice, the people are short of other products from nature that they once had access to in the

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163 See Appendix 1 for details of the years that resettlement took place for individual villages.
mountains. Norconsult (2007) reported, four years later, that there are still significant deficiencies in rice production in these communities, and this was also my impression when I visited in 2006 and 2007.

A school has been built in Viang Xay (Photo 7.1) by the ADB’s ‘Dek Nying’ (girl child) project, a loan-funded initiative designed to improve education, particularly for girls. The NGO ADRA installed pump wells in the village and a toilet near the village school (Photo 7.2). The German bilateral aid agency Deutsche Gesellschaft fur Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ), and the German volunteer agency, Deutscher Entwicklungsdiensst (DED), have both provided support for lowland agriculture in the resettlement area. GTZ provided this assistance as part of a two-year emergency flood relief project. 164 Clearly the GoL’s expectation that moving the people would attract aid has been realised, but most Brao claim that despite this aid, their lives are worse off than they were in the mountains. While at this point they welcome development assistance, just as Tania Li (2007) has observed in Sulawesi, Indonesia, they want it on their own terms. Many comment that they did not need development assistance before they were resettled. People appear to be resisting consolidation efforts by gradually moving away from each other. Some of those from Vong Lakhone have, for example, separated and established a new village.

Vong Lakhone Village

Vong Lakhone is another Brao Jree community in the Nam Kong basin in Phou Vong district (Map 2.1) that has received international donor support to facilitate resettlement since part of the population that moved into Viang Xay village in 2002 decided to make a new village separate from the Focal Site in 2003. Initially, the people were all expected to resettle into Viang Xay village, but many did not like the arrangement. Apart from disliking high-density situations, many Brao were concerned that if they stayed with Viang Xay they would lose the name of their village, which is important for the people from the village. Tania Li (2007) has pointed out, in the context of her study are in Sulawesi, that keeping a village’s name when resettled is often

important to the people, as it links them to past places and associated identities. Thus, in 2003 a number of families from Vong Lakhone established a separate community downstream and on the north side of the Nam Kong River, one that they could continue to call Vong Lakhone.

However, in 2005 the local government ordered the community to resettle to the south side of the Nam Kong River, so they would be near a new road that had been constructed, and a new school being funded by the ADB’s ‘Dek Nying’ Project. Most of the families have reluctantly agreed to resettle, their third government-promoted move in recent years, but in 2006 seven families remained in the mountains near their previous village, and others are still living on the south side of the Nam Kong River. Many in the community have moved four times in the last few years, and they are beginning to wonder when they will encounter the benefits of ‘development’ that government officials continuously promise (see Escobar 1995 for some similar ideas).

**Cheung Hiang Village**

Cheung Hiang is a Brao Jree village that was resettled to the lowlands on the south side of the Nam Kong River, near the border with Cambodia, in 2003 and 2004. The population generated large surpluses of rice from swidden agriculture in the uplands before being resettled, and that is one of the main reasons they initially resisted moving. The GoL said they should move to the Viang Xay Focal Site, but they saw that the conditions there were poor, and they refused. However, they were told that they had no choice but to follow the ‘Party-government plan’ (*phen kan phak lat* in Lao). Government officials both pressured them verbally (subtle threats, which are common in Laos) into relocating and promised ‘development’ assistance once they arrived in the lowlands. The officials said that development agencies would be more willing to ‘develop them’ if they were in the lowlands. Finally, they negotiated with the GoL and agreed to move down, provided that they could remain separate from Viang Xay.

For the first year after relocating, the people mainly survived on rice stockpiled over previous years, even though they had to pay half of all the rice transported by truck from the uplands to the truck owner. The GoL did provide some families with zinc-roofing sheets upon their arrival to the lowlands, and 13 buffaloes were allocated to
support lowland agriculture, but there were not enough roofing sheets or draft animals for all 60 families in the village. Most importantly, once they arrived they realised that there was insufficient land for establishing lowland wet rice cultivation in the area. Therefore, only some families were able to develop small paddy areas near the village. To make matters worse, much of the land was contaminated of unexploded ordnance (UXOs) from US bombing in the 1960s and early 1970s (see Chapter 6), constituting a substantial threat to human life. When I visited in 2003, I was surprised that the village was situated amongst a large number of bomb craters. Since the lowlands tended to be where most of the trucks passed along the Ho Chi Minh and Sihanouk trails during the war, these landscapes are where US bombing was most intense.

In 2005 the people from Cheung Hiang were told that they would have to resettle a second time, this time next to a new road on the north side of the Nam Kong River (still in the lowlands). Once again, the people did not want to move. Despite the problems with the first resettlement site, they had already developed some lowland paddy and were planning to open up more. More importantly, the new resettlement site next to the road is in a very dry dipterocarp forest area, and the closest source of drinking or bathing water was the Nam Kong River, two kilometres away. It was an even worse location than the first resettlement site.

Despite the hesitance of the people of Cheung Hiang, government officials finally informed them that they had no choice; the road was built for people to use, so the people needed to live near it. Essentially, there needed to be people next to the road to justify its existence, even if the road was not actually of much importance to the people it was supposed to serve. The people were told to organise their houses in single lines on both sides of the road. Twenty of the village’s 60 families bent to the pressure and moved near the road in early 2005 (Photo 7.3). The others have still not moved. It is ironic that people who are frequently labeled nomadic have been the ones resisting resettlement, especially when it is being justified in the name of supporting ‘fixed occupations’.

But the Brao still sought to negotiation a better deal for them, and in mid-April 2005, a village leader who had agreed to move told me, in frustration,

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165 Ironically, in 2006 the government in Phou Vong district planned to spend 800 million kip, or about US$80,000, to build and fix roads, including the one in question.
"We did not want to move near the road until a school had been built and a secure water source had been established. But, they [government officials] told us that we had to move before those things could be provided to us. Now we are still waiting."

Despite the village headman requesting urgent help with clean water on three separate occasions in early 2005, there was no response from the government. People could not even drink jar beer in the village, as it was too far to carry water from the Nam Kong River, the closest water source, to the resettlement site. Here, their material lack of water was manifesting itself in cultural impacts. In any case, the people had little rice to make the wine anyway, as by then their rice stocks from the mountains had been depleted. The people were very disappointed that the promised benefits of development-oriented resettlement have not been realised.

These Brao continued to suffer without water for the rest of the year until wells were finally drilled for the village in 2006. But other problems remain. There is a lack of forest resources, including non-timber forest products (NTFPs) in the area, and there are few fish nearby in the dry season. There are some areas that can be developed for paddy, but that will take many years. There are no areas appropriate for swidden agriculture. Not surprisingly, there were still three families from Cheung Hiang village in the mountains in 2006, and there are still many families living south of the Nam Kong River, unwilling to move next to the road. For those Brao who have followed government directives, these dissenters are sometimes looked upon with envy.

The case of Cheung Hiang is a good example of successive resettlements in the lowlands that often occurred after the initial failure of resettlement (see Evrard & Goudineau 2004).

**Tra-oum Village**

Tra-oum is a Brao Hamong community in Phou Vong district (Map 2.1) that has faced serious problems since being resettled to the lowlands in 2003. Shortly after moving from their previous location in the mountains near Kong Mi (see Chapter 6), to their resettlement site near Vong Samphan, the Phou Vong district center, at least 12 people from the village’s 60 families died of various unidentified diseases. Like those
from Cheung Hiang, they did not have a clean source of water upon arriving at the
government-designated resettlement site. I noticed that the Brao there frequently
compared the lowlands with where they used to live near the old site of Kong Mi (Map
2.1), which is no longer populated. For example, they mentioned that streams and springs
run year round in the mountains where they used to live. Despite being promised at least
one hectare of lowland paddy fields per family upon resettling, most only received a
fraction of what they need for subsistence. In April 2005, more than 50 percent of the
houses in the ‘new village’ had been abandoned (Photo 7.4), with many people opting to
live near their lowland paddy and swidden fields away from the village proper. Once
again, people were initially expected to live close to each other, but have since separated
more by moving into their fields. However, none have dared to move back to the
mountains, although they often speak of those areas in nostalgic ways.

By 2006 more people had moved out of the village-centre, and only about 30
percent of the houses in the village proper remained occupied. Like in Cheung Hiang,
there are few forest resources or NTFPs near where they live, as the area was already
heavily logged before they were moved there, and there is a relatively high density of
people living in other nearby resettled villages (see Map 2.1). Therefore, local people still
travel back to the mountains on a regular basis to fish and collect NTFPs. The
international NGO ADRA has drilled three pump wells in the village, but people still
have insufficient land for farming. Emphasising the way the resettled Brao viewed being
moved from the mountains to the lowlands, in 2004 an old woman from Tra-oum told me
that things were difficult in “Lao”, compared to where they used to live, in “Brao” (see,
also, Chapter 4). The geographical imaginative that she evoked is important for
understanding Brao attachments to particular places and their links to identities. Another
young Brao man asked me, “How many years have you been in Muang Brao [the country
of Brao, referring to the uplands].” The way he asked the question indicated a sort of
nostalgia for the mountains, and he seemed to think that I must know a lot about Brao
because of having spent a lot of time at places where Brao knowledge is abundant. The
spatial divide of this geographical imaginative clearly has important implications, with
Brao places being frequently associated with a better life from the past, at least for the
middle aged and older generations. Thus, the discourses of geographical difference are
performative, affecting the way the Brao see themselves and their links to different landscapes.

**Houay Keo Focal Site**

In 2005 more than 100 Brao Ka-nying families—mainly from ‘Ntoom village—were relocated to the Houay Keo Focal Site, also known as the new Somboun Sub-district Focal Site (see Map 2.1), which is near the Vietnam-Cambodia border in a relatively mountainous area in the northeastern part of Phou Vong district. They were moved to an area near the place known by US pilots during the war as the ‘Bra’, in the floodplain of the Xexou River, an area that was part of the Sihanouk Trail and was thus heavily bombed during the 1960s and early 1970s (see Chapter 6). The village area was not checked for UXOs from the war, although doing so is standard practice in the Focal Site areas before resettlement takes place. Despite the plan to convert the resettled people from being swidden cultivators to becoming lowland farmers, there is only a very limited amount of land suitable for lowland paddy near the Focal Site, and almost all of it is heavily contaminated with UXO. In 2005, UXO Lao, the international donor-supported organisation responsible for removing UXO, hoped to de-UXO eight hectares of land, but there were so many bombs in the area that the work could not be completed until 2006. This land is being allocated to 16 families, but the vast majority of people may never gain access to lowland paddy land. Even the 0.5-hectare of paddy per family will not be enough to meet subsistence needs.

For those continuing to do swidden, the government is requiring that after each year for the next five years swiddens are planted with economic ‘fast-growing’ non-native tree species, but as of 2006 many villagers were resisting, fearing that they would not be able to harvest the trees planted with their labour. With government coordination, a private company is providing the tree seedlings, but few details have been provided to the Brao about the detailed plans for creating what officials consider to be ‘new forests’. Again, describing these plantations as ‘forests’ discursively justifies them in terms of forest protection and conservation, even if they are of non-native species and will actually contribute to a reduction in biodiversity rather than its protection.
Before establishing this new Somboun Sub-district Focal Site, an old resettlement area, also called ‘Houay Keo’ (and known as Dak Roo in Brao) was developed (Map 2.1). However, a couple of years ago those plans were abandoned for a few reasons. First, between 1999 and 2004 much of the land surrounding the area was owned or controlled by a Vietnamese agriculture development company called Chong Deo (Photo 7.5). During this time the company failed to develop cashew nut plantations on 500 ha of poor soils. Most of the cashew trees that were planted either died or grew very poorly, and the company eventually abandoned the venture due to not being able to fulfill its development contract with the GoL. There were rumours that cassava would be planted on the land once the cashew plantation failed, but that plan has not materialised.

Secondly, the government expected that a large amount of lowland paddy could be developed in the area, but those expectations turned out to be unrealistic, leading to large numbers of metal ploughs purchased by the government not being used as planned (Photo 7.6).

Most importantly, the stream that runs by the old resettlement area of Houay Keo (Dak Roo) used to run year round, but it does not anymore. This has resulted in serious dry season water supply problems for the people. Essentially, the government, by moving large numbers of people to the restricted area of Dak Roo, created what can be called, ‘a policy-induced Malthusian squeeze’. That is, they have been cramped into a small area, resulting in overly intensive swidden agriculture in the watershed that produces their drinking water. Much of the area has been degraded through the failed development of the cashew plantation, and the government has also allowed an excessive amount of commercial logging in the area (Photo 7.7), which has certainly had a negative impact on water resources. The result has been the degradation of the area, including the creation of large tracts of open grass and scrublands where rich forest once existed (also see forestry section below).

In August 2005, about six months after the new Somboun Sub-district Focal Site was established near the Xexou River, a massive flash flood rolled down the Xexou River and devastated it. The Focal Site was inundated at 10 am in the morning, causing general panic. The water declined by 3 pm, but not before washing 54 houses away. Fortunately, the flooding occurred during the daytime and people were able to escape to high ground.
There were no casualties. “If it had happened at night, it would have been very different”, commented a Brao woman whose house was washed away, “We were lucky to survive the flood.” Since the flooding, many families have not dared to return to the area, or try to make new houses in places that were flooded. Two groups of ten and 20 families have moved to new settlements near their swidden fields and away from the Xexou River. Those who have stayed behind have built their new houses on higher ground. The chief of the resettlement area—a stern and heavily Laoised Brao who was brought up in Attapeu town and does not speak more than a few words of Brao—initially tried to organise the village in a grid formation, as was the case with the old Houay Keo Focal Site, but after the flood the grid fell into disarray. The new Houay Keo resettlement area is not off to a very good start, and it will be an uphill battle to convince people to move back to the area, considering the many UXO under the village site, the absence of suitable lowland farmland nearby, the lack of suitable places for doing swidden (since most have already been claimed), the forced tree planting project, and especially the considerable risk of flash floods.

Internal Conflict about Internal Resettlement

Many Brao people are feeling troubled and confused about the resettlement situation, and this is especially true for Brao government officials, those Brao who have been collaborating with the Lao colonial powers. On the one hand, most Brao officials recognise that there are severe problems associated with internal resettlement. However, as government officials, many feel obligated to uphold or even push government policy. One Brao official, with whom I have worked frequently, once said to me, “The Brao are being moved to the lowlands because they have been poor in the mountains for centuries. How will anything change if they don’t move to the lowlands?” This fits with observations made by Cooper & Packard (1997), who found locals working for development organisations or as local government officials are often particularly interested in changing themselves and especially members of their ethnic group to fit the development paradigm.

Some villagers have even begun to believe the rhetoric of resettlement and development themselves. This internalisation, or normalisation, process is not unusual in
cases when people have been oppressed for long periods; eventually they decide that they would rather be the oppressors than the oppressed, or at least, they find it safer to adopt the government line. There are examples of situations where resettled Brao have emphasised their national identities more than their ethnic identities, at least in certain situations, especially when in contact with ethnic Lao government officials. Leif Jonsson wrote, in relation to the situation in Ratanakiri in Cambodia, that one of the reasons there is no local resistance to state penetration is because, “local people with leadership ambitions and skills have already taken on the state and the national community, and fill various leadership positions. For them, the more uplanders are brought into the orbits of the national community the better” (1997: 560).

One of the GoL’s strategies has been to try to give the general impression that the internal resettlement of the Brao and other minorities is leading to modernisation and development, even though there is little evidence to support these assertions. It is amazing how powerful modernising discourses can be in obscuring real-life situations. Indicative of how discourses are being deployed, in 2005 Lao PDR celebrated the 30th anniversary of the establishment of the regime, and in order to promote the achievements of the government since 1975, the Attapeu provincial TV station created a 30-minute video. One resettled Brao man was interviewed for the documentary, but the government officials that made the video gave him a Lao language script to read on camera. Clearly, they were not confident that he would make ‘politically correct’ statements if left to his own devises. He was filmed looking downward, trying with some difficulty to read the script, reporting that things are better now than when he did “hai leuan loi” (‘nomadic swidden’ in Lao). If the scene had not been so pitiful, it would have been humorous. But interestingly, this sort of strategy, as unsophisticated as it may be, appears to be effective. When I watched the video with a number of Brao people and government officials, nobody laughed.

While Brao villagers are resisting attempts to stop them from doing swidden agriculture and resettling them to the lowlands, it is surprising how many seem to be going along with government policy, even though they are suffering due to resettlement. They appear reconciled to government rule over them, possibly a consequence of living under years of centralised planning. They have lived under authoritarian rule for years,
including the threat of violence. This has made them more passive and fearful, even if violence is not common now. Furthermore, the Brao have long been under the power of the Lao, who the government represents to many Brao, so this is a continuation of historical processes of Lao domination (see Chapters 3 and 5). Like government officials, many villagers believe that objecting to government policy is not going to gain them much. This is important, as the government often emphasises its own importance in delivering development, even when international aid agencies are actually paying the bill. If they want to maintain good relations with the state, they know what they must do or at least say to fit in. This is neither full acceptance nor full resistance, and responses often represent a sense of resignation that nothing can be done to change the situation. The Brao sometimes take a middle of the road position, in which they continue to do swidden in the uplands outside of their villages in the lowlands. I found this to be the case in Phya Keo village in Sanxay district, Attapeu province; Khoua Touay, Houay Ko and Phon Sa-at villages in Champasak province (Map 2.1) and elsewhere.

**Resettlement—Not only a Village Affair**

Resettlement is clearly ubiquitous in Phou Vong district, to such an extent that it is not only taking place at the village level, but has also been attempted at the district level. Lt. General Choumali Saignason is a Central Politburo member, and the current President of the Lao PDR. He is an ethnic Lao originally from Xekaman village, Samakhixay district, a community with a history of oppressing Brao people. In 2001 General Choumali traveled to Phou Vong district and, to everyone’s surprise, suggested that the district centre be moved from its present location near Treo Stream to Viang Xay, adjacent to the Nam Kong River, over 20 km away (Map 7.1). He felt that the district should be located near to a larger water source, as that would be critical for establishing a larger population. Initially, none of the Brao, including local government officials, dared to openly object to the idea, and planning for the move was obediently initiated. But Brao government officials were not eager to comply, as many had built solid houses that could not be easily moved, and after a few years of apparently taking the idea seriously, the plan was quietly set aside in 2005, even though a brand new concrete district education office was built at Viang Xay in anticipation of the district centre’s relocation. It was
used just a few months before the officials abandoned it and moved back into the old education office.

Map 7.1. Vong Samphan, Viang Xay and other villages in the centre of Phou Vong district, Attapeu province

Choumali ordered that the people from Somboun sub-district, which includes the Houay Keo Focal Site area in northeastern Phou Vong district, to move next to the Xekaman River near the district centre of Xaysettha, but that plan has been abandoned due to local opposition. One ethnic Brao government official, who asked to not be identified, said that he thought that the government wanted the people to move out of the uplands so that they could fully take over the Brao land there. In at least some ways, he may well be right. He pointed out that the ethnic Lao from Xekaman village frequently steal their buffaloes and cheat them. Choumali’s relatives also operate large-scale logging operations in Attapeu. As is frequently the case, the Brao tend to frame things in terms of ethnicity, seeing themselves as victims of outside power.
House Design and Spatial Change amongst the Brao

Apart from reorganising Brao villages, territories and agriculture, the GoL has imposed governmentality on the Brao at different scales, such as through manipulating ‘intimate’ spaces, such as their private dwellings or houses.

Brao people historically had particular types of houses (Hoffet 1933b; Matras-Troubetzkoy 1975; Matras-Guin 1992), although there have long been considerable differences between different Brao houses (see, also, Chapter 4). As Bourdieu (1979) described for the Kabyle people in Algeria in the 1960s, the Brao have tended to organise their houses spatially in ways that are closely linked to social practices. For example, because they are historically swidden cultivators, the Brao have never built houses with the purpose of inhabiting them for many years. While the Lao tend to invest much of their resources in their houses, they have traditionally kept their wealth in the form of mobile items, such as rice beer jars and musical gongs (see Chapter 3). This section indicates that the government wants to assimilate minorities into mainstream society.

The way the GoL has addressed the housing issue provides a clear indication of the importance that officials put on changing the spatial orientation of the Brao at various levels. They want to instigate social change through spatial transformation.

The discourses surrounding housing in Laos are important. It is common to hear ethnic Lao government officials commenting on the small-size, poor condition or inappropriate design of Brao houses. I have often heard ethnic Lao people refer to them as “chicken coops”, a sort of joking insult that indicates their contempt for the Brao, through implying that some houses are inappropriate for human habitation. They rarely consider that the Brao put much less material value on their houses compared to the Lao.

The importance of having certain types of houses is emphasised at various levels of government, even at the Ministry of Information and Culture. Indicative of this, the Ministry has established the programme, “Build Cultural People, Families and Villages”. According to a Lao language pamphlet advertising the programme that I acquired from the Information and Culture Office in Sanamxay district, Attapeu province, there are standards and steps for achieving the designations of ‘cultural person’, ‘cultural family’

166 Kaxouang Thaleng Khao Vathana Them (Ministry of Information and Culture) 2006. Banda Matathan Kan Sang Khan, Khawp Khowa le Ban Vatthanatham (The Various Standards for Building Cultural People, Families and Villages), Department of Mass Culture, Vientiane.
and ‘cultural village’. The first qualification for becoming a ‘cultural family’ is that the family “must have its own house, from the level of semi-permanent up. People in the family must also have stable professions, and not cause difficulties for the [village] administration.” The GoL classifies houses into three levels, ‘temporary’ (soua khao), ‘semi-permanent’ (kheung thavone), and ‘permanent’ (thavone). The first is a hut (either raised off the ground or on the ground) made of unprocessed wood and bamboo, usually with a grass roof. The second type has a zinc roof and usually includes some sawn wooden planks, especially for floorboards. The third is made using sawn wood or cement. A ‘cultural village’ “must have 70 percent or more families that fulfill all five criteria for being cultural families”. The goal is clearly to generate internal pressure against those ‘lagging behind’ others in the village to meet the qualifications for designation as a ‘cultural village’.

To the GoL, the construction of ‘permanent houses’ is an important symbol and is indicative of a number of other important social and spatial changes. First, if Brao have ‘permanent houses’, it implies that they must have taken up ‘permanent occupations’ (asip khong thi in Lao), which essentially means either adopting wet-rice cultivation or some-type of perennial plantation-oriented agriculture. Governments all over the world have long tried to ‘fix’ people so as to make them more identifiable for the purposes of administration, taxes, control, and civilising (see, for example, Scott 1998), and this was the idea of French administrators like Antonin Baudenne (see Chapter 5). Second, it indicates that the investment in a solid wooden house is great enough that it is unlikely that it will be easily abandoned. This gives government officials confidence that the people are not about to move away; they are essentially seen as being ‘tamed’. Third, having a ‘permanent house’ indicates that the Brao are becoming integrated into ‘Lao society’. In other words, they are becoming more like the ethnic Lao. Lao development discourses are certainly influenced by global development discourses, but they are also flavoured by Lao cultural and historical factors.

The fourth criterion for being a ‘cultural family’ is notable in the Brao context; “the family must live a clean life, not believe in superstitions [ngom ngai in Lao], protect the good culture and traditions, and respect the rules and laws.” Similarly, the third designation for a ‘cultural village’ is “the village must conserve, protect and promote
cultural heritage and good culture and traditions of one’s ethnic group, of the local area, and of the nation. It must abolish all superstitious beliefs.” This indicates how the rhetoric in Laos both claims to be pro-ethnic culture, while insisting that only ‘good culture’ be retained and that Animist beliefs (i.e., “superstitious beliefs”) be discarded. Essentially, it is cultural protection with a redundancy clause.

Transforming Housing amongst the Brao of Phou Vong

In Phou Vong district the GoL has done a number of tangible things to promote the spatial change of Brao housing. To begin with, all Brao families are allowed—and encouraged—to cut and saw up to five cubic metres of wood in order to make a ‘permanent house’. I have heard government officials in Phou Vong, including Brao officials who have clearly internalised many of the government’s ideas about development and houses, berate other Brao because many have not taken advantage of this opportunity, and still live in ‘temporary houses’. Although the Brao who do not make strong wooden houses are often called ‘lazy’, the reality is that many do not know how to saw wood, or do not have saws (Photo 7.8). Historically the Brao did not use sawn wood to make their houses. They used non-sawn poles, bamboo and rattan. Furthermore, they are so poor as a result of internal resettlement that they rarely have the resources to invest in housing, which, in any case, is rarely their first priority, especially when they do not have enough food to eat. Once again, this fits with the findings of many others who have argued that those being controlled often appropriate and internalise the visions of those dominating them, even if they may also, at least at times, resist these visions (see Pigg 1992). This is especially noticeable amongst Brao officials, but also for Brao village headmen and others who are frequently in contact with government officials. It is the least noticeable amongst those villagers without any official positions within government-created structures, but even they exhibit, albeit generally to a lesser degree, a certain degree of acceptance of the norms recognised by the government. In fact, nobody is totally outside of the influence of the state.

The government has emphasised the importance of permanent housing by offering zinc-roofing sheets to those who are resettled from mountainous areas (Photo 7.9). Having zinc roofing is strongly symbolic of development in Laos, and is often a key
indicator that people are no longer ‘poor’. It is used both by the government and even international aid organisations in Laos. For example, in Oudomxay province, in northern Laos, government officials have removed recently resettled families from ‘poverty’ lists after they were given roofing sheets. No other factors were apparently taken into account, even though the people had less food to eat than when they were supposedly poor in the mountains. Roofs are powerful symbols of wealth, even though those with zinc roofs often complain that their houses are too hot in the hot season.

The Attapeu provincial government has gone so far as to organise a particular project to teach recently resettled Brao people in Phou Vong how to make ‘permanent’ Lao-style houses. The Social Welfare Division was responsible for this initiative, which they implemented in 2004-5 in the Brao villages of Viang Xay and Tra-oum, both of which were recently resettled (see above). Ethnic Lao people were hired to build these ‘model houses’ (heuan toua bep in Lao) in the middle of the villages. The sawn wood and other materials were all paid for through the project, and the men in each village were expected to work with the ethnic Lao builders so as to learn how to make ‘permanent houses’. There was never any mention of the socio-cultural value of old Brao house designs. For example, Brao women often sleep in special rooms built near the front doors of their houses (sanen or ding biang in Brao), in order to make it convenient for young men to come and court the young women in the nights when everyone else in the house are asleep. However, modern Lao houses are not designed with this in mind, as this sort of courting is unacceptable in the ethnic Lao social context.

Each of the ‘Lao houses’ built by the project was raised high off the ground, as is typical for Lao houses, and all were made entirely of sawn wood (deemed to be something worth achieving). Nails were employed to hammer the houses together. No bamboo, rattan or other local materials were used. Zinc roofing sheets were provided, of course. Once the houses were completed, they were left in the villages as symbols of modernisation, altars of progress, examples of what the Brao should be striving to achieve.

Although the Attapeu government has significant fiscal constraints, it felt that the housing issue was important enough to invest some of its limited resources on directly

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167 Emily Hicks, World Food Program, pers. comm. 2004.
promoting the construction of ‘Lao houses’. The local government clearly sees the reorganisation of Brao housing spaces as concomitant with the social reorganisation of the Brao, and their ‘development’ and integration into Lao society. Lawrence (1996), however, has pointed out that research has shown that differently designed houses sometimes show similar patterns of use based on societal trends. Therefore, one must be careful not to assume that the social and spatial use of house will definitely change just because house designs change, which appears to be the assumption of the GoL. However, it is probably a step towards achieving assimilation and acculturation.

There are still many so-called ‘temporary houses’ in Phou Vong, which indicates that many Brao have not yet adopted Lao housing patterns. However, it would be misleading to suggest that these ‘traditionalists’ (in terms of houses) represent resistance to Lao-style houses. In fact, the poverty caused by internal resettlement is the main reason why most have not adopted Lao houses. They are expensive, and the Brao are not adept at sawing wood or making those types of houses.

In Phou Vong, none of the Brao with whom I have talked to bemoan the change in housing patterns being promoted by the GoL. Instead, they see the adoption of Lao houses as a logical part of the overall societal transformation that they are going through now that they are in the lowlands. They certainly see this change in spatial terms, and one Brao man commented to me that, “When we lived in ‘Brao’ we made Brao houses; now we live in ‘Lao’ so we want to make Lao houses.” The above distinction between living in ‘Brao’, as compared to ‘Lao’, has already been mentioned above, and in Chapter 4, and is an important identity factor. There are no exact physical boundaries between these two spaces, but the distinction between them exists in people’s minds, especially amongst Brao who have recently been settled to the lowlands. Therefore, the Brao typically conceive that when they are resettled to the lowlands they are no longer occupying the physical or associated social space that they call ‘Brao’, but rather a space that is both geographically—and socially and culturally—Lao. Thus, many accept that now that they live in a Lao space, it makes perfect sense for them to abandon Brao forms of social and spatial organisation in favour of the Lao forms that come with the ‘new’ space. However, the Brao continue to conduct certain Animist rituals when new houses are built (Photo 7.10). Furthermore, I observed all the male population of Viang Xay village lifting up
and moving a ‘permanent house’ from one side of the village to another. However, nobody seemed to recognise how ironic this was, considering the government’s idea that solid houses will keep people from moving (Photo 7.11). Therefore building a ‘Lao house’ does not imply the total adoption of Lao spaces, just a partial acceptance.

This fits with the study of resettlement conducted in Attapeu by Lucas (1997). She found that only 17 percent of recently resettled families retained houses such as they had in the mountains. 40 percent claimed Lao houses were more suitable for their new situations, or spaces, 27 percent said it was easier to make Lao houses, and 14 percent claimed to be following “advice”, apparently from government officials. It is interesting to note that while resettled Brao have often felt that it was appropriate to abandon traditional house designs, there appears to be a sense amongst many Brao that there is a difference between village resettlement spaces and agricultural field spaces. Lucas (1997) noticed, particularly for the Brao, that they tended to maintain traditional housing designs for their field houses, even while abandoning traditional housing designs in the villages. I have found this to be the case for the Brao, both in Laos and Cambodia. It may well be that agricultural spaces are considered to be more ‘Brao’ than village spaces, since the latter are where the Brao mainly encounter ethnic Lao people and government officials. The villages are more associated with government administrative power.

Moving the Hmong to Phou Vong District

The following example shows that the Brao have not only been socially and spatially impacted by being resettled, but have also been impacted by people from another very different ethnic group being resettled into an area where they are living. This sort of situation frequently occurs in the context of colonialism. Cultural differences have certainly had a critical impact on how situation have developed.

In late 2000 and early 2001 the GoL, as part of its drive to eradicate swidden agriculture, devised an Agriculture Development Master Plan for the country. It identified three provinces as still having substantial unused lowland areas suitable for wet-rice paddy conversion: Khammouane, Bolikhamxay and Attapeu. Due to the unavailability of land for lowland rice cultivation in northern Laos, GoL officials decided to relocate people without paddy land in the north to places with land in central and
southern Laos. In early 2001 five ethnic Hmong leaders from northern Laos were asked to go to Attapeu to determine whether the land there would be suitable for their people. The Hmong leaders were apparently happy with what they found, but when senior Attapeu government officials realised that the Central government was hoping to relocate 100,000 people from the north (mainly from Xieng Khouang and Houaphan provinces) to Attapeu, they became concerned and stopped the plan. Ethnic Hmong people had never lived in Attapeu and the provincial officials were concerned that conflicts would develop with the people already living there (Baird 2002; 2003b).

During the period in 2001 when this large-scale resettlement programme was being considered, 13 ethnic Hmong families were resettled from Bolikhamxay province in central Laos to Phou Vong district (Baird 2003b). The Brao found the Hmong to be very industrious and were impressed by their ability to successfully farm areas dominated by imperata grasses. They also admired the hunting skills of the Hmong.

However, the Hmong and the Brao did not get along well. For one, the Hmong were socially closed to the Brao, who were interested in making contact with the Hmong. For example, Brao men were not allowed to talk to young unmarried Hmong women, and the Hmong refused to allow their unique varieties of chickens (which they had brought with them) to be raised by the Brao. They would not sell the Brao live chickens. There were also conflicts when the Hmong claimed particular forest areas and streams as their own, and refused to allow neighbouring Brao people to fish, hunt or gather forest products in those areas, even though the Brao had customarily tenure over those areas. The Brao reported finding the Hmong to be aggressive, generally not very friendly, and lacking in solidarity or “samakhi” with the Brao, although the Hmong themselves were quite united.

Brao government officials from Phou Vong were shocked by the conflicts that developed between the Brao and the Hmong, and soon came to the conclusion that the Hmong should return to Bolikhamxay. But the Hmong were not eager to return, and it took considerable pressure from the local government to convince them to leave. Seven families left at the end of 2002 or early 2003 (Baird 2003b), but it took until early 2004 for the remaining six families to leave. Government attempts at colonising Brao spaces with Hmong had failed.
The Economic Triangle Development Initiative

There are a number of important international groupings of significance to Laos, of which the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the Mekong River Commission (MRC), and the ADB-initiated Greater Mekong Sub-Region (GMS) are probably the most significant. However, a discussion of the changes in Brao spatial organisation would be incomplete without at least touching on another grouping that is particularly relevant to the Brao, since they are at the geographical centre of it. The newest transboundary development initiative to gain momentum among many high-level government officials, politicians, international diplomats and business interests is called the ‘Economic Triangle Development Initiative’, or ‘Sam Liam Phathanna Setthakith’ in Lao. The idea first emerged at a meeting in Vientiane in 1999, at which time the Prime Ministers of Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam agreed that “the consolidation and strengthening of solidarity, cooperation and mutual assistance amongst the three countries would be a significant factor for the stability and development of each country.” However, it was not until January 25-26, 2002—during the second meeting of the three prime ministers in Ho Chi Minh City—that the initiative began to be seriously discussed. The leaders envisioned increased economic development cooperation between the seven provinces of Kon Tum, Gia Lai, and Dak Lak in Vietnam; Attapeu and Sekong in Laos; and Ratanakiri and Stung Treng in Cambodia. This encompasses a combined 85,648 km² of territory and a total population of over 3.7 million people (Engelbert 2004) (Map 7.2). Subsequently, Salavan province in Laos has been added to the initiative, at their request (Deputy Governor, Sekong Province, pers. comm. February 2005). According to Engelbert (2004: 229), “The official goal of this most recent Southeast Asian development triangle is to increase trilateral co-operation in order to bridge the gap between the more highly developed Vietnam on the one side, and less-developed Laos and Cambodia on the other.” One might look at it from a cynical point of view and say it is an attempt by Vietnam to gain more access to the resources of neighbouring Laos and Cambodia. Certainly it would not be the first time that Vietnam would have shown what could well be called colonial aspirations in neighbouring Laos and Cambodia.
The Prime Ministers of Cambodia, Lao PDR and Vietnam officially signed the agreement for the Economic Triangle Development Initiative at a November 2004 elevation in metres above sea level.

Map 7.2. The provinces in Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam included in the Economic Triangle Development Initiative.
ASEAN meeting in Ho Chi Minh City, expecting it to bring increased agriculture support to the tri-border area and ease cross-border trade problems between the three neighbouring countries. Efforts to accelerate economic development cooperation have received a significant boost from the agreement. The Government of Vietnam has produced a ‘Development Triangle Master Plan’, which indicates that the border areas between Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia are to become a priority for development cooperation. The key focuses of the initiative are to develop a transport network and a transmission grid to facilitate the sale of electricity, and to support tourism, human resource training, and health care. For promoting tourism the slogan, “Three Nations—One Destination” has been proposed.

At a 2004 meeting of the leaders of the three countries held in Siem Reap, Cambodia, Vietnamese Prime Minister Phan was quoted as saying, “The three countries should coordinate closer [sic] to develop each country’s potential to help the triangle escape from backwardness.” He proposed that the priority should be given to infrastructure development, electricity transmission networks, economic development zones at border crossings, human resources development, increasing investment capital for projects, and the establishment of coordination mechanisms between the countries in the triangle. Clearly, neo-classical forms of modernisation are the goal.

In 2005 Sok Siphana, the Secretary of State for the Ministry of Commerce in Cambodia, speaking about the Economic Triangle Development Initiative, stated that each of the three countries has remote border provinces that are partly cut off from their own country’s economy and can benefit from each other. “Work is underway to incorporate the northeastern provinces of Ratanakiri, Mondolkiri and Stung Treng into economic partnership with bordering provinces in Laos and Vietnam.” He commented

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169 Shaw & Prak 2005. Ibid.
171 Cambodian Online 2004. Ibid.
173 VOV 2004. Ibid.
174 Shaw & Prak 2005. Ibid: 1
that roads would be built and more business would be promoted between the provinces. Ly Quang Bich, Political Counselor at the Vietnam Embassy, said, "[The agreement] will be a cooperation [sic] in planting trees and preserving the forests."\textsuperscript{176} Formal documentation of exactly what kinds of development the agreement will bring has not yet been made available to the public.\textsuperscript{177} Thus, the triangle initiative is about the three countries cooperating to help each gain control of their respective margins.

In the spirit of this new development initiative, one of the large new sawmills built in Attapeu province near the new Route 18B to Vietnam is named and owned by the ‘Economic Triangle Development Company’. Relatives of the same Lao President who wanted the capital of Phou Vong district relocated own it.

While the Economic Triangle Initiative has not yet had a strong direct impact on the region, including the Brao, numerous strategies and plans for developing the region are being formulated, with some having potentially important spatial implications. Just the idea that such an initiative is underway has given the business sector a boost and land prices have risen in anticipation. According to the Deputy Governor of Sekong province, Mr. Phonephet Khiulavong, the Japanese government initially responded favourably to funding part of the US$1.5 billion plan. However, in early 2006 it appeared that the Japanese government had developed some serious reservations about taking the lead in supporting the plan. But in yet another turn of events, in early 2007 the Japanese International Cooperation Agency (JICA) announced that it would fund at least part of the plan, including road construction.

Re-Arranging Brao Spaces: The Role of Roads

"pai Attapeu...pai leo baw yak ma...ma leo baw yak pai" (Going to Attapeu, if you’ve already returned [from Attapeu] you don’t want to come again, if you’re already there you don’t want to go back [to where you came from]).

Saying in Attapeu\textsuperscript{178}

One of the tangible changes that is directly affecting the Brao, and is at least partially related to the Economic Triangle Development Initiative, is the dramatic

\textsuperscript{177} Shaw & Prak 2005. \textit{Ibid}: 1
expansion and improvement of road networks. This is not to say that all the roads in Brao areas are in good condition, or even that every village is accessible by road. However, road access has increased considerably. In some cases small roads have replaced footpaths, in others all-season highways have replaced seasonal roads. For example, in 2001 a new road was built between Phou Vong district centre and the Nam Kong River in the south of the district. A Vietnamese company built it in exchange for logging rights in Phou Vong.\textsuperscript{179} The paving of Route 16 from Attapeu province to Sekong province, with ADB funding (MAF & STEA 2003), represents a significant change for Attapeu. This road has had a huge spatial impact on the Brao by significantly reducing travel time to Attapeu town.

Indicative of how much the transportation situation has changed in recent years, a Lao man operating a private transportation service in a Brao area said, “Before there were more people than vehicles. Now there are more vehicles than people. There are 23 transporting people between Attapeu and Sanamxay every week now. Each one only gets one turn a week. There are four trips a day.”

Roads have had a significant impact on many aspects of Brao village organisation. As already indicated, now that there are roads, people are encouraged to locate their houses right beside them. When there were no roads, circular villages made more sense, but now that there are roads the spatial organisation of villages is becoming more linear, with roads becoming a new and dominant feature in Brao village geography (Photo 7.12). It is making long distance travel possible over relatively short periods of time. One Brao official from Phou Vong district said, “People are redefining their space. It used to take seven days to go places that it now takes just a day.” Certainly, people’s perception of space is changing. It is much like what Harvey (1989) called time-space compression.

**Route 18B**

The construction of Route 18B up the previously remote mountains to the east to Kon Tum, Vietnam (see Map 2.1), represents one of the most significant spatial changes

\textsuperscript{179} According to local officials, the deal was very lucrative for the Vietnamese, but this was the only way Laos could afford the road. The road did not have to pass any mountains or large hills and was fairly straightforward to build.
ever experienced by the Brao, especially Brao Ka-nying from Xaysettha and Phou Vong districts. For one, accessibility in Xaysettha and northern Phou Vong district to the provincial capital and even Pakse and Vientiane has greatly increased. Secondly, the construction of the road has been integrated into GoL internal resettlement plans, and therefore there have been attempts to move Brao villages next to the road. For example, Hat Xan village was moved adjacent to the road in 2003-4. The government wanted Boung Vay village to move there, but the people managed to resist. One Brao from Boung Vay told me, "The place next to the road is too hot, and there is little shade, water or forest products there."

One of the key purposes of this road is to develop the 'East-West Economic Corridor' connecting Thailand to deep-sea ports in Danang, Dung Quat and Qui Nhon in central Vietnam, via southern Laos. In November 2001, when the project first began, it was expected to take 36 months to complete and cost US$35 million, which would be provided to Laos by the Government of Vietnam through low-interest soft loans based on official development assistance. In July 2004, it was announced that the second phase of the construction of Route 18B from Km 37 to Km 113 in Attapeu province to Bo Y, the border with Vietnam, was well underway. The second phase of the construction was 67 km long. From Attapeu town to the Vietnamese border, 18 small bridges and three large ones were required. Two of the largest bridges, including the only bridge crossing the Sekong River and another crossing the Xekaman, were completed in 2003. All the bridges were to be finished by the end of 2004. However, there were a series of delays before the project was finished on April 15, 2006.

Apart from time delays, its price tag rose from US$35 million to US$48 million. During the inauguration, Deputy Prime Minister Khoan of Vietnam said that he believed that Route 18B would help develop the great potential of Laos' southern region as well as Vietnam’s Central Highlands and central region, contributing to poverty

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181 Ibid.
reduction and improving the living conditions of the local people.\textsuperscript{184} Development and roads are closely associated in the prevalent discourses.

**Roads and the ADB**

Although the changes taking place are very significant, Milloy & Payne (1997: 413) pointed out that generally in Laos, "There is slight concern on [sic] the effects these roads will have on the rural and ethnic people." Indicative of this, the ADB is planning to support a project to upgrade a 54 km section of road between Xaysettha and Sanxay districts in Attapeu province. This initiative would require the resettlement of 84 households, some of which are populated by ethnic Brao people from Phya Keo village in Sanxay district, as well as the taking of some private and common lands adjacent to the road. This US$6.5 million project was originally expected to begin in 2005 and take three years to complete, but it has been delayed for unknown reasons. The ADB determined that the mainly ethnic minority communities along the road (there are 14 villages with almost 7,000 people in them—76 percent being ethnic minorities) would be vulnerable to the impacts of road improvements, particularly because of their low literacy and numeracy levels. This triggered the need for an ‘Ethnic Minority Development Plan’ as required by the ADB’s 1999 ‘Policy on Indigenous People’. The ADB’s 1995 ‘Policy on Involuntary Resettlement’ was triggered. However, because the ADB found that the ethnic minorities are often living amongst non-ethnic minorities, the ADB decided to call these plans ‘Community Development Plans’ rather than ‘Ethnic Minority Development Plans’ (ADB 2003).

The ADB’s plans appear poorly thought-out, and thoroughly ‘rendered technical’. Apart from providing compensation for losses, the ADB decided that the poorest ethnic minorities would best be served by being provided with literacy and numeracy support as well as marketing and small business skills training, even though it seems likely that formal adult literacy and business training are far from the highest priorities for these ethnic minority farmers. This would help move them towards being ‘non-ethnic’ with regard to the consequences of road improvement. That is, by educating them and erasing their ‘ignorance’ they could enter the category of ‘beneficiaries’ from road improvement.

\textsuperscript{184} VOV 2006. \textit{Ibid.}
It would help them realise ADB’s neoliberal vision of using the roads they fund to provide locals with more access to markets. The ADB agreed to support a number of recently resettled villagers living along the road by digging fish ponds for them and providing support for ‘food-for-work’ to expand rice fields, since villagers along the road are not able to grow enough rice for subsistence. There does not appear to have been any consideration of the initiative’s potential negative impacts on natural wetlands and the livelihoods of the poorest, particularly ethnic minorities (ADB 2003).

The ADB road project did, however, fund a ‘Social Action Plan’ that includes HIV/AIDS awareness-raising activities, ‘other measures against human trafficking’ and ‘traffic safety and land rights recognition’. The ADB recognises that one of the negative impacts of this project will be increased safety concerns, due to a high volume of traffic and higher speeds. The ADB claims that it disseminated all the information about the project in the form of a written brochure in Lao language, but considering the low literacy rate of the people that will be affected (based on the ADB’s own findings), using written brochures to reach mostly illiterate affected people seems ill-conceived at best.

The ADB has not adequately considered how the upgrading of the road between Xaysettha and Sanxay districts might support the new Focal Site for resettlement being developed there, even though the Focal Site is mentioned in the ADB’s ‘Community Resettlement Plan’. The ADB seems to believe that the district government has the capacity and the resources to officially deal with any grievances or complaints that locals might have about the resettlement process (ADB 2003). The justification for this conclusion is unclear.

While the ADB has recognised that the road project will result in cultural impacts, they have failed to consider how those types of impacts should be compensated for or mitigated. Given the ADB’s narrow definition of compensation as “payments in cash or kind for an asset to be required or affected by a project at replacement cost” (ADB 2003: ii), it is not surprising that no compensation is suggested in lieu of the expected negative cultural impacts. To the ADB, compensation appears to only be about material things.
A Road to Cambodia?

Rumours have emerged that a new road will be built to Cambodia from Phou Vong district beginning in 2008. It would certainly have a massive impact on the human geography of the Brao. But this plan is far from certain, and even if a road were to be built to the border, it would be very difficult to continue on into Cambodia, across the Sesan River, and onto the capital of Ratanakiri province, Ban Lung. The proposed route is very mountainous, and it would be quite difficult and expensive to build. Route 1J, as it is known, would pass through important wildlife areas within Virachey National Park, one of Cambodia’s most important protected areas (see Chapter 8 for details about the park). It seems unlikely that the plan will actually develop as some expect, but MAF & STEA (2003) report that a team from the Japanese government visited Phou Vong twice to look into possibilities for supporting the construction of the road.

The Paths to Cambodia

One of the strange things about the spatial relationship between the Brao in Laos and Cambodia is not how much easier it is for them to contact each other, now that road transportation has improved, but rather how much more difficult it is compared to what it was during the French period. Gregory (2004) has made the point that time-space compression is not only bringing people closer together, but that situations are frequently influx, and involve both the widening and narrowing of time-space. While the Brao once living near each other on both sides of the border near, it is now a three to five day walk through thick jungle between Brao villages in Laos to reach Brao villages in Cambodia, and that is only when one knows the forest well (Map 7.3). Therefore, few people make the journey. In this case conceptual space has shrunk, not expanded. In Laos, war and internal resettlement has resulted in Brao villages that used to be located in the mountains along the border with Cambodia being moved to the northwest out of the mountains at least as far as the Nam Kong River. On the Cambodia side of the border, people have been moved to the south to near the Sesan River. This began with Norodom Sihanouk’s Khmerisation programme, and later as a result of the Khmer Rouge’s draconian efforts to reorganise Cambodia (see Chapter 6). Most recently, the Brao have been prevented from
returning to areas near the border with Laos by the creation of Virachey National Park in Cambodia (see Chapter 8). While many Brao still go to the forests near the Lao border to
hunt, fish and collect NTFPs, Kavet villagers report that one of the reasons why traveling through the forest near the border is much more difficult than it was before is the decline of elephant populations, since the pachyderms used to create wide paths that the Brao made use of to move around in the forest. Brao elders often state that they would like to re-establish the elephant herds and the associated paths so they could easily travel to visit relatives on the other side of the Lao-Cambodia border, since most have not been able to meet for many years. They talk about wanting to re-establish the paths that the Brao built as part of their corvée labour contribution during the French period, as these paths crossed between Laos and Cambodia (see Chapter 5). However, the political will that would be required to do this is far beyond the influence of the Brao villagers. Certainly it is not on the agenda of the Economic Development Triangle Initiative. Thus, while political and economic changes, and the transformation of the natural environment, have come together to open certain spatial channels, while cutting off others.

**Commercial Logging**

Commercial logging has had an important impact on Brao social and spatial organisation in southern Laos in recent years. The situation is quite different from what is happening in adjacent parts of Cambodia, where legal commercial logging has generally declined since the late 1990s (see Chapter 8). In Attapeu province, however, more logging is happening than ever before. I overheard one ethnic Lao in Xekaman village say, “If any [Buddhist] temples need wood, they better get it soon, because before long it will be all gone. The Vietnamese are taking everything.”

In Phou Vong district, in particular, large-scale logging by Vietnamese operators working for Lao companies with government-approved concessions has been ubiquitous in recent years. In 2003, for example, Route 18A to Vietnam was lined with thousands of large logs cut from adjacent forests, and when we stayed in Brao villages adjacent to the road, such as Dak Joor, we could hardly sleep at night due to the constant passing of logging trucks throughout the night, all on their way to Vietnam.

There have, however, been conflicts between Brao villagers and Vietnamese loggers. In particular, there are often problems with loggers cutting more logs than their government quotas allow. In one case in Viang Xay village, I observed the headman
trying to stop logging after it was discovered that a company that had already filled its quota had returned to do additional logging. I heard that the Brao head of Sai Den village confiscated a number of chainsaws belonging to Vietnamese loggers who had cut more logs than their quotas allowed them. However, for the most part villagers feel powerless to do much, especially if permission from the district has been granted.

It appears that government officials at the district and provincial levels, including many Brao, have been complicit in approving various logging operations. Most have personally benefited as a result of these logging operations. I heard many examples of logging-related corruption in Brao areas during my research.

In one particular case, in 2005, I was told by Brao people working for the border police in Ratanakiri province, Cambodia, that there had been quite a lot of commercial logging happening on the Lao side of the Lao-Cambodia border. Later that month when I visited Phou Vong district I asked the Brao deputy district chief about this logging, as I had already heard that there was not supposed to be any new logging taking place on the Lao side of the border. He was a bit surprised and unsettled by my question, and hastily responded that there was no logging taking place on the Lao side of the border. He said that no logs had been exported to Vietnam that year. He then stated that the trees were being cut on the Cambodian side of the border, and that the Cambodians were allowing their export. He said they were able to get away with it because the border between Laos and Cambodia is not yet clear. He suggested that there might be logging taking place by Cambodians on Lao territory. However, according to Dr. Mongkhol Sasorith, the chief legal advisor for the Department of Treaties and Legal Affairs of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the Lao PDR, who I interviewed in February 2007, the part of the border between Phou Vong and neighbouring Taveng district, where the logging took place, is not contested. There is no reason why the border should not be reasonably clear. It appears that some officials from either Laos or Cambodia, or maybe both, are trying to manufacture border ambiguity as a way of gaining financially from logging operations that they have unofficially authorised, but which have not been approved at the central level. This is another example, apart from the ones provided in earlier chapters, of how

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185 He is the son of the former right-wing Lao Prime Minister, Katai Don Sasorith (see Chapter 8). Mongkhol finished his PhD in France.
the Brao have used border ambiguity to their benefit. This time it has not been to gain increased independence and avoid paying taxes, but rather to facilitate corrupt logging practices in an increasingly capitalist environment. Corruption associated with logging is common in Laos (Hodgdon 2007; Stuart-Fox 2006; Anonymous 2000a).

Many villages have lost important NTFP resources as a result of commercial logging, and this has clearly upset many Brao villagers. In particular, *Dipterocarpus* wood resin trees have been removed from near most of the lowland villages where Brao people have been resettled in recent years. However, most people feel powerless to resist. They feel that they can do nothing but look on while those with power destroy the sources of their livelihood. In contrast, the Vietnamese loggers do not appear to be troubled. This parallels the situation that Cole Harris described with regard to Asians that came to work in British Columbia, Canada in the 19th and early 20th centuries. Compared to the native people, the Asian immigrants had no particular attachment to the places that where they were sent to work. In fact, the following quote by Harris (2002: 285) could be easily transferred from Canada to Laos,

> “Such workers were radically decontextualized from the places and societies in which they had grown up and had few ties with their new locations. They went where they were sent, or where they found work, and left when the work was done. Native people, on the other hand, lived in the land of their ancestors.”

Similarly, the attachment that the Brao have to their special places gives them a different impression about the destruction of forests compared to how Vietnamese loggers feel when forests are destroyed, landscapes are altered, and places are changed.

There is much more that could be written about logging in Brao areas in southern Laos, and the GoL has acknowledged facing many serious problems managing forest resources, as local government officials are often involved in illegal and corrupt practices. See Baird & Shoemaker (2008) for more details.

**The Nam Kong 1 Hydroelectric Dam**

Another important component of regional integration related to the Economic Development Triangle Initiative—but also the ADB’s GMS regional power grid—are large hydroelectric dams. These can be expected to cause some of the most important
changes to Brao landscapes and resources in the future, in the name of economic development and ‘keeping the lights on’ in regional centres like Ho Chi Minh City and Bangkok (see Baird & Shoemaker 2008).

The large dams being planned for the mainstream Sekong River, including the Sekong 4 and 5 dams—which the Russian Regional Oil Company has signed a 2006 MoU with the GoL to build—will certainly have serious negative impacts on the environment and the livelihoods of Brao people living along the Sekong River in Attapeu province and adjacent parts of Stung Treng province in Cambodia (see Baird & Shoemaker 2008). But as important as these dams may be in terms of many Brao,
especially those living adjacent to the Sekong River, they will not be discussed in detail here,\textsuperscript{187} as they are not being built directly on ‘Brao land’. Instead, I will concentrate on the Nam Kong 1 dam in Phou Vong, as it will be centred at the heart of ‘Brao land’ (Map 7.4), and is a project that will have direct negative impacts on a large number of Brao people.

In the early 1990s the Korean company Hyundai Engineering signed MoUs with the GoL to investigate two large projects on the Nam Kong River: the Nam Kong 1 and Nam Kong 3 dams. Although Hyundai eventually withdrew from the area after the Asian Financial Crisis in the late 1990s, ideas about building dams on the Nam Kong River did not disappear with the Koreans (Baird & Shoemaker 2008).

The Nam Kong 3 dam was initially expected to have a capacity of 21 MW and cost US$100 million (Ministry of Industry & Handicrafts 1994). ADB & GoL (2004) estimated that 1,550 people would need to be relocated if the dam were to be built.

According to Maunsell & Lahmeyer (2004)—a study funded by the World Bank—the Nam Kong 1 dam would be located about 20 km from the Lao-Cambodian border. Initially proposed to have a capacity of 105 MW and cost US$233 million (Ministry of Industry & Handicrafts 1994), it is now expected to be larger (Maunsell & Laymeyer 2004; EdL 2003; Norconsult 2007). The principal market for power from the project has long been expected to be Cambodia or Vietnam (EdL 2003; Maunsell & Lahmeyer 2004), with Thailand being added to the list of possible consumers more recently. Just 10 percent of the electricity generated will be used in Laos (Norconsult 2007).

The LNCE (2003) reported that the Nam Kong 1 dam was only marginally viable, but that the project was considered attractive because no human resettlement was expected and because the project would be strategically located in terms of the ADB-envisioned GMS regional electricity grid. Under the scenario examined by Maunsell & Lahmeyer (2004), a 32 m high concrete dam with a 12.1- km\textsuperscript{2} reservoir would have been built at a cost of US$202 million. Thirty-two kilometres of new roads were expected to be required.

\textsuperscript{187} For detailed discussions of these dams, see Baird & Shoemaker (2007b).
In December 2005, the Russian Regional Oil Co. Ltd. signed a MoU with the GoL to conduct 18-month feasibility studies on both Nam Kong 1 and 3 dams, with the planned capacity of the Nam Kong 3 dam being increased to 35 MW.\footnote{Vientiane Times 2005. Russia to develop Lao hydropower. 23 December 2005} Subsequently, in October 2006, the Russians signed a MoU with the GoL to proceed with construction of the Nam Kong 1 dam. At the time, the Nam Kong 1 dam was expected to have a capacity of 240 MW, and be completed by 2013. However, the site Nam Kong 3 dam reportedly could not be located during the initial study of the area, thus delaying consideration of that project.\footnote{Vientiane Times. 2006. Power stations surge forward. 24 October 2006} However, more recently it has been suggested that the company did find the site; but that the road construction required would be too expensive to justify the project.\footnote{Peter-John Meynell, Norconsult Consultant, pers. comm. July 2007.}

In June 2007, the Norwegian hydroelectric consulting company, Norconsult, completed an ‘Initial Environmental Examination’ for the Nam Kong 1 dam (Norconsult 2007). The project is now expected to consist of an 80 m tall concrete-faced rock fill dam with a 390 m crest and a 150 MW installed capacity. Although the reservoir is only expected to cover 21.8 km$^2$, the Nam Kong River will be flooded 30 km above the dam site, creating a long deep stratified and anoxic reservoir, where few fish will be able to survive. Although no resettlement is expected to occur in the project area—since the Brao villagers who used to live there have almost all already been moved to the lowlands, “with the aid of donor groups and the Lao government” (2007: 8)—a 30-km stretch of the Nam Kong River from the dam site to its confluence with the Sekong River will be badly impacted. Norconsult stated that, “The daily flows and downstream river levels will change significantly and such changes will be appreciated down to the junction with the Se Kong” (2007: 11). Furthermore, poisonous waters released from the reservoir will have important downstream impacts. Norconsult (2007: 12) wrote, “The release of poor quality water from the reservoir will have an effect upon the aquatic flora and fauna in the first stretches of the river below the dam, tending to reduce both diversity and populations.” It concluded that fish migrations from downstream will stop and that, “There is potential for a loss of aquatic biodiversity and productivity in the Nam Kong River and its associated wetlands downstream due to these changes in flow” (2007: 14).
It indicated that riverbank vegetable gardening downstream would be negatively impacted, and considering the grave impacts to the aquatic ecosystem expected, fishing would be very negatively impacted. Essentially, Brao livelihoods will be terribly impacted. Norconsult (2007: 9) acknowledged that,

“All villages in the reservoir flooding area have robust fisheries primarily for subsistence, contributing a large part of the protein in their diet. The fisheries downstream of the dam both before the river reaches the Se Kong and in the Se Kong flood plain through to the Cambodian border and beyond are significant both for subsistence and trade.”

Although Norconsult’s dire predictions are uncharacteristic for these types of studies, which tend to ‘sugarcoat’ the impacts, the consultants who wrote the report clearly have little understanding of the people in the project area. Although the Brao Jree populate the area, Norconsult referred to them as “Badao”, or “Lao Theung.” Norconsult mentioned that four villages are located downstream from the project, together totaling 358 households and 1612 people. Although only one of the four villages was mentioned by name, Viang Xay, the other communities are Cheung Hiang, Vong Xay and Vong Lakhone, all of whose livelihoods are closely linked to the Nam Kong River.191 Norconsult mentioned that one village is located above the dam site, and that is the Brao Hamong village of Mak Kiang. The government has already relocated part of the population of Mak Kiang village to the lowlands, but the remaining families have refused to move and are still living in the mountains (see Baird & Shoemaker 2005).

As is typical for foreigners who have worked with the Brao without really understanding them, Norconsult’s staff found it convenient to identify Brao “shifting cultivation” as a threat to the forests, even though the GoL has relocated most of the population downstream from the dam. The consultants found it convenient to play down the importance of wildlife populations that will be impacted by the project, instead emphasising the impact of Brao hunting in the area, and overall reductions in wildlife populations compared to the past. Interestingly, the dam itself is not included as a threat, even though it will destroy a large river, one of the historically most important rivers for the Brao.

191 Cheung Hiang, Vong Lakhone and Viang Xay are discussed earlier in this chapter.
Referring to the past resettlement of Viang Xay, Vong Xay, Cheung Hiang and Vong Lakhone, Norconsult declared that, “The resettlement is considered to be generally successful, although an area of contention has been the lack of training and extension to help the people adjust to a lifestyle based on paddy rice cropping” (2007: 9). However, Norconsult reported that, “[S]ome people seem to revert to relying on the forest for NTFPs” (2007: 8). My experience with these people indicates that they are really ‘reverting’, but rather never stopped using the resources near the dam reservoir. My research indicates that the resettlement has been far from successful (see earlier sections of this chapter), and if Norconsult’s findings are considered carefully, problems become evident. For example, the consultants reported that,

“Current agricultural production is constrained by inadequate water supply, poor soil fertility and the lack of capital and technological capacity. More than 50% of the households in two villages are self sufficient in rice [indicating that half do not have enough to eat], but in two of the villages a number of households have less than six months rice supply. Families subsist by consuming NTFPs such as bamboo shoots, or selling these and fish products to buy rice” (2007: 9).

The above statistics certainly do not suggest that resettlement has been very successful.

In terms of the landscape that will be directly affected by the reservoir, Norconsult reported that, “Villagers have not reported any ancient monuments or other relics of past civilisations in the area, although there are reports that Khmer civilisation archeological remains are to be found in the floodplain area downstream of the dam site” (2007: 10). However, it does acknowledge that, “There are village spirits, caves and waterfalls within the reservoir area that are part of the village culture” (2007: 10). Most of those are associated with legends about Brao mythical hero Groong, but places important to the Brao are not valued ‘archeological sites’ and are not valued by the state.

Norconsult acknowledges that the creation of transmission lines and roads for the dam will have an impact on land use, including “privately owned land”, in which case the consultants claim compensation will be provided. But it is notable that compensation will only be paid for “tall crops” (2007: 13), thus preventing possibilities for compensating Brao swidden cultivators.
Apart from all the major impacts expected from the Nam Kong 1 dam, it is clear that the project managers expect to take increasing control over landscapes long under the *de facto* control of the Brao. For example, they write, “[T]he need for more active watershed management in the catchment will have the potential for improving wildlife protection and more sustainable management of wildlife resources.” Considering all the negative impacts of the dam on wildlife, it is quite amazing that Norconsult has chosen to emphasise the potential positive impacts of the dam on natural resource management. Near the end of the report, Norconsult provides a glimpse of what the Brao people will ultimately face. The report states,

“[T]here will be disruption to these four communities living near the site, both during the construction period and because of the impacts upon the fishery with consequent impact upon dietary protein intake and health. The villages are still very poor, and lacking in many basic facilities… These are poor communities that will experience disruption both during construction and afterwards in their fishing and NTFP collection activities, upon which they are very dependent” (Norconsult 2007: 13).

This is sad, considering all the problems that these people have already gone through as a result of past ill-conceived swidden eradication efforts and resettlement. Furthermore, the Brao people know very little about the massive changes that they are facing, and appear to have no say in how things develop. One foreigner living in Attapeu who has been following the plans to build the dams wrote, in an e-mail, that, “It’s pretty shocking how fast this is steaming ahead! The local guys (at least the villagers and technical staff) don’t even know about it.”

**Conclusions**

While the present era in Laos is rarely considered to be ‘colonial’, this chapter clearly shows that while the GoL is ideologically anti-imperialist and anti-colonialist, and quite concerned with promoting national unity, colonialism is the reality in Brao areas today. In fact, colonialism is arguably more evident than ever before, with administrative and territorial control being exercised with more effectiveness than ever in the past. Furthermore, the Lao have important Brao collaborators in the government, especially in the Phou Vong district, and they are promoting colonisation in Brao areas, with many
Lao families moving to Phou Vong as ethnic Lao people increasingly staff the local government. As with the French, colonialism is being justified in the name of a ‘civilising mission’ and maintaining security, although those ideas are now represented as modernising ‘development’ and ‘national unit’, as well as technical and economic ‘progress’, and ‘poverty reduction’.

Although outsiders have initiated or otherwise brought many social and spatial changes to Brao areas, this chapter shows that the changes being experienced by the Brao are not entirely driven from the outside. It is true that outsiders have long been trying to reorganise Brao spaces, and this is continuing, but the changes that the Brao are now facing have in themselves influenced how the Brao envision space. While some Brao have rejected or resisted these changes, over time the Brao have been gradually transformed, changing their views and even pushing for the types of changes initiated in order to gain increasing control over Brao areas.

This process of change has led some Brao to envision and incorporate new and broader spatial scales into their thinking. For example, some people who used to look for work in Attapeu province are now venturing farther to Pakse or even Vientiane. Similarly, but at a different scale, Brao young people from Houay Ko village in Pathoumphone district, Champasak province, used to go to Pakxong to pick coffee every year. Now some are thinking about going to Thailand. Brao people (especially the women, with men often staying behind to make money cutting wood in the forest) from Khoua Touay village in Pathoumphone district used to pick coffee in Pakxong, but now many are going to Thailand to work illegally. What are the implications of these changes? Only time will tell, but it is likely to result in dramatic socio-cultural changes as well. This issue will be dealt with more fully in the final chapter of this dissertation.

The issues that I have focused on here are some of the most critical for the Brao, including ethnicity and development discourses in Laos, the GoL’s swidden eradication policy, ideas about village and village territorial organisation, and house design changes. Regional integration through the ‘Economic Triangle Development Initiative’, including road improvements, commercial logging, and large hydroelectric dam construction have been investigated. All of these themes have had critical socio-spatial implications for the
Brao, but I have certainly not exhausted all possible relevant topics. I have simply pointed out the spatialised elements of development practices and discourses.

The changes that have taken place in the name of ‘development’ have been very significant and rapid in recent years, and spatial reorganisation has proven to be an important component of the neoliberal development model increasingly being promoted by the GoL and its main donors. Global development discourses have become intertwined with French-era discourses and forms of long-established ethnic discrimination by lowlanders against uplanders, creating new hybrid discourses such as the ones that presently dominate Brao areas. These development discourses are important for justifying measures to reduce or eradicate swidden agriculture, re-arrange village territories, and internally resettle people. They are crucial for justifying the types of spatial changes that are seen to be compatible with modern forms of development.

Not surprisingly these rapid changes have brought on various types of responses. While the Brao have frequently resisted attempts to change throughout history, including producing various conceptual places of resistance, it would be a mistake to characterise their reaction to development—either now or in the past—as being single-minded defiance or rejection. In fact, the Brao are very flexible people, despite their reputation for being intransient by many ethnic Lao. Resistance is frequently combined with negotiation and compromise, and in some cases, after long periods of time, some Brao have internalised some development ideas and have adopted similar development discourses to those who are trying to dominate them. However, individual circumstances, even within a relatively small ethnic group like the Brao, are critical for understanding the circumstances in particular places and contexts. But this should be of little surprise, as those oppressed throughout history have often ended up mimicking their oppressors. This is both an important survival tactic, and represents the desire of many Brao to change their circumstances, and to stop being oppressed.

Having covered the modern ‘development era’ in Laos, it is now time to consider recent experiences and development amongst the Brao of Cambodia.
CHAPTER 8
Development Today and the Brao in Cambodia

Introduction

In 1991, Ya Khamayng, a Brao Umba man originally from Bang Geut village, Taveng district, was living near Ban Lung, the capital of Ratanakiri province. He had returned to Cambodia in the early 1980s as a refugee in Laos, wanting to participate in the market economy, the idea of which was being promoted in development discourses that he had heard at the time. He had grown a large quantity of cucumbers (dawoong in Brao) in his swidden field, so one day he filled a back-basket of them and walked to the Ban Lung market to hawk his produce. He was not adept at attracting customers and did not sell a single cucumber. After some time he became frustrated, gave up, and returned home. On his way back he threw all the cucumbers into a ditch beside the road, as he was embarrassed (gamao in Brao) to return home without having sold anything. That was the last time he tried to sell anything at the market. Not long after, he moved to Taveng district, where he lives today.

This anecdote is a good example of how it has not always been easy for the Brao to adjust to the rapid changes that are taking place around them, especially considering their relative unfamiliarity with the market economy that they are expected to embrace. Despite the rhetoric about neoliberal reforms advancing human welfare, the reality is that there are frequently winners and losers. Some people have been left behind as a result of ‘uneven development’, a typical result of capitalist development (Smith 1990).

Research in Ban Lung clearly indicates that although many new businesses have opened in recent years, almost none of them (just 0.2 percent) are owned or operated by highlanders (McAndrew 2000). Highlanders did not participate in the market much during the Sangkum government either, but it has only been recently, during the ‘development era’, that significant efforts have been made to integrate the Brao into the market economy of Cambodia. Of course, the highlanders have been involved in trade for centuries, but the present situation is not the same. One important difference is that this time, the globalised international aid community, including the United Nations and various non-government organisations (NGOs), are working in northeastern Cambodia to
'help' them, in the name of 'development' and, most recently, in the name of 'poverty alleviation'.

This chapter examines some of the recent events that have transformed northeastern Cambodia and particularly the Brao, both socially and spatially. It looks at yet another form of colonialism, this one involving ethnic Khmer domination. I begin by briefly explaining some of the political changes that led to the adoption of a multi-party 'democratic' system and neoliberal market reforms in Cambodia. I consider a number of case studies in order to explore how development discourses and practices have tended to colonise the human landscape of the Brao, and then outline some of massive changes that the Brao are facing. The cases presented deal with UN-supported development efforts in Ratanakiri province, health and education development support, the expansion of road networks, commercial logging, the rapid expansion of cashew plantations, land alienation, the development of Virachey National Park in Brao traditional territories, and the impacts of hydropower development.

As in the previous chapter, I depart from my emphasis on history, concentrating instead on the present circumstances. However, much of what is included is informed by previous chapters, which I believe are critical for understanding what is happening now. The new form of colonialism presented here relates to domination by the lowland Khmer, who are increasingly seeking to gain control over places previously administered by the Brao. Communism is no longer the main justification for these advances into Brao areas, as it was in the 1970s and 1980s. Instead, 'development' and capitalist progress are the keys, and this time the colonial power has various international development agencies to help it achieve goals. I demonstrate that colonialism is having a significant impact on Brao social and spatial organisation, and while this is important, it is also crucial to recognise that some things are changing faster than others. Development discourses are justifying government involvement in the highlands in much the same way that the 'civilising mission' justified French colonial advances into Brao areas at the end of the 19th century.
The UNTAC Period

The dawn of the ‘development era’ (‘samai aphiwat’ in Khmer) in Cambodia began in the 1990s. Although continued internal insecurity in the early part of the decade meant that major modernising efforts did not begin until somewhat later than they did in Laos, development has certainly been the dominant discourse in the country since the end of the 1990s. One could argue that the development era in Cambodia did not begin until after the Khmer Rouge imploded in 1998, but in many ways the historic Paris ‘Agreements on the Comprehensive Political Settlement of the Cambodia Conflict’, which were signed on October 23, 1991, marked the beginning of ‘samai aphiwat’ in Cambodia. It was, in fact, after that date the political environment in Cambodia changed dramatically.

We have already looked at social and spatial change amongst the Brao in what is now northeastern Cambodia during the pre-French and French colonial eras (Chapter 5) and at Cambodian ‘independence’ until the end of the 1980s (Chapter 6). In 1988 the Vietnamese military began withdrawing from Cambodia. The withdrawal was officially completed by September 1989\(^{192}\), after a decade of battling with the KR and its sometimes oddly matched allies (Tomodo 1997).

In 1990 the country’s name was changed to the State of Cambodia. The political implications of this name change were minimal, as the People’s Revolutionary Party of Kampuchea (PRPK) remained in control of the political system (Ovesen & Trankell 2004).

The 1991 Paris agreements represented a major achievement—the final success, after the accumulation of more than a decade of negotiations, involving the United Nations. The agreements consisted of a Final Act and three instruments: the Agreement on a Comprehensive Political Settlement of the Cambodia Conflict, the Agreement concerning the Sovereignty, Independence, Territorial Integrity and Inviolability, Neutrality and National Unity of Cambodia, and the Declaration on the Rehabilitation and Reconstruction of Cambodia. These Agreements led to the establishment of the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC), which was set up to

\[^{192}\text{Some people believe those Vietnamese troops and certainly ‘advisors’ lingered in Cambodia into the 1990s.}\]
ensure that the Agreements were implemented on the ground (United Nations 2003). According to the United Nations, “The mandate [of UNTAC] included aspects relating to human rights, the organisation and conduct of elections, military arrangements, civil administration, maintenance of law and order, repatriation and resettlement of refugees and displaced persons and rehabilitation of Cambodian infrastructure” (United Nations 2003: 1). Clearly, UNTAC’s role in the social and spatial reorganising of Cambodia was critical.

UNTAC assumed control of key sectors of the country's administrative structures during its mandate, including foreign affairs, defense, security, finance and communications, although this control was not always affective. Its main objective was to build a stable environment conducive to national elections, which did, indeed, take place according to schedule in May 1993 and were generally considered to be free and fair. During UNTAC’s mandate, the United Nations High Commission on Refugees (UNHCR) oversaw the repatriation and resettlement of some 360,000 refugees and displaced persons. At its peak, UNTAC included over 21,000 military and civilian personnel from more than 100 countries. Its mission officially began in February 1992 and ended in September 1993, when the Constitution was proclaimed and the new government of the Kingdom of Cambodia, led by two Prime Ministers, Norodom Ranariddh (of the FUNCINPEC Party) and Hun Sen (Cambodian People’s Party) was inaugurated (United Nations 2003).

UNTAC was oriented towards creating the conditions conducive for a successful transition from bloody civil war to a democratic and inclusive political environment that would bring peace to the troubled country. The KR became uncooperative soon after the arrival of UNTAC, but the UN was able to secure most of the country’s territory during its mandate, except for the major strongholds of the KR. Although its tenure was relatively short, its influence was dramatic—it ushered in a whole new era to Cambodia over an extremely short period. Cambodia was opened to the world. Significantly, foreign aid poured into the country, and international aid agencies, including multilateral banks, international organisations, bilateral donors and NGOs, became very influential funding sources in Cambodia, in many ways taking over where UNTAC left off.
As Zweers & Sok (2002) have reported, the accessibility and the security situation in Ratanakiri improved considerably after the UNTAC-sponsored elections, and indicative of the changes that took place following the elections, the population of Ratanakiri increased 41 percent between 1992 and 1998, while the population of Ban Lung increased 82 percent over the same period (McAndrew 2000). Large numbers of Khmer flocked to the northeast. No longer constrained by civil war, many hoped to make their fortunes in the ‘new frontier’. Colonisation of Brao areas was rapidly occurring.

**The Post-UNTAC Period**

In 1992 the UN established CARERE, initially called ‘Cambodia Resettlement and Reintegration’. As its name implied, CARERE’s initial mandate was to support the repatriation and reintegration of returning refugees and internally displaced persons into Cambodian society, following years of extreme internal turmoil. The main emergency response projects that it implemented were designed to meet the needs of rural and resettled communities, including supporting the provision of schools, health clinics, roads and other basic infrastructure.

In 1996, as the political situation in Cambodia appeared deceptively to be stabilising for some, CARERE shifted its focus to meeting the long-term development needs of the country. It also changed its name to the ‘Cambodia Area Rehabilitation and Regeneration Project’ and began working specifically in five Cambodian provinces, including Ratanakiri (UNDP 2000).

In the late 1990s CARERE was gradually replaced by the Seila programme, a new UN-sponsored initiative of the Cambodian government, and in 2000 all CARERE responsibilities were officially transferred to Seila, which had the goal “to establish a national programme to promote local economic development activities through decentralised planning and decision making” (UNDP 2000). Seila has sought to build a foundation on which to develop an effective and self-sustaining rural anti-poverty effort. It has also encouraged “social cohesion, behavioural changes and organisation in villages and communes in regions where the social fabric and farm-production organisation have been largely disrupted or dismantled by the country’s prolonged war.” Seila has also

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193 The term ‘Seila’ is derived from a Khmer word meaning foundation stone.
served as a model to reintegrate former KR-held territories into the mainstream of Cambodian society (UNDP 2000). Clearly, Seila’s activities have promoted particular types of colonial change, masked in the discourses of ‘participatory’ and ‘decentralised’ development. But, the head of Seila is in Phnom Penh, not in Brao villages. The discourses have masked the centralised nature of the development supported by Seila.

Seila has envisioned that “the alleviation of poverty can be accomplished only through connecting the impoverished segments of society to the decision-making process. Seila embodies the principles of sustainable development.” However, one might interpret the above as a prescription for providing the central government with more control over the local. In any case, Seila has fostered the formation of large numbers of institutions and administrative structures important for governing the highlands, as is typical in cases of colonialism. These have included Village Development Committees (VDCs), Commune Development Committees (CDCs) and Provincial Rural Development Committees (PRDCs), which Seila’s managers hoped would “serve as participatory and decision-making frameworks that extend from village to commune to province level”. The architects of Seila reported that this was essential for enabling “the Cambodian people to plan and make decisions that affect their lives” (UNDP 2000). One might ask what ‘Cambodian people’ Seila is really intending to empower.

CARERE and later Seila have mainly promoted economic development and integration, as well as trying to build ‘the capacity’ (or power) of the Cambodian government to manage a neoliberal economic system, including the promotion of modernising forms of development through the provision of funding to develop particular areas, working in close cooperation with local government. With a broad mandate, and considerable financial resources, CARERE and Seila have together been the dominant development players in Ratanakiri province over the last decade, and their role in pursuing the social and spatial organisation of Ratanakiri required by the colonial powers that they support will be considered in various parts of this chapter.

194 However, after 2002, when the ‘Law on Administration of Communes’ was passed, Seila dissolved the VCDs, replacing them with Village Budget Committees, and focusing resources on CDCs. Part of the justification for this was to make it easier to administrate the people and also to increase the emphasis on basic infrastructure. In this way, Seila has been an important tool for promoting government ideas about changing the social and spatial organisation of Cambodia. They are focusing on communes and provinces, rather than districts and villages, which has tended to be the emphasis in Laos.
Development Organisations and Research with the Brao

While few researchers have had a chance to do detailed studies about the Brao in Laos since 1990, due to the closed nature of the governments in Attapeu province and particularly Phou Vong district,\(^{195}\) the same cannot be said for northeastern Cambodia, where various researchers have studied the Brao, mainly on behalf of development organisations, since the early 1990s. While there were only four NGOs working in Ratanakiri in 1994 (Bourdier 2006), the number and scope of NGO work has expanded significantly since then.

The British health NGO, Health Unlimited, was one of the original four. They hired a series of three anthropologists in the early 1990s to conduct health-oriented anthropological research on the highlanders—including the Kreung—in Ratanakiri province (see Jonsson 1992; 1997; Vail 1993 and White 1995). The NGO, NTFP Project, also sponsored a number of studies related to natural resource management and the Brao and its sub-groups (Baird 1995; Baird \textit{et al.} 1996; Emerson 1997; Baird 2000; Fisheries Office, Ratanakiri & NTFP 2000; Anonymous 2000b; Baird 2005b). The CARERE and Seila programmes have, of course, sponsored many studies on highlanders and various aspects of development in Ratanakiri since the mid-1990s, sometimes in cooperation with the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) or Canada (see, for example, PRDC 1997; Bann 1997; IDRC/CARERE 1998; Zweers & Sok 2002; Irwin & Sok 2004; Irwin & Sok 2005a & b). Organisations working in cooperation with Virachey National Park (VNP) have also sponsored research related to the Brao and their natural resource management practices (Koy 1999; Page 1999; Hasselskog & Krong 2000; Lay 2000; Kim 2000; 2001; BPAMP 2003; Baird 2003a; Baird & Dearden 2003; Ironside & Baird 2003; Baird 2008b). NGO Forum on Cambodia, in cooperation with the Natural Resource Management Network in Ratanakiri—and more recently Community Forestry International, a US-based international NGO—have also conducted research on land alienation issues in Ratanakiri (NGO Forum on Cambodia 2004; 2006; Brown 2004). Additionally, other International NGOs have supported linguistic studies, Khmer script-

\(^{195}\) As an example, the Mon-Khmer language researcher Gerard Diffloth tried to gain permission to collect linguistic data from the district in the late 1990s, but was refused access by the government (Diffloth, \textit{pers. comm.} 2000).
based writing systems for the Brao Umba, Kavet and Kreung sub-groups of the Brao and bilingual education systems (Keller et al. 2008; Middelborg 2005; Keller 2001). There have also been a number of other research projects and small studies conducted on the Brao, other ethnic groups, or more generally about Ratanakiri since the mid-1990s, not all of which can be listed here (see, for example, Bourdier 1998; 2006; McAndrew 2000; Fox 2001; 2002; Bottomley 2002; Ojendal et al. 2002; Ruohomaki 2003; Backstrom et al. 2006; AIPP 2006). The point is that there has been much research done about development issues and the Brao since the early 1990s, and that it has informed many of the ways that development has been approached amongst the Brao. Some of this research will be referred to in the following sections.

Continuing Elements of Khmerisation

The Khmerisation rhetoric of today is less blunt than it was, since it has become increasingly entwined with modern development discourses that at least rhetorically support participation and are against authoritarianism. However, as Olli Ruohomaki (2003) has pointed out, one of the most problematic issues in Ratanakiri remains the Khmerisation process, in which the cultural values of lowland Khmer are being imposed on highlanders, much in the same way as the Sangkum government tried to do in the late 1950s and 1960s, and the KR did later (see Chapter 6). As Ruohomaki reminds us, this includes the promotion of Khmer language, Buddhism, state bureaucratic structures and practices, and particular livelihood systems, including wet-rice cultivation and cash cropping. In fact, this sort of process is not unique to Cambodia. It is also affecting marginal parts of the other countries in the region, such as Laos (see Chapter 7). Today, Khmerisation is justified more on the grounds of development than ever before.

The following case studies show how Khmerisation efforts have become integrated with global development discourses, and how these resulting hybrid discourses have led to a particular form of colonialism, with its own particular social and spatial implications.
CARERE/Seila and the Brao

In the mid-1990s the improved security situation in northeast Cambodia allowed the Brao living along the Sesan River to gradually begin moving their swidden fields north, back to where they originated (see Chapters 5 and 6). In the late 1990s, after the threat of the KR had disappeared, the Cambodian government told the people that they should not move north. The government used foreign aid—especially the funds provided through CARERE and later Seila—as the ‘carrot’ to achieve their objectives. The establishment of Virachey National Park in 1993 also served as a convenient ‘stick’ for keeping the people in the lowlands. The Kavet from Veun Say district were particularly targeted by this campaign. In the 1990s, they were amongst the most eager to move back into the mountains, after being brought down to the lowlands during the Sihanouk and KR periods (see Chapter 6).

In support of the settlement of the Kavet, CARERE provided those in the four villages in Kok Lak commune with a rice mill in 1996, buffalos for families to do lowland wet-rice cultivation in 1997, and a school in 1998. Then, in 2001, Seila offered ‘food-for-work’, for building a road from the Sesan River to the commune centre, and in 2002 Seila supported a similar ‘food-for-work’ programme that required the Kavet to collect sand from the Heulay (Lalay) stream for use in improving the road. Finally, in 2003, Seila supported the construction of bridges along the course of the road, to allow year-round passage.

It is notable that all these initiatives have been directly or indirectly supportive of lowland wet-rice rice cultivation and the year-round inhabitation of ‘fixed villages’, much like USAID’s development work with the Brao in Attapeu in the late 1950s (see Chapter 6) and the Sangkum government’s efforts in the 1950s and 1960s (see Chapter 6). All the support provided was designed to increase food security and access to the market economy.

The bridges that were built present an interesting example. They required a lot of timber from the forests, and also tens of thousands of dollars of aid money. The bridges are large and wide, and strong enough for trucks. But the villagers cross them mainly by foot or bicycle, and only a few have motorcycles. There are no cars or trucks in the

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196 One buffalo was given for two families to look after, which was problematic.
villages, and no prospects for any being purchased in the foreseeable future. In one case, a bridge is beginning to deteriorate before a car or truck has ever crossed it. At times, Brao people have put narrow village gates (Viang in Brao) across roads to try to recreate the sense of village proper that village gates once constituted when villages were circular (Photo 8.1).

Some NGO workers have even gone so far as to suggest that the roads were not built to provide the villagers with access to the lowlands, but rather to make the forests accessible to logging trucks that would certainly need larger bridges. Others have speculated that large bridges were built to make villagers accessible to government officials, including high-level officials in vehicles that require large bridges. Whatever the case, the bridges were clearly not appropriately scaled. I have noticed the same problem in relation to Seila-funded bridges in Taveng district in Brao Umba areas, where the bridges were also ‘overbuilt’. Narrow bridges large enough for motorcycles to pass would have been more appropriate, but in the minds of government officials supporting the initiative, bridges large enough for trucks are much more impressive symbols of modernisation. It appears that the Seila people involved were not as interested in creating appropriate development for the highlanders as in bringing development to the people. Since large bridges are built all over Cambodia, it was felt that the same should be true for highland areas, since they are part of Cambodia. Here, the symbolism of development represents the integration of the highlands into Cambodia is crucial. The infrastructure in different parts of the country was supposed to look uniform. Since almost all of those who worked for CARERE and Seila were Khmer from other parts of the country, this phenomenon should come as little surprise.

There is also the matter of expanding the roads leading from these bridges. Even though the idea did not originate with the Brao, the Brao have had to provide the labour. As in the French colonial period, corvée labour has been required to improve roads. Now, it is justified in terms of ‘development’. It resembles what Ribot (1999) and High (2006) have called ‘participatory corvée’. It promotes colonialism by helping the state gain control of labour, as well as of space, through increasing state access to Brao places. Furthermore, the government and Seila have asked that the Brao contribute money to the building of bridges. One Brao Umba man from Bong village in Taveng district saw
through the development discourses used for justifying the expropriation of Brao labour and money. He said, “It is their idea to widen the road and build large bridges. It’s not ours. Why should we have to do all the work and then provide money as well? If they really want the road so much, they should pay for it themselves.”

The development being offered has clearly not been participatory, although the rhetoric of Seila would suggest otherwise. I have observed that ethnic Khmer people working with Seila have frequently presented development ideas to the Kavet in ways that prevent discussion of alternative ideas or real participation. If you want development support, take what is offered. That is the underlying message frequently encountered. It is much like Leif Jonsson’s observation in Ratanakiri during his time there in the early 1990s. He wrote,

“The problems, as well as the solutions, have all been decided beforehand, it appears that local participation consists of locals’ token attendance at meetings where “it is decided” to go for a certain course of action, and/or of their “willingness to learn” what is being imposed from the outside.” (1997: 555).

Bourdier (2006) described an evaluation conducted in Ratanakiri by CARERE in the mid-1990s that was very culturally insensitive and non-participatory. An expatriate NGO worker living in Ratanakiri expressed his concerns about Seila, and its role in validating a system that is oppressing people, rather than addressing the root causes of the oppression. His view was that CARERE was not as bad as Seila, but that the government has had more control over the money and development priorities with Seila than they had under CARERE, thus leading to more Khmerisation. He also pointed out that while some highlanders are increasingly identifying with “the oppressor”, others are becoming more introverted and alienated, something that typically happens during a period of rapid, enforced change. This issue has already been discussed in relation to the Brao in Laos (Chapter 7).

As Zweers & Sok (2002) report, village focal people and volunteers belonging to VDCs have been “installed” in highland villages by development agencies such as CARERE and then Seila. The criteria for choosing these people have been mainly Khmer literacy and the ability to travel to meetings in the district and provincial centers (perfect criteria for colonial collaborators). These people have received financial benefits for
attending meetings and sometimes for working in other communes, thus helping to ensure their loyalty to the state. The situation has tended to elevate young men to positions as ‘new leaders’, due to their access to knowledge about ‘development’. This power has tended to increase the value of Khmer language skills amongst community members, while reducing the influence of women and village elders who have limited Khmer language skills. New power structures have been created, with young men often taking increased roles in development and village affairs, while elders remain in charge of internal village matters, in weakened positions. All of these changes support the colonial Khmerisation agenda.

Knowledge is certainly powerful. Illustrative of this, younger people have sometimes lost respect for elders, who they perceive as not being knowledgeable about critical issues related to development. In turn, younger people are exhibiting less respect for Animist rituals organised by elders, and for spatial taboos. This has reduced village solidarity. Zweers & Sok (2002) warned that development agencies should be careful not to promote the dichotomy between “development” and “traditional” discourses, because such dichotomies imply that traditions are unchanging, which, of course is not true. Critically, this idea makes many of those interested in the change represented by development feel as if the rejection of traditions is concomitant with embracing change. The cultural and identity implications are clearly very significant.

It also appears that rapid change is resulting in the widening of the generation gap within Brao society. Generational differences in societies are to be expected, considering that change always occurs, but during periods of rapid transformation these changes can be so immense as to result in serious rifts in a society (Bodley 1990). Zweers & Sok (2002) reported, for example, that young Kreung people tended to be very keen about the positive impacts of ‘development’ and ‘progress’, whereas the older generation appears to be more skeptical and suspicious of the changes taking place. In Kok Lak commune, Veun Say district, I have observed situations where Kavet elders provided many good reasons why they wanted to return to do swidden agriculture in the mountains in Virachey National Park, only to hear the younger generation object to moving from the lowlands, often for reasons as simple as wanting somewhere to ride their newly acquired bicycles (bikes cannot be used in the mountains due to the steep terrain). The younger
generation is attracted to consumer goods such as motorcycles, videos, watches, radios, and bicycles, whereas elders tend to attribute greater value to special jars and musical gongs.

**Health, Development and Space**

There are many serious health and nutrition problems amongst the highlanders including the Brao of Ratanakiri province. Health Unlimited (2002) reported that 73 percent of the children they surveyed in Ratanakiri had experienced coughing, diarrhea or fever in the previous seven days. Eighteen percent of women were underweight, and 58 percent reported recent symptoms of illness. Caloric intake levels are considered to be insufficient, and vaccination systems remain underdeveloped. Ratanakiri has the highest under-five year-old mortality rate of any province in Cambodia, at 229 out of 1,000. “The nutrition status of the indigenous highland people is amongst the poorest in the country,” stated Health Unlimited (2002: 3).

Considering the above, it should be of little surprise that health is one of the main development services that NGOs and other development agencies working in Brao areas in Cambodia have supported in recent years. While some might initially wonder what health-related development has to do with spatial change, the reality is that health and spatial organisation are closely linked.

Frederic Bourdier (1998) described the highlanders of Ratanakiri as being dispersed in the forest, thus making health statistics difficult to obtain. This characterisation is not incorrect, and it is important in terms of understanding how people working in health care frequently frame highlanders and their problems. They describe the highlander strategy of inhabiting dispersed communities as being fundamentally incompatible with providing effective and efficient health care services. Already, the tension between Brao ways of organizing spatially and modern ways of looking at health care is evident.

One important spatial issue related to health involves the construction of village-level health posts, such as the ones that the Spanish NGO, ‘Psychologists Without Borders’ funded in 2006 in the relatively remote Brao villages of Trabok, in Taveng Leu commune, and Rok in Kok Lak commune (see Map 2.2). The construction and staffing of
these posts have meant that people do not have to travel to district centres to access modern medicines or basic medical support, which, in itself, is spatially important. It can also be expected that the posts will impact culture and identities, including the frequency of Animist rituals used to cure illnesses.

Some of the comments made by the Khmer Secretary of State for the Ministry of Health at the Trabok Health Post hand-over ceremony in February 2007 are worthy of reflection. This official said, “There has been a lot of progress in Ratanakiri. It used to take two days to get here from Phnom Penh, but this time I was able to get here in one day.” He also mentioned that, “If roads aren’t good, motorcycles are more valuable than cars.” He spent a lot of time talking about the roads, and clearly saw the northeast as a remote backwater, indicating that Khmer stereotypes of the highlands continue to be important in terms of how development is perceived by the central government.

The promotion of mosquito net use to reduce instances of malaria is another area where space and health care extension work become intertwined. In 2005 Health Unlimited distributed mosquito nets to almost all the highlanders in Ratanakiri province. Instead of sleeping in the forests without mosquito nets, the NGO suggested that sleeping under mosquito nets in their villages or swidden houses would be preferable. This is not necessarily bad advice, but it is important to recognise the spatial implications of health care campaigns. In this case, it involves the spatial reorganisation of sleeping spaces. Too often health care issues are not considered in relation to other aspects of human organisation, and human relations with nature. For example, it might be preferable, in terms of having good access to health facilities, for people to live near towns or other centres, like Ban Lung, the capital of Ratanakiri province, but if population densities are high in those areas, they could negatively affect opportunities for agriculture, hunting, fishing and NTFP collection. Ultimately, outcomes such as malnutrition and poorer health could result, despite the fact that the people are living near a health centre. Krahn (2003) clearly indicates that ethnic Katu people in southern Laos, living in more remote areas have access to wild foods that are important for their vital nutrients.

The German Development Agency, German Agro Action (GAA), has supported efforts to improve the quality of drinking water amongst the Brao in Taveng district. One aspect of their support has been spatially limiting, while the other fits well with older
forms of Brao spatial organisation. The first are tube wells, which have been built in Brao villages situated along the Sesan River. The government is a big supporter of the construction of these wells, as they want more people to live full-time in the villages. It is hoped that the existence of wells will help attract people, although at present only a small number of people live in the villages for significant parts of the year. The wells are a powerful symbol of development, and are amongst the most complicated and expensive I have ever seen in Southeast Asia. However, the actual number of people using them is quite low. The wells are fixed, while the people are not. There is a spatial divide between the reality of the people’s lives and the vision for development.

The second measure supported by GAA in the same villages involves the provision of mobile plastic water containers with clay filters. This support fits much better with Brao livelihoods. The containers are very popular, as their use makes boiling water unnecessary. Most importantly, the containers can be carried to swidden fields, villages or wherever else the people go. This contrasts with the cement water filters that the Red Cross gave villages a few years previously. They were immobile and unpopular. One Brao complained that the only thing the Red Cross filters were good for was “raising mosquitoes” (jiam mouay in Kavet), because unlike the containers given by GAA, the concrete ones did not have a good lid, and mosquitoes could get in and lay eggs.

The Struggle for Health and Space

There are many other ways in which changes in health care practices can lead to spatial changes. Zweers & Sok (2002) reported that many highland villagers interviewed in Ratanakiri province said that the introduction of medicines is one of the most important reasons for a decline in the belief in the power of spirits. I heard similar stories from Brao people during my research in northeastern Cambodia and southern Laos. Some Brao also told me that they had spent large amounts of money to buy medicines to cure illnesses, but that they did not get better. In contrast, they noted that it is less expensive to sacrifice a chicken and drink jar rice wine. Thus, many are justifying traditional sacrifices and the power of spirits.

One particular incident is a good indicator of how the conflict over space has sometimes become evident due to health care issues. In 2005 the Brao Umba Deputy
Chief of Taveng Leu commune, Ya Khamphen, was very ill. Since he was married to a Lun woman, it was determined that he should sacrifice a buffalo following the Lun ‘bra taroom’ tradition, in order to appease the spirit believed to be the cause of his illness. As is customary, he made the preparatory chicken sacrifice in advance of the buffalo sacrifice, but soon after, his son—who had converted to Christianity a number of years earlier—arrived. He was convinced that his father should abandon plans for the buffalo sacrifice and go with him to the provincial hospital. According to custom, once preparations for a sacrifice have been made it is taboo (da-ah in Brao) to stop the process, but eventually Ya Khamphen’s son convinced him to travel to Ban Lung. Unfortunately, Ya Khamphen’s condition deteriorated rapidly upon his arrival at the provincial hospital and he died that evening.

This incident has had important implications amongst the Brao of Taveng, who blame Ya Khamphen’s death on his son’s Christian ideas, and his refusal to follow the Animist ways, which the Brao call ‘sungkhom labawp’ (system of society) because Ya Khamphen violated the spatial taboos in abandoning the planned sacrifice and going to the provincial hospital. People widely believe that the spirits killed him.

Most Brao, however, are willing to follow Brao Animist, Khmer and Lao Animist, and modern medicine practices to stay healthy. They generally do not see any contradiction with mixing all of the above, since it is all about getting better. However, the Ya Khamphen case is upsetting to the Brao due to the disrespect that Ya Khamphen’s son is perceived to have shown towards Brao Animist practices. That was a struggle over the control of space. Would the Animist spirits be honoured or would modern medicine representing Christian views be privileged? Would the spatial taboos be respected, or would the provincial hospital be privileged?

It could be said that struggles related to health are also struggles related to ‘power over life’, or ‘biopower’, as Foucault (1990[1978]) called it. Biopower consists of ‘diverse techniques for achieving the subjugation of bodies and the control of populations’, and health-care systems are certainly one way in which biopower is used to control the Brao, for example through health related census work done by the government.

197 I originally planned to discuss Christian missionary activities and the Brao, and the specific social and spatial implications to the Brao of protestant Christian evangelism, but I have decided to instead focus on this aspect in a separate future paper.
or even NGOs. In this way, power produces individuals and associated places. As Stoler (1995) has since pointed out, questions of biopower are also important in relation to race and colonialism.

**Education, Development and Space**

“Most of the Khmer Loeu are stupid, because they have no education and do not want to get any.”

Phnom Penh Ministry official, 1994 (quoted by Bourdier 2006: 178)

“[Traditional] practices are diminishing, particularly among men who have had outside contacts and among children who have attended school”.

Whitaker *et al.* (1973: 70)

“People say they have...seen some positive developments in the last few years: the building of a road, health clinic, and a school. The school has no teacher, and the health center is far from the village, but they are signs of progress.”


Education is an area of particular interest to many development agencies working in Brao areas. AIPP (2006) reported that only ten percent of highlanders in Ratanakiri are ‘functionally literate’, which is about the same percentage of highlander children who complete primary education. Officially, 23 percent of the people in Ratanakiri are literate. However, the provincial government in Ratanakiri tends to fudge school admission statistics in order to make it look as if more children are studying and graduating than are, in reality. There are a few reasons why. First, central government funding for the Education Department in Ratanakiri is partially dependent on official enrollment statistics. Secondly, enrollment is overestimated to ensure that official government targets are reached, including UN millennium goals. This approach actually backfires, as it results in less support from international donors for education since the situation appears to be better than it is.

Just as during the Sangkum period, it is difficult to attract Khmer teachers to many remote highland villages (see Chapter 6), and when teachers do agree to work there, they

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often teach irregularly. An additional problem is that people often stay in their swidden fields for much of the year, making it difficult for children to travel to the village proper to go to school. Without motivated teachers, few travel to school.

The state has long used education to transform the Brao of Ratanakiri, be it during the French period with the establishment of schools for the Brao and other highlanders in Veun Say (see Chapter 5), or during the Sangkum government period of the 1950s and 1960s (see Chapter 6). Fiona Wilson (2001) argues that to the bureaucracy of the modern state, the school has become an emblem demarcating the territory effectively governed by the state. She believes that nearing the frontiers of the modern state, the school has taken over functions of the military outpost. It is the location where symbols of nation are kept and regularly displayed. This is certainly true for Brao areas in Cambodia, where government officials—especially those at the central level—see the expansion of education as concomitant with increasing state power. Schools are, in fact, a tool of colonialism.

Beyond forcing education on people, schools are more complex in scope. Many Brao have bought into the idea of development, and believe in using education as a tool for modernising people. For example, Leif Jonsson (1997) quoted a Brao man who was asking officials from the Phnom Penh government for more education for his people. He thanked the officials for what they had already done. This was not necessarily negative, and many development workers would take it as a positive indicator, but it does represent an important shift. These sorts of changes are never neutral, since they promote particular ideas about development and its link to the state.

Some organisations, including Seila and the ADB, have tended to support standardised school construction in villages, despite problems with school attendance and with attracting appropriate teachers. Certain NGOs in Ratanakiri province, including NTFP Project and International Cooperation in Cambodia (ICC), have supported non-formal education programmes that are much more spatially flexible than typical formal education initiatives. Realising that Brao mobility varies with the seasons, these organisations have not only taken education to the villages, but have also created mobile systems that bring education to the swiddens where people live for large parts of the year. This has especially been the case amongst the Kavet and the Umba, who tend to spend
even less time in villages than the southern groups (see Chapter 4). Spatially sensitive education makes it possible for people to live in remote areas, working their swidden fields during the day, yet receive access to education, both in Khmer and their own languages, in the evenings. For example, education is offered in Phao village, Taveng district, in both the village and in swiddens during the rainy season when many are far from the village. Most recently bilingual non-formal education in Kreung, Brao (Umba) and Kavet has been supported in villages and swiddens. This contrasts significantly with the standard delivery of education services to communities in Cambodia. Although the government has gone along with NGO efforts to adapt education to Brao spatial organisation, it would rather promote a more stable form of education, involving well-built schools in villages staffed by full-time government-installed teachers.

The international NGO CARE has established a bilingual education project in Kreung and Tampuon villages in Ratanakiri province, but its support is different, involving regular daytime schooling in fixed village schools. While this may not be as spatially flexible as the non-formal programmes mentioned above, it is still a great improvement over standard Khmer-only schooling. Instruction is in both indigenous languages and Khmer, and the bilingual curriculum used is much more ethnically sensitive and in tune with local livelihoods and traditions than regular government curriculum, which tends to be oriented to lowland Khmer. Indigenous people from the villages are trained as teachers (Middelborg 2005). Pigg (1992) has pointed out how schoolbooks issued by the state are frequently important vehicles for transferring ideas about progress. Villages are frequently portrayed in education curriculum as places that are not as developed, or desirable, as urban spaces. Thus, evolutionary ideas, about villages eventually advancing to the stages in which they are like towns, are crucial. In the Lao context, for example, I frequently hear ethnic Lao government officials telling villagers, in Lao language, that “hai xonabot kai pen to muang” (let the countryside become the city). When I ask villagers why they want the countryside to be like the city, and what aspects of the city appeal to them compared to the countryside, they are generally confused by the question. The good and the bad of both is clearly not the point:

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199 The situation in Laos differs considerably from what is happening in Cambodia, in that bilingual education, culturally sensitive curricula, and the government there does not permit non-formal education directed to people living in swidden houses away from villages.
rather, cities symbolise modernity, compared to the age-old countryside, which is envisioned as never changing and locked in the past, impoverished and in need of development.

**Roads and Village Organisation—A Powerful Spatial Symbol of Development**

Although the government’s efforts to reorganise Brao spaces were mainly concentrated on maintaining security during the 1980s and early 1990s, vestiges of earlier efforts to reorganise village space have become increasingly evident in recent years. In fact, the issue of roads did not emerge with the ‘development era’, but predated it (see Chapters 5 and 6).

In the mid-1980s the government required that Brao Umba villages established along the Sesan River be organised in lines, with houses, one after another, situated on both sides of a road. The Kavet in Veun Say and Siem Pang were also encouraged to establish ‘long villages’ along the Sesan and Sekong Rivers in the 1980s and 1990s, even before development agencies arrived. In both cases it was not so different from the requirements of the Sangkum government in the early 1960s (see Chapter 6). When development agencies arrived, the government had more resources to achieve its goals.

One example related to Seila’s support for roads in Kavet villages in Kok Lak commune clearly indicates the symbolic importance of roads. There are four Kavet villages in Kok Lak: Heulay, Rok, ‘Ntrak and La Meuay. The first two are on the west side of the Heulay (Lalay) Stream and the other two are on the east side. The main road from the Sesan River to Kok Lak was built on the west side of the stream with Seila support, as described above, and it is the west side that people from all four villages use when traveling to buy things from Chinese traders living next to the Sesan River at Veun Say (Map 2.2).

Then why were roads built in the two villages on the east side of the stream? Those roads do not serve any practical function. Yet they were built. When I visited the villages in 2003 it was clear that these roads were more about reorganising village space than facilitating travel or access, because in each village the road began abruptly at one end of the village, went about 100 metres through the community, and then ended abruptly at the other side. The roads were clearly intended to be centres of development.
The Brao were told that roads are necessary for development, and that even if roads built in their villages were not actually functional, they were important with familiarising the inhabitants with the idea of ‘development’, in preparation for the future. The same thing took place in a Kavet village in Siem Pang. People were told to “come together”, and were then put on both sides of a short road “from nowhere to nowhere,” as one Kavet put it.

One elder told me that the Kavet were not initially convinced that it was better to make linear villages than circular ones, but government officials and development workers from Seila insisted that organising in this way would facilitate ‘development’. They argued that ‘long villages’ make it possible to establish private plots of land attached to each individual household, where fruit trees and other agricultural crops can be cultivated. The disadvantage of this spatial organisation, however, is that it tends to reduce village solidarity (see Chapter 4).

Villages situated along a road are unable to prohibit people from entering their villages due to village taboos (see Chapter 4). Roads pass right through villages, and people must pass on these roads to reach other villages. This has caused the abandonment of many spatial taboos at the village level. Faced with government pressure, the Kavet eventually agreed to follow the recommendations of the ethnic Khmer government and Seila officials who were the architects of the plan.

There is more that could be said about road development and social and spatial reorganisation amongst the Brao, but apart from the anecdote above, the issue has been dealt with in Chapter 7. It is, however, worth mentioning Route 78, which passes from Stung Treng through Ratanakiri from west to east, finally continuing 70 km from Ban Lung to the border with Vietnam (where it connects with Route 19).

Route 78 is apparently high on the Cambodian and Vietnamese Transport Ministers’ agendas. He is considered an important part of the Economic Development Triangle Initiative of Laos, Vietnam and Cambodia\(^\text{200}\) (see Chapter 7). Eventually, will form part of a massive regional road link, beginning in China, passing through Vietnam,

carrying on through northern of Cambodia, and connecting to the seaport of Sihanoukville.\textsuperscript{201}

The Socialist Republic of Vietnam has recently agreed to loan Cambodia the money to upgrade Route 78 into an all-season paved road.\textsuperscript{202} In February 2007, the Prime Minister of Cambodia, Hun Sen, visited Ratanakiri province with Vietnam’s Deputy Prime Minister, Troung Vinh Trong, to inaugurate the new road. Hun Sen made some telling comments during a speech in Ban Lung. “The road is a symbol of development”, and he said, “The road is important for the development of the country.” He assured the thousands of people who gathered to listen that “The road will bring development to Ratanakiri, Cambodia and Vietnam. It will increase trade with Vietnam and be of benefit to the people and to the Khmer nation-state.” Further, he said, “Where there is a road, there is hope.” He made no mention of the potential threat that road access poses in terms of losing local land to outsiders.

In an article he wrote for \textit{The Cambodia Daily}, Pierre-Yves Clais, a former French UNTAC paratrooper who worked in Stung Treng in the early 1990s, and is today a French travel writer in Cambodia, heavily criticised the deforestation and land grabbing that has occurred along the road between Stung Treng and Ban Lung.\textsuperscript{203} Even before the road has been upgraded, Clais has bemoaned the recent destruction of what he calls the “lush vegetation and fantastic fauna”. He claims that the forest began being cleared when rumours surfaced that the road was going to be repaired. Clearly upset with the situation he wrote,

“It is a death sentence for the Asian Development Bank’s “pro-poor tourism project,” which was to make the three provinces, Stung Treng, Ratanakkiri [sic] and Mondolkiri, a model of development in favor of local communities.

Why build infrastructure and spend millions of dollars to modernize airports if there is nothing left to see? Will international tourists come to admire cashew plantations on which the luckiest of the mountain people will be able to work as slaves?

Since 1992 I have witnessed the dying out of a culture and a world; before long the minorities of the northeast will have disappeared, having lost their land and their forest for the sake of so-called development.”

While somewhat overstated, Clais’ concerns are legitimate. I, too, have noticed how large swaths of forest along the road have been cut and burned, apparently to convert the land to ‘farmland’ from ‘forest’, so that the Forest Law of 2002, which prohibits forested land from being privately owned, does not prevent the powerful who are taking over the land from gaining land titles. Similarly, Frederic Bourdier (2006: 85) was critical of the World Bank for envisioning participation in the construction of a network of roads in Ratanakiri province “without thinking of the disastrous consequences of the intensified appropriation of lands of the Proto-Indo-Chinese populations.”

Commercial Logging

In the 1980s and 1990s commercial logging had a significant impact on the livelihoods of many Brao communities. For example, between 1984 and 1998 over 10,000 *Dipterocarpus* wood resin trees were, according to villagers, commercially logged from Teun, a commune largely inhabited by Kreung people. These trees previously represented an important source of livelihood for local people (Baird 2005b). There were also many problems associated with the ‘Hero logging concession’ amongst Kreung people in Ratanakiri in the late 1990s (Anonymous 2000b). Anonymous (2000b) explained how spirit forests and other important forest areas for the Kreung have been negatively affected by commercial logging operations, thus affecting local livelihoods and culture. Zweers & Sok (2002) wrote that highland elders in Ratanakiri province reported that Vietnamese commercial logging seriously depleted stocks of valuable trees and associated wildlife and NTFPs in the late 1980s. Logging was particularly heavy at the beginning of the 1990s. As Chandler (1996: 237) described it, “Raw materials, especially timber, were being removed at breakneck pace.” Bottomley (2002) has also agreed that the impact of commercial logging on Brao people in Ratanakiri has been negative.

Ruohomaki (2003) commented that considering the large amount of commercial logging that occurred in Ratanakiri in the 1990s, he was surprised that there had not been
any violent protests. Some highlanders have resisted logging operations in Ratanakiri, as pointed out by Bottomley (2002) and Anonymous (2000b). Many have been vocal against logging concessions when given the opportunity to speak openly in NGO-sponsored public forums. Without NGO support many would not dare challenge government-approved concessions.

As important as logging operations have been in terms of Brao social and spatial organisation, including influencing forest-based livelihoods, more recent changes, based on the development of cashew plantations and trends in land alienation (see below) have arguably had much more serious impacts on forest and livelihood issues. Logging concessions have been much less active in recent years, mainly due to pressure applied by the international donor community. Indicative of this, Community Forestry International, a US-based NGO working in Ratanakiri has been devoting its resources in that province to addressing land alienation issues. Other NGOs have generally been working much less on logging issues. A report by AIPP (2006) did not deal with logging issues in the northeast, instead focusing on land issues.

In recent years various development agencies in northeastern Cambodia have worked with Brao communities to set up Community-Based Natural Resource Management (CBNRM) or, when applied to forests, Sahakum prey cheu in Khmer. Measures that have been established, apparently through participatory processes, include the protection of natural forests. While none of these arrangements has been approved by the central government, a number have been approved at the provincial level, and in many cases these regulatory systems have led to some important improvements in natural resource management in villages (see, for example, Anonymous 2000b; Baird 2005b). Some CBNRM work, especially efforts promoted by Seila at the commune-level, was done too rapidly. Results have not been positive.

Among other reasons, CBNRM has been justified amongst the Brao because it is widely believed that ‘traditional taboos’ as well as a lack of modern technologies, previously helped protect the forests and natural resources. But in recent years, these taboos have not been followed as strictly as they once were. This has led to the increased prevalence of modern technologies and associated overexploitation of certain resources (see, for example, Zweers & Sok 2002). Certainly, there has been a decline in the
importance of spatial taboos such as those described in Chapter 4, and this change has undoubtedly had important implications in relation to the use of nature.

Despite the moderate success of some CBNRM community forestry measures in Brao areas, such as Poy and Cha Ung communes in O Chum district, and Teun commune in Kon Mum district, as well as an overall reduction in large-scale legal and illegal commercial logging since the end of the 1990s, commercial logging continues to negatively impact some Brao communities. This is especially true in Veun Say district, where high-level government officials are believed to be complicit. Over the last few years there has been considerable controversy regarding a logging concession in Kreung areas in O Chum district. Thousands of cubic metres of 'luxury wood', apparently to build a new National Assembly building in Phnom Penh, have been harvested.

The most important commercial logging scandal in Brao areas in recent years involved logging in Virachey National Park. This action is discussed in the Afterword at the end of this dissertation.

Cashews and Development

The agricultural situation in Brao areas has changed dramatically in recent years. Whereas the Brao in Laos have been switching to lowland wet-rice cultivation as their main form of agriculture—a result of government-sponsored resettlement and promotion efforts (see Chapter 7)—agricultural transition in Ratanakiri has largely been driven by the introduction of cashew trees, a globally traded cash crop.

According to Rushton (2003), Kreung people in O Chum district started experimenting with planting cashew trees “about 20 years ago.” Due to a lack of markets in the early years, few people took up planting cashews. However, about a decade later, when a market began to develop, largely in response to improved security and transport routes, and the availability of cashews nuts that could be sold, people began to plant cashew trees in much greater quantities. Both government agencies and NGOs supported the marketing of cashews. For example, the NGO CIDSE provided fruit tree (including

cashews) cultivation training to locals in the community. By 2003, 90 percent of the villagers from the village had either well-established or young cashew plantations.

When I first arrived in Ratanakiri in 1995 there were very few cashew trees to be found—only a couple of plantations near Ban Lung, which did not dominate the landscape. Ruohomaki (2003) reported that in 1993 the Cambodian government had begun to promote cash crop plantations to attract agricultural entrepreneurs, settlers from the lowlands, and tourists to Ratanakiri. However, not until 1995 did the Provincial Department of Agriculture, with CARERE support, begin promoting cashews, and in 2000 a cashew nursery was established by the Agriculture Department with Seila support (Irwin & Sok 2005b). However, the real expansion actually occurred as a result of farmer initiated exchanges of seeds and information. Soon cashew planting took off.

Kreung people in O Chum district, Ratanakiri grow cashews to protect their red soil land, especially that near major roads, from outsiders. Irwin & Sok (2005b) mentioned that Kreung people were motivated to plant cashews as a means of taking private control of scarce land resources. One Kreung stated (quoted by Rushton 2003: 25), “The cashew crop is like making a land rights certificate, we villagers can’t read or write, the crops we plant are our letters, after we plant cashew its like making a permanent claim to our ancestral lands.” Certainly, it is much more difficult for the government or outsiders to take over a piece of land with a perennial crop growing on it, than to appropriate land that has been left to regenerate into forest fallow. Tania Li (2007) has pointed out that people in Indonesia plant secondary crops on swidden fields, not necessarily to protect the land, but to make it private so that it can be sold for profit without having to gain permission from the rest of the community, or having to provide locals with a share of the money from selling the land. Context is clearly important.

Currently, one would almost have to be blind to not notice the huge areas in Ratanakiri that are covered in cashews. While reliable statistics regarding the scale of cashew cultivation are unavailable, the Ratanakiri Department of Agriculture reported that there were 21,000 ha of cashew plantations in the Province in 2005, of which more than half were immature and less than five years old. This translated into 7,500 metric tonnes of cashew nut exports from Ratanakiri during that year (very few cashews being consumed in the Province). At 3,000 riel/kg, the provincial income was estimated to be
close to US$9 million (Ironside 2006). That makes cashews the single most important source of income in the Province. Ratanakiri has become the top cashew-producing province in Cambodia (Rushton 2003). Ironside (2006) pointed out that as young trees mature, the quantity of cashews will certainly continue to increase. In fact between 2005 and 2006 the Department of Agriculture estimated that production increased by 500 metric tonnes between 2005 and 2006, even though the price per kg declined.

While the state, powerful Khmer members of the armed forces, and government officials from other parts of the country owned the rubber plantations developed in Ratanakiri in the 1960s (see Chapter 6), the situation with cashew plantations is quite different. Some ethnic Khmer have established medium and large-sized cashew plantations in the province, but highlanders own the majority of the cashew plantations, since they have found it easy to establish small plantations in their swidden fields. Ironside (2006) reported that about 70 percent of all Ratanakiri’s income from cashew nut sales went to small farmers, particularly highlanders.

The Brao and other highlanders typically establish cashew plantations by making swidden fields as in the past, but with an added twist. As highland the rice and other crops are planted, farmers plant cashew seeds directly in the ground. After harvesting the rice and other food crops for a year or more, depending on the quality of the soil, the fields are abandoned for swidden, as would have been the case in the past. However, the farmers do not allow grasses and trees to dominate, cutting them down to allow the cashew trees to grow. Cashews, once established in swidden fields, do not require much maintenance and never require watering, so they are easy for highlanders to manage. The only real danger is bush fires, but provided that the grasses surrounding the trees are cut down once a year at the beginning of the dry season, they tend to grow well. Moreover, once cashew trees are mature they are able to withstand some fire (Irwin & Sok 2005b). Most recently, some highland farmers have purchased gas-run ‘weed eaters’, to assist in the important task of grass cutting directly after cashews are planted.

Cashew trees grow best on the red volcanic soils that are characteristic of the plateau near the provincial capital of Ban Lung, but it is also possible to grow them on the white poor quality soils that dominate the Sesan and Srepok river valleys. The trees on white soils are smaller and produce less fruits than those on the plateau, but in all
cases villagers can begin to collect fruits and sell the seeds within three or four years of planting. Once the trees are large their leaves are allelopathic, preventing grasses or other plants from growing and competing. At that point there is almost no maintenance involved for monoculture cashew plantations.

In some ways, cultivating cashews fits well with Brao livelihoods. As already mentioned, it is easy to add cashews to swidden systems, and little labour or investment is required to establish or maintain plantations. Secondly, cashews are harvested in March and April, when there is a lull in other agricultural activities. Generally, more labour is available for collecting them in that season than there would be if the harvest took place at another time of year. Thirdly, the crop does not spoil, is relatively lightweight, and is easy to transport. Even farmers with plantations far from buyers have no difficulty transporting their crop to market.Fourthly, no advance processing is required.

While many highlanders now sell cashew nuts to traders in the capital city of Ban Lung, small-scale cashew nut traders are ubiquitous in Ratanakiri. When visiting Brao villages during the cashew nut season, it is not unusual to see Khmer buyers from Ban Lung arriving in search of cashews. Traveling by motorcycle with a scale and large sack, they pay cash for whatever cashew nuts the villagers are willing to sell. Marketing cashews could not be more convenient.

Ironsides (2006) demonstrated the importance of cashews in increasing local highland incomes in Ratanakiri. He pointed out that many highland families can now generate US$600-700 per hectare of red soil plantations. One hectare of mature trees produces 1.2 to 1.5 metric tonnes of cashew nuts. Many farmers appreciate the income that cashews provide, and some have significantly improved their incomes as a result. Large Khmer-style houses are being built with the proceeds from cashew sales, and motorcycles are purchased as never before. People have money to buy medicines, to purchase rice during shortages, and to send their children to school. Rushton (2003) reported that the Kreung people she studied were using income from cashews not just to buy luxury goods, but also to provide basic needs. The Brao sometimes trade cashews for ice cream, clothing and other trade items brought to villages during the cashew season. In

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206 However, labour is still seen as a limiting factor for the expansion of cashew plantations (Irwin & Sok (2005b).
many instances, income from cashews is replacing products that highlanders once harvested from the forests.\(^{207}\) People still use the forests, but a transition to a cashew-dominated economy is becoming increasingly evident.

**The Challenges and Risks associated with Cashew Cultivation**

There are a number of important risks and challenges associated with cashew tree cultivation. The first and most obvious one is associated with the Brao economy becoming more closely linked to global commerce. Ratanakiri is very much caught up in wider processes of economic development that are engulfing Southeast Asia and the world more generally. The impact on local social structures and livelihoods is huge (Ruohomaki 2003). While not necessarily a problem *per se*, it is worrying that as the cultivation of cashews expands, the highlanders become increasingly dependent on a single globally traded cash crop that they do not consume as food (They sometimes eat the non-marketable stringent fruits that are harvested with the marketable seeds). As Irwin & Sok wrote, “Dealing with growing a food commodity in a global market is beyond anyone’s control” (2005b: 11). At present, most cashew nuts are exported to Vietnam, but some may also reach Thailand. A large quantity are re-exported to third countries in Europe, North America and elsewhere.

Of relevance to the question of cashews and the links to global markets, Leif Jonsson has remarked that, “Once rural communities and regions have been brought firmly into the various orbits of a modernizing nation-state, their means and motivations for supporting themselves aside from the state have been eroded” and “people increasingly live in terms of the “imagined” national community.” (1997: 556). Clearly there are various means of connecting with outside forces, one of which is to become part of global marketing networks for cashew nuts. Ironside (2006) has expressed the concern that ‘food-first’ agricultural strategies amongst highlanders are losing out to approaches that depend on unpredictable international markets.

Hannah Rushton (2003) found that Kreung farmers in Jou (Svay) village, O Chum district, received 1,200 riel/kg for cashews in their village in 2000, but that the price dropped to 800 riel/kg in 2002, a substantial income decline. The villagers had no idea

\(^{207}\) However, forest products are not just important for income, also for subsistence.
why prices dropped, and could do nothing about it. It may have been that rapid increases in cashew harvests over the four years in question resulted in a market glut. However, prices have continued to fluctuate in more recent times. One Brao cashew cultivator reported that cashews sold for about 1,700 riel/kg in 2003 and 2,000 riel/kg in 2004. In 2005, Irwin & Sok (2005b) found that cashew prices in Cha Ung commune, O Chum district, and in the Ban Lung market ranged between 2,000 and 3,500 riel. In Kroala village, O Chum, the price was 3,000 riel/kg during the same year, and in neighbouring Dong Krapu the price was reportedly 2,000 riel/kg. Most recently, cashew prices have declined again. Ironside (2006) reported that prices in Ratanakiri went from about 3,000 riel/kg in 2005 to 2,000 riel/kg in 2006.

Irwin & Sok (2005b) stated that many Brao farmers were interested in receiving more technical support related to growing cashews. It is clear from my own observations that thus far, most Brao have received very little or no training. For example, while cashews are ideally spaced eight metres apart, it is typical to see Brao farmers spacing them two metres or less apart. In cases when I mentioned to farmers that the trees were growing too tightly, they were generally surprised.

Some feel that the high potential of the land in Ratanakiri is not well utilised through cashew cultivation, compared to other possible options, and that the opportunity costs of planting cashews have not been fully considered.208

Another challenge associated with cashew cultivation was addressed by Rushton’s research. Initially, Rushton intended to study the local knowledge of the Brao people in relation to forests, but she soon found that much of the good red soils that previously supported rich forests had been converted to cashew plantations. This presented some important challenges for the Kreung whom she studied. Firstly, there was a reduction in common forests near their villages, and while some forests remain farther away, they are less accessible than forests used to be. The cultivation of cashews has significantly altered the people’s relationships with forests. Secondly, Rushton (2003) reported that some farmers have become concerned about the increasing difficulty of finding good red soil forests for swidden agriculture. In some villages, such as the ones I visited in Cha Ung commune, all the red soils are covered with cashew trees. As a result,

208 Jeremy Ironside, pers. comm.. April 2006.
the people have switched to doing swidden on less productive white soils. This has resulted in important changes in land management practices, since swidden agriculture can be practiced on white soil areas for only one year before having to be fallowed, and since the time it takes forests on white soils to regenerate is lengthier than for red soils. Irwin & Sok (2005b) found that 28 percent of the land allocated for swidden agriculture in Thouy Umbeul village, Cha Ung commune, was already planted with cashew. Half of the land allocated for swidden agriculture in Thouy Toom (see Map 2.2) was similarly covered.

Rushton (2003) found that villager decisions to convert forests into cashew plantations are having important implications for long-term land management practices. It is not easy to reverse the process to regain swidden fields for growing rice, the main subsistence crop. Villagers told Rushton that when cashew trees are felled to make space for rice and other swidden crops, those crops tend to do very poorly, probably because the allelopathic leaves of the cashews have affected soil quality. Kreung people that only after ploughing was it possible to grow rice at all, and even then production was low. Similarly, Irwin & Sok (2005b: 3) wrote, “Cashews do not replenish the soil, possibly even spoil it, thus disrupting the traditional swidden system.”

I heard similar stories from Brao farmers. In Cha Ung commune, O Chum district, for example, Brao Tanap villagers reported that most of the good red soils had been converted to cashew plantation. However, a few years earlier, when cashew prices declined, three families decided to cut down some cashew trees to revert to swidden agriculture.\footnote{The commune has also apparently lost 120 ha of land to outsiders.} Once they had cut the trees, it was discovered that the soil had hardened, and that erosion had reduced the amount of fertile biomass. The rice planted did not thrive, and the farmers eventually came to the conclusion that the land could be rejuvenated only if left to return to forest fallow for a number of years.

There are other limitations. Irwin & Sok (2005b) reported that in Cha Ung commune most families claimed that they could not expand cashew plantations due to labour scarcity. This was one of the main reasons why the average family had 1.8 and 2.4 ha of cashew trees per household in the two villages studied, and not more.
Livestock can be an important source of highland livelihoods, but once cashew trees are large, grasses for cattle do not grow under them, denying them fodder. More importantly, cattle become ill if grazed in plantations where they consume cashew seeds, as the outer seed casings are slightly toxic.

One positive aspect of the present cashew situation in Ratanakiri is that chemical fertilisers, herbicides and pesticides are rarely used. However, there is a concern that if the density and quantities of cashew trees continue to increase, this could change. In other parts of the world chemical inputs are much more common for cashews, indicating that diseases could develop in Ratanakiri.\(^{210}\)

In 2006, the head of the provincial Agriculture Department of Ratanakiri, who is originally from Phnom Penh, told a foreign tourist that the government is attempting to arrest swidden agriculture in the Province. I have heard various provincial government officials make similar comments. However, the government has had little influence on agricultural trends, despite what it wants others to believe. In Ratanakiri, the government is simply not sufficiently efficient or determined enough to make much of a mark, a situation quite different from that in Laos, where Brao agricultural transition has been driven mainly by government policies and practices (see Chapter 7). However, while swidden agriculture remains an important part of many Brao livelihoods, I do believe that the situation in Laos and Cambodia support Padoch et al. (2007) in their assessment that generally swidden agriculture is in rapid decline in Southeast Asia.

**Looking for a Balance**

Some farmers are concerned about deforestation occurring due to the cashew boom, including about the impact on the environment and forest-based livelihoods, but they tend to be the poorer people, the ones with less interest in cashews. Others are more concerned about the loss of forests for swidden agriculture: this is the issue that is most critical in driving widespread calls to restrict cashew tree expansion. As much as the income from cashews is appreciated, most Brao do not want to become totally dependent on cash crops. During my interviews with Brao people, none have suggested that they

\(^{210}\)Jeremy Ironside 2006. Ibid.
plan to abandon swidden agriculture as their main source of subsistence. Wet rice cultivation is limited in most of the main cashew growing areas.

Some villages are considering ways to restrict the expansion of cashews. For example, the headman from Dong Krapu village told me in 2006 that his community had limited the area allocated for cashew plantations to two hectares per family. In reality, most people there have more. In neighbouring Kroala village, the headman told me that they had decided to limit each family to a maximum of three hectares, and Teun commune has initiated a cap of two hectares of cashews per household.

In the case of Trawng Jong village, people are doing swidden agriculture much farther from the village proper than previously, as forests near the village were the first to be converted to cashew plantations. This has fundamentally changed village habitation practices. Whereas, in the past, many Kreung people did swidden agriculture near the village, allowing them to sleep in the village proper, most now find it necessary to live in their swidden fields, it being too far to ‘commute’ from their fields to the village on a daily basis (2-5 km). As a result, community leaders told me that in 2006 they had banned the expansion of cashew plantations on village lands. One elder told me, “It is not that we don’t like cashews. Everyone likes to get money from selling them, but we also have to make sure that we have land for swidden agriculture, because we eat rice, not cashews.”

Many other communities in Ratanakiri have not yet begun restricting cashew expansion, even in cases where most of the good soil has already been covered with cashews. When I asked farmers how they planned to deal with the inherent conflict between unfettered cashew expansion and the maintenance of swidden systems, there was often little response. Many have apparently not carefully considered the issue, while those who have suggest that changes will have to be made once they are faced with real conflicts between their agricultural systems.

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211 This is different from the Brao Umba and the Kavet, who tend to spend much less time inhabiting villages than the Kreung and Brao Tanap do. For the Kreung, extended abandonment of the village is taboo (huntre in Brao, see Chapter 4), whereas this is not the case for the Brao Umba and Kavet.
Land Alienation

One of the critical changes that has occurred as a result of the neoliberal reforms adopted in Cambodia has been the commodification of land, and its transformation from being exclusively public, or communal property in the Brao context, to becoming private and transferable. This is the first period in history that Brao land has had monetary value, and the boom in cashew cultivation has played an important role in the transformation. Land can now be converted to cashew plantations, thus giving it a tangible value in terms of easily measured future harvests and sales of cashew nuts.

The loss of highlander lands is known as ‘Land Alienation’ by many NGOs working to support indigenous peoples’ land rights in Ratanakiri (NGO Forum on Cambodia 2004; 2006; CARE & NGO Forum on Cambodia 2005). Land alienation has caused highlanders, including the Brao, to lose control of their lands to outsiders, including settlers from the lowlands of Cambodia, soldiers, government officials, and Khmer business people. The land lost was previously used for swidden, raising livestock, NTFP collection and other purposes, including spiritual ones. There are serious concerns that sufficient land will not be available for future generations of highlanders if land alienation continues. This loss of land is an important characteristic of the colonialism that is affecting the Brao in northeastern Cambodia today.

Ratanakiri province has been at the forefront of land disputes between villagers and powerful people, and has been the source of a number of high profile cases. The most well-known are in Aikapheap commune, O Chum district, involving Khmer business people and ethnic Tampuon villagers, in Kong Yu village, Pate commune, O Yadao district, involving the purchase of land from ethnic Jarai villagers by the wife of the Ministry of Finance, and in Bokeo district, involving land grabbing from the Tampuon by a general in the Royal Cambodian Armed Forces (RCAF) (AIPP 2006).

In fact, land problems have plagued Ratanakiri for well over a decade (see, for example, White 1996; Colm 1997; Emerson 1997). The land occupied by the capital city of Ratanakiri, Ban Lung, was controlled by ethnic Tampuon people until relatively


recently, and White (1996) pointed out that as early as the mid-1990s, lowlanders were taking advantage of highlander ignorance of Cambodian land laws by threatening land confiscation by the government, to convince highlanders to sell their land. In the mid-1990s Frederic Bourdier (2006) also envisioned the conflict over land that would eventually come to Ratanakiri.

Serious land problems actually arose with the recognition of private lands in 1989. The 1992 Land Law recognised private land ownership, and the 1993 Cambodian Constitution confirmed the legality of private and public state land ownership (Guttal 2007), while saying nothing about ethnic minorities (Taylor 2006). In 1998 the UN Special Rapporteur for Cambodia stated that,

"The rights of indigenous communities to land and the natural resources on which their livelihoods depend is under threat not only because of logging and plantations, but also from land grabbing, which takes several forms: bribes to the weakest members of the community, false promises, enticement, or simply intimidation and violence."\(^{214}\)

The situation has become more and more difficult, and there have been an increasing number of reports of private investors from the lowlands appropriating local lands, especially those with red volcanic soils (Ruohomaki 2003; NGO Forum on Cambodia 2004; 2006).

The most direct method used by powerful investors to gain land is ‘land grabbing’: simply taking it. For example, Brao Tanap people in Teun village, Kon Mum district (see Map 2.2), had land taken from them by a Khmer ‘investor’ (as the Brao called him), who invited ethnic Cham people to inhabit part of the land to work as labourers planting cashews. After the USAID-funded ‘Public Interest for Legal Advocacy Project’\(^{215}\) provided legal support, the Brao were able to scare away the ‘investor’, and have 17 hectares of land returned to them, with another seven hectares going to the state because trees are growing there. The Brao villagers have had more difficulty removing 30 Cham families from the land. The situation has become particularly complicated, because the original Cham settlers sold the land to newer settlers before leaving. The buyers refuse to move, claiming that they bought the land and are not squatters. One Brao elder


\(^{215}\) Organised by the Cambodian NGO Community Legal Education Center (CLEC).
commented that in the old days the Brao would simply have attacked the outsiders and chased them away. Because of 'human rights' this is no longer possible (see, also, Li 2002).

Another means by which villagers are cheated out of their land is through outsiders making small land purchases to gain footholds in villages, and then gradually taking control of larger areas of adjacent land, usually by fencing it in. The newcomers apply for land titles, and by the time the highlanders realise what is happening, one-hectare plots have turned into 10-or 20-hectare pieces with legal title.

In other cases, buyers have tried to gain control by taking advantage of Brao people's low levels of literacy in Khmer. In Taveng district, for example, Brao villagers agreed to sell two hectares of land to a Khmer man. They signed a document to this effect, but by the time the document reached the Brao commune chief of Taveng Kroam, the document stated that the villagers were selling 20 hectares of land, not two. Fortunately, the commune chief noticed that a zero had been added, and questioned the Brao villagers. The land sale was blocked, but things rarely turn out as well for highlanders.

Landless ethnic Khmer and Cham settlers from other parts of Cambodia frequently squat on Brao land without purchasing it or even asking permission to use it. This has been a serious problem for people in Labang 1 and 2 communes in Lom Phat district. Settlers from the lowlands simply colonised Brao lands. Such problems and clashes occurred in the 1960s between ethnic minorities and Khmer Kandal (see Chapter 6). In this case real colonisation from the lowlands is causing the Brao to lose their lands.

The Brao have a tradition of 'lending' land to people from other villages for a year or two. Unfortunately, some have taken advantage of this practice by 'borrowing' land and then obtaining land title documents for it. This situation parallels that in British Columbia, Canada, in which native people, confronted with colonial demands for land, initially could not comprehend that outsiders could take their land and convert it into private property (Harris 2002). In 2002 a Chinese trader from Veun Say—with a long history of interaction with the Brao (see Chapter 5) and a good understanding of Brao customs—asked the leaders of Chuay village, Taveng district (see Map 2.2), if he might 'borrow' eight hectares of land to raise cattle. After agreeing, the villagers later found
that he had expanded the area under his control to 20 hectares through planting cashew
trees and engaging in lowland wet-rice agriculture on adjacent land. In 2005, the Chinese
trader built a fence around a still larger piece of land, and sought a land title agreement
for 100 hectares or more. Although the Kreung villagers of Chuay have complained to
the commune and district governments, the problem has not been resolved. To make
matters more complicated, the Chinese trader is now asserting that the land is not in
Chuay village’s territory or even in Taveng district, but in neighbouring Talao commune
of Andong Meas district (a district without a Brao population). The Kreung insist that the
area is inside Taveng, based on the established border between the two districts in 1988
by Ya Phalen, the Brao governor of the province at the time. Such situations are very
difficult, but it is at least heartening that highlanders are becoming more aware of this
sort of scam.

Powerful government officials, including Khmer and even highlanders holding
senior positions in local government, frequently act as land brokers for outsiders, or take
control of large tracts of land for themselves. As Guttal (2007: 15) has stated, “Often,
individuals, families and entire communities are being coerced and bullied by powerful
Provincial authorities to either sell land or simply hand it over.” In 2006 the chief of
Forestry in Ratanakiri claimed ownership over 100 ha of land belonging to the Kreung
villages of Geulong, Bee and Gum, all of which are in La-oke commune, O Chum district
(Map 2.2). He told the people from the communities that he had papers confirming that
“the Ministry” had granted him the land, and that it was no use resisting. He also claimed
that a powerful member of the National Assembly, Bou Thang, was backing him (see, also, Chapter 6). However, when contacted, Bou Thang declared that he knew nothing of
the deal. Therefore, the Commune Council refused to sign off on the arrangement, as no
papers from the Ministry were produced. The chief of Forestry eventually abandoned his
‘claim’.

In another part of La-oke commune, the district chief, an ethnic Kreung native of
La-oke village, succeeded in gaining control of a 40 hectare parcel\textsuperscript{216} of land from
villagers, which he sold to a Khmer businessman for US$10,000. The new owner fenced
the land and planted cashews on it. The villagers received only 20,000 riel/family (about

\textsuperscript{216} Some claim that the parcel is much more extensive, one Brao stating that it was 1,000 hectares in area.
US$5) in compensation and are not allowed to let their livestock onto the land. Even though the vender is Kreung, many villagers resent what he did. When inter-ethnic conflicts like this occur, class often emerges as an important factor. The district chief is considered ‘rich’.

Land brokers sometimes convince villagers to sell land by asserting that if they do not sell, others will simply take it in any case. Associated with this tactic, they have been known to incite village-to-village conflicts over tracts of land. They persuade the people of one village to sell the disputed land, claiming that if they do not sell, the people from the other village will. In Labang 1 commune, Lom Phat district, for example, Brao villagers lost 40 hectares of land in 2003. A cashew nut investor threatened to simply take the area should the villagers refuse his offer. Tania Li (2007) has pointed out that in Indonesia people without secure tenure have an incentive to sell land before others take it.

Although many are cheated, the land crisis is also linked to the commodification of the highlander world-view. As Ruohomaki (2003: 87) has pointed out, “[I]ncreasingly, the goods purchased at the market are meant for the fulfillment of socially defined needs, of what a good standard of living should be. Hence, radios or motorcycles are status markers that distinguish their owner from others who do not own them.” Highlander values are shifting, and consumer goods are rapidly replacing bronze gongs and beer jars as the most important symbols of wealth and prestige. Selling land is seen by many to be a means of obtaining these new Commodities. In pre-French times, slaves were sold for gongs; now land is sold for motorcycles.

“[T]he motorcycle is perhaps the most wanted item,” wrote Ruohomaki (2003: 87). Having one distinguishes the better-off families from others. It offers people opportunities to realise new geographies in which space is shrunk by ability to quickly cross it. The desire for motorcycles and other consumer goods—as well as for cures for sick relatives—has sometimes enticed villagers to sell land. An example is the Brao Tanap people in Taong commune, Kon Mum district, who have sold most of their holdings to outsiders in recent years (at least 270 ha, beginning in 1995, according to one

source). One Brao man living in Ban Lung, whom I know well, sold a prime piece of land in town partly to cover medical expenses. He had incurred debt buying modern medicines and then more debt for a buffalo that he sacrificed after the modern medications had failed to cure him. He used some of the land proceeds to buy motorcycles for him and all his adult children, and claimed that he had no option but to sell his land.

Apart from the problem of losing land, fences are increasingly dividing landscapes in ways previously unknown. In some cases there is no space for paths between swiddens and villages, making movement difficult, and changing the ways the highlanders use space. Everyday activities, such as hunting, fishing, and the collection of forest products and even firewood are limited. The effects are much the same effect as the imposition of fences on native people during the colonial period in the province British Columbia, Canada (Harris 2002).

Many land-related conflicts are occurring in the villages, especially with outsiders. Some Brao have resisted by stealing fence posts, or by cutting holes in fences, but most dare not do much. As Harris (2002) described, many Brao are living on their ancestral lands, but much of their surrounding land has been demarcated, fenced and otherwise taken control of by outsiders. Their places, and their relations to space, have changed dramatically as a result of the colonial expansion that is occurring.

**Large Land Concessions**

Large land concessions to companies are another emerging problem in Brao areas. They have the potential to cause considerable turmoil in coming years. The Brao villages of Katot and Charop, as well as other ethnic Lao and Khmer villages in Sesan district, Stung Treng province, are facing severe land alienation as a result two land concessions totaling 19,917 hectares for fast-growing acacia trees, or possibly rubber (what exactly will be grown remains unclear). These concessions will result in the loss of most of the villagers’ forestlands, severely upsetting local livelihoods (Map 8.1).

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218 Concessions larger than 10,000 hectares are illegal under the 2001 Land Law, but the company got around the regulation by setting up two companies and splitting the land between them. Contrary to the spirit of the Land Law, both concessions are actually controlled by the same powerful Phnom Penh-based investor.
Map 8.1 Land concessions in Sesan district, Stung Treng province

Although Chan Sarun, the Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, who recommended that the concession be granted, told the media that the land was not very fertile, and covered only with undergrowth, NGO workers in Stung Treng have contradicted him, insisting that the area actually includes many large trees and important wildlife resources. Brao people from Katot have told me that the forests are still ‘good’. In January 2006, Chan Sarun visited Katot with a large number of Khmer officials. According to the headman of Katot, the Minister brought a wrap around skirt for each woman in the village, two bottles of wine, and other gifts. He agreed to the villagers’ request for US$1,000 to build a small shelter for Buddhist monks who visit from neighbouring ethnic Lao villages. The event was undoubtedly related to the concession, but initially the headman did not mention that this was the case when I talked to him about the visit. Later that day, however, he showed me some PVC pipes that the concession company had provided for developing a piped water system for the village.

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something I have never seen in any Brao village, either in Cambodia or Laos. Parked under their house was a brand new tractor, one of two that the company had provided to the village. Bribery of the village leaders is apparently being attempted, to break opposition against the concession. This situation has the potential to cause a great deal of conflict within the community. A Brao elder from the village commented, when I asked him about the concessions, “I am afraid there will be a war in the future. There are a lot of bad feelings and conflict related to the concession.” He declined to elaborate.

**Working to Solve Land Problems**

NGOs in Ratanakiri have been working to stop land alienation by raising awareness amongst villagers, and by supporting them in other ways. They are brokering village agreements that prevent the sale of village land and frequently remind local government officials that the 2001 Land Law of Cambodia prevents the sale of indigenous land (NGO Forum on Cambodia 2004; 2006). The Land Law of 2001 states:

> “An indigenous community is a group of people who reside in the territory of the Kingdom of Cambodia whose members manifest ethnic, social, cultural and economic unity and who practice a traditional lifestyle, and who cultivate the lands in their possession according to customary rules of collective use. Prior to their legal status being determined under a law on communities, the groups actually existing at present shall continue to manage their community and immovable property according to their traditional customs and shall be subject to the provisions of this law” (Article 23, as quoted in AIPP 2006: 17).

Article 25 states,

> “The lands of indigenous communities are those lands where the said communities have established their residences and where they carry out traditional agriculture. “The lands of indigenous communities include not only lands actually cultivated but also include reserves necessary for the shifting cultivation which is required by the agricultural methods they currently practise and which are recognised by the administrative authorities. “The measurement and demarcation of boundaries of immovable properties of indigenous communities shall be determined according to the factual situation as asserted by the communities, in agreement with their

220 However, only some of those agreements have proven to be resilient.
neighbours, and as prescribed by procedures in Title VI of this law and relevant sub-decrees” (as quoted in AIPP 2006: 17).

Article 26 allows indigenous communities to own land collectively. However, they do not have the right to transfer land rights to other parties if the land is ‘State Public Property’. Such land is to be managed in perpetuity based on ‘traditional decision-making structures’ and ‘indigenous customs’, although those terms imply static and unchanging entities. Article 28 states that no outside party is allowed to acquire any rights to immovable properties belonging to indigenous communities. Article 39 states that the transfer or possession of lands eligible for indigenous collective title is not valid (AIPP 2006).

In 2005, in a report to the 62nd session of the UN Commission of Human Rights, the Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms of Indigenous Peoples warned that there was

“still an “implementation gap” between the legislation and day-to-day reality and that enforcement and observance of the law was beset with myriad obstacles and problems...The main problem is...the vacuum between existing legislation and administrative, legal and political practice. The divide between form and substance constitutes a violation of the human rights of indigenous peoples” (as quoted in AIPP 2006: 18).

Unfortunately, much of the land grabbing that has taken place in Ratanakiri province has occurred since the 2001 Land Law was passed, making all those deals technically illegal. One way in which the Land Law has been subverted is by producing fake land certificates and transaction papers dated prior to 2001. These documents are used to claim that deals since 2001 actually occurred before the Land Law was adopted, making them legal (Guttal 2007).

To make matters worse, when highlanders have been cheated out of their land, they have found it exceedingly expensive and difficult to use the court system to gain justice. There are serious problems with the judicial system, as the courts tend to rule in favour of the powerful people who either pay them or have influence over them in other ways (Guttal 2007; Backstrom et al. 2006; NGO Forum on Cambodia 2004; 2006). Brao people with whom I have talked have little faith in the official justice system to resolve land problems.
As much as I appreciate the work that NGOs are doing on land issues in Ratanakiri, it is unfortunate that while fighting for local rights through invoking the Land Law and Forestry Law, NGOs have failed to mention that spatially, the Land Law is actually a centralising mechanism, transferring power from the provinces to the central government.\textsuperscript{221} Paradoxically, NGOs are trying to use centralised legislation to empower local people.

**Communal Title**

The Ministry of Land Management, with Seila support, has made effort to establish communal indigenous land tenure in a few pilot villages in Ratanakiri province. The provisions in the Land Law for indigenous communal land title are seen as progressive, compared to the policies of other countries in mainland Southeast Asia (NGO Forum on Cambodia 2006), where no such provisions exist. However, the establishment process has been excruciatingly slow, and it is uncertain when the pilot villages will gain communal land title. The sub-decree on Communal Land Titling still has not been passed,\textsuperscript{222} and there have been problems defining who exactly is ‘indigenous’. Very slow movement has led NGOs to call for a speeding up of the process to be sped up (NGO Forum on Cambodia 2006). Many Brao value communal land title and communal exchanges of labour for swidden agriculture (see, for example, Matras-Troubetzkoy 1983), believing that they go together, and lead to increased community solidarity. They have frequently told me that it makes sense in terms of facilitating the building of communally beneficial fences, and that communal title will ensure that there is land for future generations. However, many in government are not keen on the concept, and are especially opposed to communal land title in cashew areas. A concomitant problem is that of the government claiming that villages have to become official ‘legal entities’ before being granted communal land titles. The Ministry of Interior has, however, written by-laws allowing for this to happen in pilot villages (Peter Swift, pers comm. 2007).

\textsuperscript{221} Ken Irwin, Seila/IDRC advisor based in Ratanakiri, pers. comm. November 2005. However, according to Peter Swift (pers. comm. 2007), some in the Ministry believe such a sub-decree is not necessary.

\textsuperscript{222} Ken Irwin 2005. Ibid.
In the Kreung village of Kroala, one of the model communities in Ratanakiri province for establishing communal land tenure, an NGO-sponsored researcher on village traditional authority and conflict resolution reported that people from the village wanted individual land title, not communal tenure. One Kreung man told the researcher that his community had been forced into requesting communal tenure. Follow-up investigations determined, however, that most people in the village actually do support community land tenure, but that a small number oppose the idea. But when someone has a sick relative in desperate need of medical care, it is difficult to think long-term when their loved one might be dead tomorrow if there is no money to pay now for medicine. The same is true when highlanders are faced with severe rice shortages.

Land alienation is a complex issue. On the other hand, land alienation is a real livelihood and cultural menace for poor highlanders. It is also one of the biggest threats to natural forests, because even though the 2002 Forestry Law prohibits the clearing of natural forests, the reality is that clearing occurs frequently, giving powerful people control over the land (NGO Forum on Cambodia 2006).

It appears that ethnic Tampuon villages near Ban Lung have faced the worst instances of land alienation. In Yak Loam commune, for example, one village recently ‘disappeared’ after all its land was sold, and in a nearby village, while people have retained ownership of the land where their houses are located, they have no agricultural land, or even land for use as a burial ground. They must pay ethnic Cham people who have purchased the land to bury their dead. If they want the corpse buried lying down, they must pay more than if they are willing to have it buried upright (the latter takes up less land). Zweers & Sok (2002) reported that the Tampuon appeared to have abandoned more traditional taboos than the Kreung and Jarai people that they studied. Some have speculated that the clan structure of the Tampuon fundamentally works against village solidarity, and that this is one of the reasons why Tampuon people have tended to be less united against land alienation than the Brao and Kreung, who do not have a clan structure and tend to organise as villages, a spatial level more in tune with present-day government administration. One prominent indigenous land activist who is herself half Tampuon and half Lao, but who also speaks Brao, told me that she thinks the Brao and Kreung communities would not fall apart if faced with land problems, as has often been the case.
with the Tampuon. However, others have pointed out that the problems facing the Tampuon may be mainly due to the fact that they are located on the best soils on the plateau, making their lands the prime target of land grabbing.

The Tampuon are not the only ones experiencing a problem in gaining land for grave sites. The Kreung village of Trawng Jong in O Chum district has its graveyard in a rubber plantation that, although situated on ancestral land, is now owned by the state rubber plantation established in the 1960s. While Khmer rubber tappers are fearful of the spirits of the dead Kreung buried amongst the rubber trees, and have complained to the Kreung about the location of the graveyard on numerous occasions, the Kreung have no other burial ground, and have refused therefore, to relocate their graveyard.

It has become evident that highlanders, including the Brao, often feel envious if members of their communities obtain money from selling land, while they do not. Because the Brao tend to conceive of their society as being largely egalitarian (see Chapter 3), it is upsetting to them when one person in their community gains much more wealth than others in the village. Their sense of societal balance is challenged. Therefore, land sales can lead to intense conflicts and incite other villagers to sell land to attain similar 'statuses. This can result in a vicious cycle of land sales and land alienation, and more land sales, until nothing is left. There is a sense that if one person can benefit from selling village land, everyone should be allowed the same opportunity, even if it ultimately leads to everyone's demise. A good example of this can be found in Dong Kamal village in O Chum district (Map 2.2), where Kreung people are engaged in 'justified' land-selling.

While land alienation is particularly problematic in the highlands, it is a growing problem throughout Cambodia, as the rich and powerful increasingly gain control over space (Guttal 2007). One has only to take a cursory look at the large number of newspaper articles in the English language press in Cambodia to recognise that land alienation has become one of the most important issues facing Cambodia today.223 Hun

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Sen has even publicly warned government officials, business people and the armed forces that illegal land seizure must stop, or there could be what he termed a “farmers’ revolution” against the government. Although Hun Sen did not mention that the confiscation of land for rubber helped ignite rebellion against the Sangkum government in the 1960s (see Chapter 6), his remarks about a farmer revolt are unlikely to be coincidence. He was certainly around the last time that land issues escalated into revolution. Moreover, Hun Sen is probably well aware that land issues have been at the forefront of dissention in the Central Highlands of Vietnam, along with Christian religious issues (Human Rights Watch 2002; Writenet 2006). But will the lessons of history be considered as carefully as they should be? If it is any indication, the National Authority for the Resolution of Land Disputes, which was created in early 2006 as a high-profile emergency solution to Cambodia’s endemic land conflict problem, had, by the end of 2006, not resolved a single land conflict in the country.

The loss of land by highlanders, regardless of the reasons, obviously has important social and spatial implications. It affects all forms of land use, from hunting and fishing to agriculture. It makes fallowing swidden fields risky, as land that is not planted with crops can easily be grabbed. How can NTFPs be collected from the forests when others own them? Loss of land has also led to further tensions between highlanders and Khmer. As one NGO activist told me, “Land problems make highlanders dislike Khmer. They do not want to come near them, resulting in more social separation than before.” Ultimately, land loss affects livelihoods and culture, including how space is used and fundamentally perceived. At a late 2006 NGO-sponsored workshop about land issues in Ratanakiri, a Kreung woman said, “The Khmer can survive on just a little land. 5 x 5 metres is enough for them, but we need 5 to 6 hectares.” Clearly, the issue has taken on an ethnic character, with important implications in relation to identities.


A behaviour that has struck me throughout my research is how the Brao frequently frame things in ethnic terms, with the Khmer frequently being criticised. For example, a Kreung elder said to me in 2006, "The Khmer [Prom in Brao] don’t respect minorities. They can’t speak our language even after being here a long time. They just want our land."

**Virachey National Park and the Brao in Northeast Cambodia**

Protected area management is a modern way of organising space that is considered by many to be a form of ‘development’. It is, in fact, promoted by ‘development organisations’ and is a form of change that is considered positive by many. However, protected area (PA) management frequently involves attempts by central states to gain control over territory, using various coercive measures (Peluso 1993; Vandergeest 1996a & b; Jonsson 2002; Neumann 2005).

Virachey National Park (VNP) is one of Cambodia’s largest PAs. Created by Royal Decree in 1993, it covers 332,500 hectares in the northeastern provinces of Ratanakiri and Stung Treng (Map 8.2). Ethnic Brao Umba and Kavet peoples once inhabited most of the land now included in the park (Baird & Dearden 2003; Ironside & Baird 2003; Baird 2008b). Koy (1999) reported that 11,799 people in 41 villages and nine communes are situated directly adjacent or inside VNP, the majority of which are Brao (Baird 2008b).

In the 1970s and 1980s some international PA specialists vaguely proposed that part of what is presently VNP be included in PAs (see Baird 2008b), but it was not until the early 1990s that the idea gained any momentum. Initially the idea of establishing a 500,000-hectare ‘Indochina Tri-state Reserve for Peace and Nature’ between VNP in Cambodia, Mom Ray Nature Reserve in Vietnam, and either the Nam Kong Provincial Protected Area or the Dong Ampham National Protected Area in Laos was proposed by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). There was little consideration of the Brao people who had previously lived in the area, as the process was national and international in scale (Westing 1993a & b; McNeely 1993; MacKinnon 1993; Mok 1993; Hoang 1993).
The World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) followed up with support for VNP in early 1998 (Lay 2000). This forced the Brao to face fresh attempts to spatially reorganise them, this time in the name of nature conservation. After 1998 the Brao came to realise that the biggest obstacle to moving back to their homelands was no longer poor security or the KR, but the inclusion of their lands in one of Cambodia’s largest PAs.

The World Bank and the Global Environmental Facility (GEF) followed with large-scale financial support via the Biodiversity and Protected Areas Management Project (BPAMP) in 2001 (Baird 2008b), a project that is scheduled to end at the end of 2007.
Although none of the funders of VNP have expressed opposition to the claims of former inhabitants of the park, and most have stated that their intention is fair treatment (see Ironside & Baird 2003; Baird 2008b), neither have they been willing to take an explicit stand in support of Brao land rights inside the park. Most have combined indigenous-friendly discourses with practices that disempower the Brao. To many conservationists, having such a large PA with few human inhabitants is regarded as advantageous, so most have been willing to turn a blind eye to the plight of the Brao. They have tended to willfully ignore the history of the area. Moreover, the central government has been happy to use the status of the park to gain more power over a marginal part of the country, one that they did not previously have control (Baird 2008b).

Most recently, there has been much rhetoric about working cooperatively with Brao people in managing the park, but actual practices differ considerably from professed policies. For example, the Brao are no longer allowed to live in the park, and it has been only after considerable delay that some communities have been allocated ‘Community Protected Areas’ (CPAs) to allow for limited use of park resources. The Brao are allowed to fish and collect NTFPs in these state-created CPA spaces, but the conditions of their use have been determined in a top-down manner at the ministerial level. One rather arbitrary, and quite geographical, condition put on the establishment of CPAs in VNP was that their extent was not to be farther than a four-hour walk from the villages. Why not three hours? Why not five? There has been no clear justification. Questions of history have been given less importance than arbitrary numbers. This is upsetting to many Brao, who do not accept that the new rule can erase generations of history inside the park.

In February 2007 Kavet elders from Kok Lak commune, Veun Say district, told me that they had three major problems with their CPA: 1) the borders are not to their liking, as Kavet were not allowed to participate in their demarcation in the field, 2) they must ask permission of the distant park office, whenever they want to enter the CPA, thus wasting time, and 3) they are not permitted to conduct swidden agriculture, their main livelihood activity, in the CPA. The Cambodian government, with funding from the World Bank and GEF, quietly forced the Brao who had managed to work their way back into the park (in the late 1990s and early 2000s) to leave, even though using World Bank funding was contrary to the Bank’s indigenous and resettlement policies.
Circumstances have kept the Brao from living in their areas of origin since the 1960s and early 1970s (see Chapter 6), yet they have found that they have no legal rights over their traditional lands. Due to the confusion surrounding the KR period, and large scale relocation that took place then, the Cambodian government decided, at the national level, that it would be too problematic to consider land claims preceding 1979. The NGOs working in northeastern Cambodia in support of indigenous land rights have largely been unwilling to support Brao claims over lands inside VNP, even though the Park’s establishment has been the biggest ‘land grab’ in northeastern Cambodia to date. For example, the NGO Forum on Cambodia (2006) does not make any mention of land alienation due to VNP, describing communes that have lost most of their land to the park as having had “low” levels of land alienation. AIPP (2006: 22) did, however, acknowledge that, “The establishment of national parks or protected areas where the traditional user rights of indigenous communities are then limited or denied is also a cause for serious concern.”

The Brao have demonstrated resistance and mistrust towards VNP, by various means. Some, for example, have knocked down signs put up by the park. They often complain about the Park, mainly amongst themselves and behind the backs of Park officials. However, it would be wrong to say that they are totally opposed to the Park. In many ways they see its value, especially for protecting the forests from commercial logging, and for keeping outsiders from overexploiting resources in their traditional lands (see, however, Afterword). Many complex issues are involved.

One of the spatial results of having villages concentrated in a relatively small area near the Sesan River (see Map 2.2) is that the Brao are no longer able to organise village territories as they once did, although elders generally remember the boundaries of their previous territories. They often have to pragmatically allow swiddens of different villages to become situated between their villages and the swiddens of the people from those village. This is generally considered to be taboo, or ‘huntre meur’ in Brao (see Chapter 4). This is the case for Siang Sai, Koh Pong Toich, Ke Kuang Toich and Tanaich villages in Taveng Kroam commune. All do swiddens in the same general area. In Taveng Leu commune people from Bang Geut, Pleu Thom, Son, Liang Veny, Ke Kuang Thom,
Trabok and Bong villages are sometimes forced to cross other village territories, although they try to avoid doing so whenever possible (see Map 2.2).

The development of a national park has had very important implications for the Brao. They were not excluded from their mountain spaces in VNP due to being internally resettled to the lowlands, as happened in Laos (see Chapter 7). They are still excluded from Brao upland spaces, but this exclusion is partial and conditional, dependent on their willingness to follow directives from above.

Hydroelectric Dams—The Dramatic Forced Reorganisation of Brao Space

The O Chum Dams

In 1985 Vietnamese ‘experts’ decided to build moderate-sized hydroelectric dams in Ratanakiri province, in order to provide electricity for the provincial capital. They identified the O Chum Stream as having potential, and built two dams on it in the 1980s, which together have an electricity generating capacity of 1 MW. Both dams continue to be operational.226

The lower dam was built first. It flooded a relatively small amount of land belonging to the two Kreung villages of Trawng Jong and Jou (Svay) (Map 2.2). In 1989 the upper dam was constructed, which caused the flooding of a much larger area, including 50-60 hectares of lowland paddy land. The flooding caused significant spatial reorganisation of Trawng Jong and O Chum villages, the owners of the land. No compensation was offered for any of the land lost. Initially, the dam builders promised that those impacted would receive free electricity, but after the project was completed the people found themselves paying the same rate as everyone else.

The Yali Falls Dam and Dramatic Agriculture and Land-Use Changes in Ratanakiri

The Yali Falls dam is on a very different scale than the O Chum dam, being one of Vietnam’s largest hydroelectric projects. With an installed capacity of 720 MW, and costing US$1 billion, construction of the 65 m high dam began in November, 1993, on

226 However, in 2004 an oil-powered generator was installed to provide supplemental power for Ban Lung when not enough power is generated by the dams.
the Krong Poko, a large tributary of the Sesan River in Gia Lai province, in the Central Highlands of Vietnam (Map 8.3). The dam created a large 64.5 km$^2$ reservoir, which

![Map 8.3. Completed and planned dams in the Sesan River basin in Vietnam and Cambodia](image)

caused the resettlement of many highlanders from the area. International aid for the project was provided by Russia and the Ukraine, and the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA) assisted with tunnel construction (Wyatt & Baird 2007).

Many initiatives realised during the post-French period have their origins in the French period, including this dam. A French entrepreneur was granted a concession to construct a hydroelectric dam at Yali Falls in 1929. When the investor was unable to develop the project as planned, French authorities revoked the concession in 1931, before any construction began.\footnote{Message from the Resident Superior of Annam, May 4, 1931. \textit{Centre des Archives d’Outre-Mer}, in Aix-en-provence, France, Indochine 59412.}
Various plans for harnessing hydropower on the Sesan River were developed in the 1970s by the Mekong Committee (the predecessor of the MRC).\textsuperscript{228} It envisaged the construction of 180 dams on the tributaries of the Mekong River, including sixteen hydropower development sites in the Sesan River basin—five projects in Cambodia, ten in Vietnam, and one border project (Nguyen 1999).

Although the World Bank refused to finance the Yali Falls dam directly due to concerns regarding resettlement from the reservoir area of the project (Wyatt & Baird 2007), it later agreed to fund a 500 KV transmission line as part of a US $575 million loan for transmission and distribution facilities. This line was constructed to send power from Yali—as well as other Sesan dams that are being planned and constructed—to southern industrial regions, including Ho Chi Minh City (World Bank 1996).

The construction of the Yali Falls dam began modification of the river hydrology and water quality of the Sesan River from early mid-1996 (Fisheries Office & NTFP 2000; Baird et al. 2002). By May 2000, when the first two of four turbines were commissioned and put into operation, the dam had caused large-scale ecological, socio-cultural and economic impacts to the communities living along the Sesan River in Kon Tum and Gia Lai provinces in Vietnam, and in Ratanakiri and Stung Treng provinces in Cambodia. Even today, compensation for these impacts have not materialised, despite years of attempts by local communities and their advocates to highlight the problems caused by the dam (see Ojendal et al. 2002; Hirsch & Wyatt 2004; Wyatt & Baird 2007).

An Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) was carried out for the Yali Falls dam, but the Cambodians were never informed, consulted, or officially given a copy of it. In any case, it considered only impacts six km downstream from the dam site, far from the point where the Sesan River enters Cambodia, 70 km away (Wyatt & Baird 2007). The EIA was completed by the Swiss consultant, Electrowatt Engineering, on behalf of Electricity of Vietnam (EVN) and coordinated by the Interim Mekong Committee (IMC).

\textsuperscript{228} The MRC is the regional river basin authority, an inter-governmental agency consisting of the four Lower Mekong Basin countries of Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos and Thailand. In its present form, the MRC's mandate is derived from its April 1995 'Agreement on Cooperation for the Sustainable Development of the Mekong River Basin' (see http://www.mrcmekong.org/about_us/agreement_1995.htm).
The Swiss government completely funded the EIA at the cost of US $1,090,000 (Ojendal et al. 2002), a high price for such low quality work.

In the absence of any official EIAs or ex poste facto studies of the transboundary impacts in Cambodia, a number of NGO-supported studies have documented the downstream impacts of the Yali Falls dam in Ratanakiri and Stung Treng provinces (see Baird et al. 2002; Fisheries Office & NTFP 2000). These impacts have affected 55,000 people from many ethnic groups in 90 villages, including a large number of Umba, Kreung, Kavet and Lun people.

The first unusual floods caused by the dam occurred in mid-1996, when communities along the river lost property, livestock, and crops. This event was attributed to a construction-related failure of a diversion dam built to facilitate Yali’s construction (Fisheries Office & NTFP 2000). Since then, wet season flooding has continued to be unusually severe and unpredictable, sometimes catching unwary river-users by surprise. According to an associated study that collected testimonial evidence, these rapid changes in river flow and water levels led to thirty-nine drowning deaths (Lerner 2003). The impact studies attribute these unusual flooding events partly to wet season flood control operations at Yali. Unusual and rapid water level rises have also occurred during the dry season. Unpredictable floods have drowned livestock, washed away boats and fishing nets, and destroyed crops. These findings have been confirmed by another study of the downstream impacts of the Yali Falls dam, conducted with support from Harvard University lawyers (NGO Forum on Cambodia 2005). The changed nature of the river has caused some villages to move inland to forested areas, which has resulted in additional negative impacts to forests (Wyatt & Baird 2007).
Since Yali began operations in 2000, communities have observed higher-than-normal river levels in the dry season months. This change has slightly improved dry season motorised river travel, but this benefit is greatly outweighed by the negative impacts on fishing, shellfish collection, agriculture, and the harvesting of wild vegetables. The increased flows, along with changes in the hydrology of the Sesan River, have also harmed various forms of wildlife, including threatened sandbar nesting birds such as River Lapwings, and River Terns, and the highly endangered Black-bellied Terns (Claassen 2004).

The operation of the Yali Falls dam has been linked to year-round unpredictable fluctuations in river levels and flow over shorter time periods, unrelated to seasonal rainfall. With hydropower plants such as Yali, electricity generation directly correlates to the amount of water passing through the turbines, and hence to river levels and flow. Such variations occur sometimes on a diurnal basis, and at other times, days apart (Wyatt & Baird 2007). They continue to pose problems for Sesan communities by washing away boats and fishing nets, and by affecting communities’ ability to employ fishing practices that rely on stable river levels. Furthermore, they have made it difficult to practice riverbank agriculture. In the past, communities along much of the Mekong and its tributaries made widespread use of exposed fertile riverbanks and sandbars to grow supplementary seasonal crops. These agricultural practices constituted an important source of food security, especially during the dry season.

At certain times of the year, particularly during the wet season, the water in the Sesan River is more turbid than it was a decade ago. This has been attributed to increased riverbank erosion and possible riverbed scouring associated with fluctuating river flows and levels. Villagers report a bad smell from the river, especially after wet season floods. Along the Sesan river water along the Sesan has customarily been used for drinking and bathing. Since 1996, communities have complained of an increase in health-related problems associated with unusual flow conditions, and in particular with odd water level rises during both the wet and dry seasons. Reported ailments include itchiness, bumps, and eye irritation after bathing in the River, and stomach problems after drinking river water. On July 5, 2007, after years of speculation, Probe International reported that—as the Fisheries Office & NTFP had suggested in 2000—Nordic experts studying the
impacts of the Yali Falls dam had found toxic blue-green algae in the dam’s reservoir and confirmed that the symptoms of the algae on people are “exactly the same” as those reported by people living downstream in Cambodia. 229

Fish catches have apparently declined dramatically, with larger fish species affected to a greater extent. As Sesan villagers are highly dependent on fisheries for food and income, declining stocks have severely affected their food and income security. Increased turbidity and sediment loads (from increased riverbank erosion) have reduced the light available for algal growth, or smothered bottom-growing algae, which are an important food source for some species. High sediment loads have also damaged important fish habitat, such as deep-water pools, through sediment deposition and infilling. The increased turbidity has affected species that do not tolerate high-sediment loads. Non-seasonal fluctuations in Sesan River flows are believed to have caused migratory disorientation in fish species whose migration is triggered by monsoonal cycles. A recent one-year study confirmed that a few fish species have largely disappeared, many others have experienced drastic declines (Baird & Meach 2005).

The economic impacts on local villages in Ratanakiri province were assessed for the period between 1996 (when unusual flooding first caused material loss) and 1999, based largely on data collected and recorded by the Fisheries Office & NTFP (2000). Completed in January 2001, the assessment concluded that annual livelihood income losses for 1999 alone amounted to US$2.5 million for 3,434 households in Ratanakiri province. This means that monthly household income decreased from US$109 in 1996 to US$46 in 1999. Property losses between 1996 and 1999 were estimated at US$800,000. This figure is considered to be low, since many impacts were difficult to quantify (McKenney 2001).

Within certain Vietnamese agencies there is a common erroneous assumption that impacted communities can adapt to changes in river hydrology, and might even welcome increased dry-season water levels, but interviews with community leaders from villages

in Ratanakiri suggest that there has been a build-up of unsustainable debt within a
growing number of households in impacted communities.

The loss of riverbank agriculture due to the diurnal fluctuations in water level has
deprived villages of important dry-season income and crops (including tobacco, eggplant,
chilies, and plants valued for barter trade). Native edible vegetation along the river has
also declined, further harming local livelihoods and exacerbating the loss of deteriorating
fisheries. Village leaders have reported that householders have been borrowing cash from
local money lenders (at exorbitant interest rates) or from other householders within the
village—as well as from community rice banks—in order to make up for the losses since
2000. This borrowing has led to considerable debt problems. Other dam impacts include
increased pressure on fauna within the surrounding forests and the expansion of upland
fields (and forest clearance for the gardens) in order to compensate for other losses. Extra
labour is sometimes required to tend these gardens, creating more debt.

Although it is located in another country, the Yali Falls dam has had significant
transboundary impacts on Brao living along the Sesan River. The dam has transformed
the Sesan, which changed the nature of Brao social and spatial organisation, affecting
important Brao places and resultantly Brao identities. People cannot rely on the river for
fish or for other uses as they did previously. The people of Trabok village decided to
move away from the Sesan. As one Brao woman said, “The Sesan River is not like
before. It’s crazy now.”

Other Dams in the Sesan River Basin in Vietnam

Apart from the Yali Falls dam, a number of other large dams are under
construction in the Sesan River basin in Vietnam, including the Sesan 3, Sesan 3A, Plei
Krong, Sesan 4 and Sesan 4A dams. The Upper (Thuong) Kon Tum, Dak Bla and Dak
A Koi dams are in the planning stage (Wyatt & Baird 2007; Ame Tandem (3SPN), pers.
comm. 2007) (see Map 8.3 above).

None of these dams has been adequately studied for downstream impacts in
Cambodia, and only very recently has a transboundary study of the environmental
impacts of the Yali Falls dam been conducted, in which the previously reported impacts

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This is a re-regulating dam two km from the border with Cambodia.
were finally officially acknowledged (SWECO Groner 2006). So far, no compensation has been provided for people in Cambodia, and while a regulating dam has been proposed for below the Sesan 4 dam, at the Vietnam-Cambodia border, Wyatt & Baird (2007) have learned that it is unlikely to be large enough to regulate the unusual hydrological conditions caused by the other dams in the cascade.

Conclusions

As was the case for Chapter 7, this chapter departed from emphasising history, and instead focused on the ways in which Brao social and spatial change is presently occurring, influenced by a particular form of colonial power.

Providing an historical grounding is much more important for the Brao than for dominant ethnic groups, such as the Khmer. The history of the Brao is not well known: it is a history of a little-known ethnic group from a little-known part of the world, far from the centre of power of the nation-states that have come to dominate the region, even in an era of increased regional and global interconnectedness. It is a history that does not appear in mainstream history texts, and is frequently ignored by those working in development. It is also largely oral. But mainstream histories do not exist in an uncontested vacuum. They are contested in terms of specific local or ethnic histories, such as the ones owned by various groups (Baird 2007a). This is why I deemed it important to historicise this dissertation.

The obscuring of Brao histories is, in fact, a critical part of the construction of hegemony. Before new social and spatial systems can become hegemonic, it is necessary to suppress the old and competing systems, all of which are bound up in history. Therefore, territorialisation processes demand deterritorialisation as a precursor to change, including the suppression and alteration of historically informed discourses. Maps are frequently important tools for territorialisation, as they can naturalise new territorial forms while literally erasing others from these representations of the landscape (see Vandergeest 1996a). However, it would be wrong to suggest that old systems are simply replaced by unrelated new ones, even if that is the goal of colonial forces. Instead, new systems frequently establish themselves by integrating elements of the old systems.
they are replacing. It is never a matter of a clean cut from the past. Compromise is involved.

This chapter focused on social and spatial changes that external actors, working through the colonial Khmer state, are seeking to impose on the Brao, and on Brao responses to these efforts. These changes are related to international development aid agencies, global commodity markets, ethnic Khmer Kandal and Cham from other parts of the country, companies owned by wealthy or otherwise powerful people from within Cambodia, and the government of neighbouring Vietnam. Clearly, the Brao are facing a series of rapid changes produced by a large number of external influences. But these external pressures are connected to previous circumstances and human agency, leading to sometimes surprising results.

Change, for the Brao, is being influenced by many factors. This is not necessarily a bad thing. Change is eternal, and something to be seen as not necessarily good or bad. It has sometimes been suggested that it is not a matter of whether change is occurring or not, but that adaptation to it is key. Adaptation is often more difficult when change occurs rapidly (Bodley 1990). During periods of rapid change it is sometimes difficult for people from different generations to understand and relate to each other, breeding social conflicts and other problems. This truth is illustrated, for example, when people emigrate from one socio-cultural situation to a very different one. Often, a wide generational gap develops, causing serious community upheaval. This is what many Brao are facing.

Fortunately, there have been at least some attempts to situate the rapid change within the past, in order to avoid a sense of disconnection. For example, the emphasis on bilingual education and more culturally sensitive forms of education are important for making the transition easier. However, it is not easy to determine the level of social or spatial change felt by various Brao people. How much is appropriate, and what goes beyond the Brao ability to adapt without excessive stress?

Today, ‘development’ is a hegemonic force, and as Henri Lefebvre (1991) has shown, hegemony never leaves space untouched. Neither does colonialism. Since development is always about social change, social and spatial changes are invariably linked. Therefore, making the heuristic link between social and spatial change is important. Development, including development promoted as part of colonial projects,
frequently employs spatial reorganisation as a means for achieving social change, and social change caused by development always has spatial implications.
CHAPTER 9
Conclusions

Various Forms of Colonialism

There are a few main points that bring all the chapters of this dissertation together. The first, and most obvious, is that the thesis is focused on the ethnic Brao people, who belong to various ethnic Brao sub-groups, and are scattered in large numbers of villages in Cambodia and Laos. The second is the link between social and spatial change, a theme that transcends this case study. The third, however, is the real glue that binds it all together. Oddly enough, it is a theoretical idea that only became clear to me quite late in my writing project, the idea that I was studying various forms of colonialism.

While my original intention had been to use the concept of ‘development’ as the underlying theoretical foundation for linking the parts of the dissertation, some of my investigations led me down an unexpected path, one that resulted in my examination of the many years of war and violent internal conflict that characterises much of Brao history, both in Laos and Cambodia. While questions of ‘development’ were often important, if sometimes hidden, and part of the ideological battle that was linked to violent conflict, explicit development efforts frequently had to be suspended or severely limited due to violence. I could not exclude such important periods of history simply because they related less obviously to ‘development’. Nor could I abandon the theoretical idea of development, as it has had a profound impact on the Brao over their more recent history. How should I deal with this conundrum? The conceptualisation of ‘forms of colonialism’ crystallised my theoretical framework, and fitted very well with Brao conceptions of their history. Colonialism encompassed much of what I had written, and provided me with a certain grounding that opens up useful avenues for developing certain theoretical ideas.

It has long been clear to me that many players have tried to use various types of power, whether military or related to development practices and discourses, to affect the Brao people in specific ways. I embarked on this study with that in mind. By broadly conceptualising colonialism in a way that encompasses the successive attempts of many actors to control the Brao over history (including during periods typically considered to
be precolonial and postcolonial), I have gone beyond thinking of colonialism as a European endeavor. I have developed a theoretical framework that identifies all the major efforts of ‘Others’ to control the Brao as fundamentally colonial, although they have differed in terms of their objectives, means and results.

The various colonial powers have included not only the French, but also the Siamese, Japanese, Vietnamese, Americans, and the pre- and post-French Khmer and Lao. Recently, the Lao and the Khmer have worked as the guardians of their respective countries, creating their respective ‘geobodies’, as Thongchai Winichakul (1994) calls them, through the consolidation of control in the margins of the territory they claim. More ethnic Lao and Khmer colonists have recently moved into Brao areas than at any previous period of history. The influence of their languages has been great, as has the land control exerted by the state.

Within discrete eras, there is further variation. The early stages of the rule of the Khmer Rouge over Brao areas, had quite different social and spatial implications than the stages after 1973, when much more draconian measures were introduced. Therefore, it is useful to detail subgroupings of colonialism, as I have done in Tables 9.1 and 9.2 in the next section. However things are broken down—and there are many possibilities—the point is that many different agendas have affected the Brao. Each of the colonial forces has attempted to reorganise the Brao in varying way for its own purposes. Even when goals have been similar, ‘spatial reaches’ have differed, depending on ability to affect space in the hinterlands. Furthermore, each form of colonialism was spread unevenly throughout the population and over landscapes, creating various configurations and geographies of colonialism, each with different social and spatial implications.

Apart from differences, important linkages and networks characterised the successive forms of colonialism. The ‘postcolonial colonialists’ who followed the French, whether they were royalist or communist, adopted many development ideas introduced by their European predecessors, sometimes with greater vigour than the French. For example, both the Sangkum and Khmer Rouge governments in Cambodia, despite having different political ideologies, were led by French-educated leaders. Norodom Sihanouk and Pol Pot, each influenced by French ideas, applied his own hybridized version of governance. Any regime is unsuccessful in changing everything, even when ideologically
inclined to do so, as was the case with the KR. The fact that many Kreung people continued to use the Brao language throughout the KR period, even though the KR intended to impose Khmer language throughout Cambodia, is a testament to the importance of individual and group agency. Each new form of colonialism inherited traits from the previous one, and was further influenced by Brao agency. History and culture always inform the present, liked or not.

While those in human geography have analysed scale mainly in relation to the priorities of capitalist production (Brigham 2004), elucidating how scale is, following Neil Smith (1992: 76), “constructed as both a technology and ideology of capitalism”, my focus, while not denying the importance of political economy, is the role of scale in identity production and reproduction, and how it is linked with social and spatial change, identities, resistance, and constitution of meaning. These various types of change have, amongst other things, involved attempts to impose new kinds of reterritorialisation, which are necessarily linked to deterritorialisation (Goudineau 2000). This spatial reorganisation represents attempts to dismantle or alter Brao places, spaces endowed with particular meaning to the Brao, and replace them with new spaces defined by ‘Others’. Because these places are fundamentally linked to identities, and involve the particular scaling of landscapes by the Brao, attempts to deterritorialise and rescale have had important implications in terms of identity production. The overall thesis of this dissertation is that although various colonial powers have attempted to socially and spatially reorganise the Brao in historically distinctive ways, including rescaling space and altering Brao places and identities, these efforts have never entirely succeeded, due to Brao resistance, adaptation and negotiation, strategies that themselves are fundamentally linked to Brao identities.

Through the examination of the various maps presented in this dissertation, it should be clear that governments have imposed a series of administrative boundaries on Brao landscapes. Brao spatial scales of organisation, such as ‘Brao land’ and village territories, both of which are discussed in Chapter 4, were not included on maps. An attempt was made to deterritorialise and replace them with overlapping spatial ordering. These alterations of the meanings of Brao places have undoubtedly led to changes in identities. In some cases, they have led to the weakening of village identities associated
with the bounded places that were once recognised as village territories. Other places, such as those constituted with meaning by the nation-state, their geobodies, have been strengthened by these changes. The alteration of places, including the redrawing of maps, always affects identities, sometimes in complex, unexpected and uneven ways.

Colonial powers, despite their sometimes-vigorous efforts, have never been able to fully achieve their goals for altering Brao places and identities, whether during the French or other periods, including the present. Brao people in many areas continue to recognise their village territories, retaining a mental map of ‘Brao land’ and ‘Lao land’, even though these territorial divides have not been inscribed on the maps of colonial powers. Like Brao histories, Brao maps are oral and mental. They may not be written, but they do exist. As described in Chapter 4, the Kavet elder who recalled that Brao villages used to be like countries, linking older spatial scales with newer ones, and creating hybrid geographies of identities and space.

At times the dominant powers and the Brao have influenced each other, and both have been altered their policies and practices in response, as part of iterative processes linked to national, regional and global discourses. The French were forced to accommodate many Brao ideas about spatial organisation due to limited resources. This included allowing the Brao to continue with officially-banned swidden agriculture and changing the tax structure amongst highlanders. Similarly, the Brao were forced to adapt to some rules of particular French concerned, such as bans on attacking other villages or on capturing slaves. These sorts of compromises are not uncommon when two parties with quite different ideas engage with each other (see, for example, Brosius 2003).

Comparing Various Forms of Colonialism

It is useful to broadly compare the ways in which various actors have affected, or attempted to affect, Brao organisation. I have chosen to categorise certain forms into more refined sub-forms, such as in the case of the communist government of Lao, which exerted its powers very differently during the period immediately after 1975 compared with its present functioning.

Fifteen variations of colonialism have been identified, including one covering international development agencies in Laos and another in Cambodia. This provides the
### Table 9.1. A summary of forms of colonialism imposed on the Brao and their spatial impacts.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Forms of Colonialism/ Categories of Spatial Organisation</th>
<th>Controlled where Brao populations could live</th>
<th>Influenced Brao Housing</th>
<th>Reorganised Brao territorial spaces and boundaries</th>
<th>Attempted to change agriculture</th>
<th>Attempted to alter Brao places and identities</th>
<th>Attempted to spatially reorganise the Brao in the name of development</th>
<th>Attempted to spatially reorganise the Brao in the name of war/security</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Khmer Royal (13th-16th century)</td>
<td>Yes, through slave raiding</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Somewhat</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lao Royal (16th century-1778)</td>
<td>Yes, slave raiding</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Somewhat</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Siamese (1778-1893)</td>
<td>Yes, slave raiding</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Somewhat</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>French (1893-1954)</td>
<td>Tried, but generally not successfully</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Somewhat</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes, but not very successfully</td>
<td>Yes, especially in later period</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japanese (1945)</td>
<td>Insufficient time</td>
<td>Insufficient Time</td>
<td>Insufficient Time</td>
<td>Insufficient Time</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Insufficient Time</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vietnamese Communist (1950-1954)</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Ideas rarely implemented</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lao Royalists (Laos) (1954-1970)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes, but cut short by war</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sangkum (Cambodia) (1954-1970)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes, especially in later period</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American CIA (Laos) (1965-1973)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early Khmer Rouge (Cambodia) (1962-1973)</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Later Khmer Rouge (Cambodia) (1973-1979)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes, in Khmer Rouge Style</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vietnamese and Cambodian (Cambodia) (1979-1991)</td>
<td>Yes, but less than Sangkum</td>
<td>Minimally</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Minimally</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early Lao Communist (Laos) (1975-1989)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Later Lao Communist (in Laos) (1990-present)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-UNTAC Cambodian Government (1992-present)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
reader with a more comparative perspective than has been possible up to the present. The table is incomplete in itself and is meant only as a heuristic tool. Details are available in earlier chapters.

It should be clear that the pre-French periods of colonialism had different implications than had later periods. All periods were forms of colonialism, involving states taking control over peoples. All had spatial or territorial implications, even though not all involved the establishment of international borders, which came later. Still, these powers gained control over particular spaces, at least temporarily, in order to obtain the slaves who constituted their main interest.

One question that arises from Table 9.1 relates to relative orders of magnitude. In other words, when were attempts to reorganise the Brao, socially and spatially most intense, or effective? It is tempting to declare that the present—the development era—represents the most dramatic and multi-faceted period of social and spatial reorganisation ever. At a certain level, such an argument could be made. Development discourses are dominating and influencing Brao lives in ways previously unknown. Time-space compressions have occurred like never before, largely due to the ubiquitous role of roads and motorised vehicles of recent years. However, the Brao have lived through many attempts at reorganisation, and while some have been more dramatic and significant than others, it is not easy to compare different periods. The various forms of colonialism have had distinct spatial implications, and have occurred over unique temporal scales. When slave raiders hunted people during the pre-French Khmer, Lao and Siamese periods, all aspects of social and spatial organisation were greatly affected for the Brao people who were hunted, captured and sold into slavery in distant lands. To a lesser but significant extent, Brao who escaped slave raiders must have faced considerable hardships and changes. Each power needed to control space in order to prosper. Outside of the dramatic events surrounding the slave trade, few efforts were made by the Lao and Siamese to fundamentally alter the lives of the Brao. The effects of colonialism can be uneven, varied, and nuanced. To directly compare two colonial regimes would be like comparing mangoes and papayas.

Still, some useful conclusions can be drawn. The French intended to reorganise the Brao in much broader and more pervasive ways than the Khmer, Lao or Siamese.
However, their ascendance was not associated with the utter violence associated with slave raiding. Despite their visions for reorganising the Brao, the French were largely unable to achieve their goals. However, their era could be called more significant than any other, since they introduced many ideas about 'development' and 'progress' to the Brao, and perhaps more significantly, to the Lao and the Khmer, who would later attempt to enforce variations of them, albeit in hybrid forms, mixing French ideas with their own, and those of others.

Following Cambodia's independence from France, during the eras of Norodom Sihanouk's Sangkum government and Pol Pot's Khmer Rouge, the Brao were victims of draconian attempts to reorganise them, to an extent and in ways that they had never before experienced before. The rulers, full of nationalist hopes as well as fears—given their own historical origins—planned to assimilate the Brao into the Khmer state. If not for the conflict and resistance that led to their respective downfalls, they might have succeeded. In Laos, colonialism was more successful. The Royal Lao government and the CIA, and the Pathet Lao communists and their Vietnamese mentors, all exercised significant influence on Brao social and spatial organisation, working in different ways. Their efforts have remained effective over a longer time frame. Development-oriented attempts to reorganise the Brao in Cambodia, and to a lesser extent in Laos, were secondary to security and military concerns.

During the present period, global development discourses, represented by international development agencies, have merged with legacies from the French, Lao and Cambodian governments, resulting in new discourses and practices, all of which have social and spatial implications. While particular types of organisation are especially useful during times of war, other types of organisation are thought necessary for achieving 'development'. The dominant ethnic Lao and Khmer are trying to use development as a means of bringing the Brao into their respective nation-states. International development agencies, professing varying ideas and approaches, have distinctive ideas about organising the Brao. The Lao and Cambodian governments with whom they work affect the discourses and practices of the international development agencies.
Table 9.2. Summary of effort made by various forms of colonialism to affect seven scales of Brao spatial organisation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Forms of Colonialism/ Brao Spatial Scales of Organisation</th>
<th>Brao land</th>
<th>Ethnic Brao sub-group</th>
<th>Village territory</th>
<th>Village proper</th>
<th>'Bra' (Animist ritual) group</th>
<th>Household</th>
<th>Individual</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Khmer Royal (13th-16th century)</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lao Royal (16th century-1778)</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Siamese (1778-1893)</td>
<td>Some, in later period in response to French</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>French (1893-1954)</td>
<td>Some</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>A little</td>
<td>A little</td>
<td>Some</td>
<td>A little</td>
<td>Some</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japanese (1945)</td>
<td>Some</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>A little</td>
<td>A little</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>A little</td>
<td>Some</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vietnamese Communist (1950-1954)</td>
<td>Some</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Some</td>
<td>Some</td>
<td>Some</td>
<td>Some</td>
<td>Some</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American CIA (Laos) (1965-1970)</td>
<td>Some</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Some</td>
<td>Some</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Some</td>
<td>Some</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early Khmer Rouge (Cambodia) (1962-1973)</td>
<td>Some</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Some, but moderate</td>
<td>Some</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vietnamese and Cambodian (Cambodia) (1979-1991)</td>
<td>Some</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Some, but less than Khmer Rouge</td>
<td>Some, but less than Khmer Rouge</td>
<td>Some, but less than Khmer Rouge</td>
<td>Some, but less than Khmer Rouge</td>
<td>Some</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Later Lao Communist (in Laos) (1990-present)</td>
<td>Some</td>
<td>Some</td>
<td>Some, but different than early period</td>
<td>Some, but less than early period</td>
<td>Some, but less than early period</td>
<td>Some, but more than early period</td>
<td>Some, but less than early period</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In addition to the broad social and spatial implications of various forms of colonialism, it is useful to look at how the latter have affected the seven different scales
of spatial organisation of the Brao, introduced in Chapter 4: ‘Brao land’, Brao ethnic sub-
group, village territory, village proper, ‘bra’ (Animist ritual) group, household and
individual (see Table 9.2). While Table 9.2 indicates the scales of Brao spatial
organisation that varying forms of colonialism were interested in reorganising, it does not
indicate the scales of space impacted. For example, if an international development
agency is not interested in altering ‘bra’ Animist ritual groups, having a religious
mandate, its influence on other scales of organisation may indirectly impact the way ‘bra’
Animist ritual groups are organised. In other words, individual spatial changes may
transfer to other scales.

During the early Lao era, the main intents of the Lao were to acquire individual
slaves and collect tribute or taxes, rather than to alter other aspects of Brao organisation.
Their efforts to catch people during slave raids certainly had impacted significantly on
the way in which many Brao villages were organised. Such is not indicated in Table 9.2.
Each spatial scale is linked to others, and is often intertwined with others in unusual
ways.

Some Concluding Thoughts about National Borders and Brao Places

A fascinating aspect of this study has been Brao use of the international border
that separates Laos and Cambodia—first established in 1905—to avoid or escape
authority. What is particularly interesting to me is the Brao people’s rapid recognition of
the significance of this international border, although French authorities did not consult
with them before imposing it. But even though it was the first time that the Brao had ever
been exposed to an international border, they did indeed recognise its significance quite
rapidly. During the same year that the border was established, Kavet villagers in Siem
Pang crossed from Cambodia to Laos to avoid higher taxes and corvée labour (see
Chapter 5).

I deal elsewhere with the question of Brao boundaries before the arrival of
European colonial powers in mainland Southeast Asia (Baird 2008a). Thongchai
Winichakul (1994) asserts that international borders, as we know them today, did not
exist prior to the arrival of Europeans, a position that is fundamentally correct. Some
have extended Thongchai’s original argument and have suggested that territorial
boundaries of all kinds were non-existent prior to the arrival of Europeans (see, for example, Duara 1995; Keyes 2002). I believe that lowland perspectives should not be emphasised over highland perspectives, in ways that obscure the possibilities for considering the spatial systems of groups such as the Brao. There is considerable evidence that, amongst the Brao, the concept of boundaries demarcating landscapes predates European rule in the region. As outlined in Chapter 4, the Brao maintained rather well defined boundaries between village territories in order to ensure that swidden farmers from one village did not break spatial huntre taboos by crossing into the territory of another village. It seems likely that the Brao to understand the international boundary created by the French, since they themselves had their own boundaries to separate relatively autonomous political entities, albeit at the smaller scale of village (see Chapter 4).

Apart from the debate as to whether or not people in mainland Southeast Asia had territorial boundaries prior to the arrival of Europeans, there are other interesting questions associated with the international border. The willingness of the Brao to cross the Lao-Cambodian border to the other, apparently without much concern, up to the 1970s and even more recently (see Chapter 1), indicates that national Lao and Cambodian identities have not been particularly well developed amongst the Brao, although identities are changing. Considering the many powers that have dominated them, it is unsurprising that many Brao have chosen not to acknowledge any single power. Apparently, history suggests that doing so would be ill advised, since ‘national’ governments, foreign powers, and political ideologies have been known to come and go.

The ability of the Brao to make use of the international border, and associated state-defined spaces along its divide, to create their own places of resistance where state hegemony has been turned against the state, suggests a level of sophistication that does not fit well with the image of the Brao as an uneducated, unworldly ethnic minority. The Brao have long shown considerable agency, both as individuals and groups. If it were not for state-mandated restrictions, in both Laos and Cambodia, forbidding the Brao from living near the Lao-Cambodian border in either Laos or Cambodia (see Map 7.3), I suspect they would still be manipulating the international boundary to for their own
benefit. I will not be surprised if they do so in the future, especially if faced with extreme difficulties on either side of the border.

The Rescaling of Brao Space, the Persistence of the Hidden Transcript, and the Challenge to Colonial Nation-state Hegemony

One of the important conclusions of this dissertation, one that inspires me greatly, relates to the role of various powers in rescaling Brao spaces during successive periods of colonial domination. This indicates to me that spatial rescaling is important in achieving state rule. For me, spatial rescaling is about fundamentally changing the paradigms surrounding the ways in which spaces are organised, altering the boundaries that are essential for constituting different scales of space.

In Chapter 4, information is presented concerning about Brao organisation, both social and spatial. In the subsequent chapters the circumstances of the Brao during each historical period, is discussed, including others’ efforts to reorganise them, and Brao responses to those attempts, not always resisting but frequently negotiating and compromising. One of the most notable conclusions of my research is, however, that throughout the various periods of colonial domination—including the present ‘development era’—the various powers have not seriously attempted to understand, let alone strengthen or support, Brao ways of spatially organising. This should come as little surprise, and in many ways indicates the colonial nature of the various groups that have tried to dominate the Brao over time. For them, a fundamental part of their ambitions has been to gain control over space. Without the ability to rescale space, how would the primacy of nation-states and the boundaries that constitute their geobodies be possible? Substituting old ideas about space and territories with new ones has been a critical element of nation-building in both Laos and Cambodia. This effort has required deterritorialisation and rescaling, whenever possible, including attempts to remake Brao landscapes and change Brao places.

The Brao typically recognise seven scales of spatial organisation, already outlined above and in Chapter 4. Whether these represent ‘original’ Brao scales of spatial or not is a moot point, since rescaling, or the changing of paradigms surrounding spatial organisation, has undoubtedly always occurred, beginning long before anything was
written about the Brao. Those seven spatial scales are meaningful for many Brao people, even today. They are linked to their past, as the Brao understand it. At least a few of those scales—including the scales of ‘Brao land’, ‘village territory’ and ‘bra’ Animist ritual group’—were apparently not imposed on them by colonial powers, at least as far as we can know, because there is no record of a colonial power having, for example, ‘bra’ groups, or recognising ‘Brao land’.

It is amazing that despite the many attempts to rescale Brao spaces, and to reorganise and reconstitute their places, a unique conception of social space remains amongst the Brao compared to governments, even if these visions are hybrid. Again, this speaks to the roles of individual and group agency amongst the Brao, and to the inability of multiple levels of colonialism to extinguish previous conceptions of space. Despite the success of many colonial efforts, the Brao have somehow managed to retain vestiges of systems from the past, even as they decline in the face of increasingly powerful development discourses and practices. The Brao retain a vast array of taboos for regulating space, including dozens of varieties of huntre spatial taboos and five distinct types of taboos with spatial implications (see Chapter 4).

It is true that colonial transformations of space have been significant and in some ways successful. Most Brao now recognise the administrative boundaries that outsiders have imposed on their spaces, such as district, provincial and national borders, as well as various other extensions of state control over space. These boundaries, and the state-initiated rules associated with them, are seemingly as ‘natural’ as they are to the majority of Laotians and Cambodians.

In this dissertation I have considered spatial taboos, including da-ah, kun-trung, gumbrung, grung and huntre, which are crucial for understanding Brao organisation of space. Up to the present, researchers have somehow failed to uncover much about this rich area of study. Why has this been the case? It appears that this level of inquiry has been largely off the radar screen of scholarly researchers. Those working for development agencies have not been trained to look for, let alone perceive Brao systems of spatial organisation. The same might be said of ethnic groups other than the Brao. Extensive engagement with development workers over many years has convinced me that most believe that learning about indigenous forms of spatial organisation is not worth the
time. The topic does not bear directly on development goals agreed to by donors. Many feel, too, that these forms of organisation are outdated and largely irrelevant in the modern world. Finally, and most importantly, investigating Brao spatial organisation represents a potential threat to the state. Differences imply that there are alternative ways of conceiving space, a notion that challenges state monopoly of space. Even the ‘decentralisation school’ of thought in development, which has been quite influential in recent years, tends to argue for decentralisation, using scales of spatial organisation that are clearly visible and defined at the central level based on the idea of the nation-state. Few appear to advocate a truly bottom-up approach to decentralising spatial organisation, and even if they did, it is doubtful that national governments would relinquish control over determining how government organisation is scaled. To many, fighting against destructive development projects is justifiable, but challenging the primacy of nation-states by exposing spatial projects orchestrated in the name of ‘nation-building’ is not.

My hope is that this study—through demonstrating that Brao organisation of space differs significantly from the systems recognised by dominant colonial powers, will serve to inspire others to investigate alternative systems of spatial organisation amongst ‘non-dominant’ peoples, wherever they may be found. Despite a long history of varied attempts to alter the spatial systems of the Brao, those systems have somehow survived, albeit frequently hybridised and embedded in hidden transcripts. The survival of these spatial systems indicates their continuing importance in identity production and reproduction. It is important to recognise these spatial systems, as a step towards supporting and empowering those in frequently non-dominant situations, like the Brao of Laos and Cambodia.
AFTERWORD

Kham Khoeun, Virachey National Park, Logging and the Border

“Pa ta ti do, ti jo klim” (If it is hot in the north, it is cool in the south)

Kavet saying related to the moving across the border between Laos and Cambodia

To end off this dissertation, I would like to provide one last anecdote that shows the importance of understanding the past as a means for making sense of the present. It relates to Kham Khoeun, the former governor of Ratanakiri province, Virachey National Park, large-scale commercial logging, and the Lao-Cambodia border.

Kham Khoeun is not Brao. However, he speaks Brao very fluently, was raised in the forests of northern Ratanakiri during the Second Indochina War during by the Brao Umba people of Taveng district, and previously had a Brao minor wife in Taveng. In fact, Kham Khoeun is not Khmer either. He identifies himself as ethnic ‘Lao’, but in fact, some of his ancestors were probably Tampuon, as the village he comes from in Veun Say district is a former Tampuon village that has shifted ethnic identities over a long period of time, and is now identified as a ‘Lao’ village. He has relatives in southern Laos on his mother’s side, and spent the later 1970s living in Attapeu province in Laos.

On May 12, 2004 a visiting delegation from the World Bank—which is responsible for coordinating US$4.91 million in bank-funding for the Biodiversity and Protected Area Management Project (BPAMP)—contracted a small plane to fly over Virachey National Park, together with officials from Cambodia’s Ministry of Environment (MoE). As outlined in Chapter 8, Virachey is one of Cambodia’s largest protected areas and is the traditional home to a large number of Brao people. It has been the main focus of BPAMP, which began in March 2000 and is scheduled to end in December 2007 (see, also, Baird 2008b). The group probably expected to enjoy the beautiful natural landscape included in the park, but when they flew over the northeastern-most part of the park—the Dragon’s Tail (see Map 8.2)—they unexpectedly uncovered a massive illegal logging operation on the Cambodia side of the border with
Vietnam, inside the park. \footnote{Phann Ana 2006a. 3 implicated in illegal logging are transferred. The Cambodia Daily, January 24, 2006.} There is no road to this area from Cambodia, but there is road access from adjacent parts of Vietnam.

Having lost face in front of their benefactors, the World Bank, the MoE took the discovery seriously and filed an official complaint with the courts. Further investigations resulted in a July 2004 report that indicated that 500 truckloads of timber with an estimated value of US$15 million had been secretly logged and exported from the Dragon’s Tail directly to Vietnam via Laos. \footnote{Phann Ana 2006c. Graft trial of 3 senior R’kiri officials postponed. The Cambodia Daily, July 21, 2006.} One informant who visited the area told me that, “Three mountains were totally bare as a result of the logging.” After Yim Sat, a Brao Umba man who was working as a low-level park ranger in the border area, was arrested, he provided evidence regarding the case, implicating the highest levels of government in Ratanakiri for their suspected direct involvement.

A case was filed with Ratanakiri Provincial Court in November 2004, \footnote{Phann Ana 2006a. Ibid.} and in December 2004, Kham Khoeun was questioned by the investigating judge from the Phnom Penh Municipal Court, Kim Sophorn. Initially, no charges were brought against Kham Khoeun, and it appeared that he might be able to evade the scandal. It was rumoured that the investigation of his involvement ended after Kham Khoeun paid a substantial bribe to the investigating judge. Of course, Kham Khoeun denied any involvement in the logging, and claimed that he was being targeted because he was the one who actually blew the whistle on the operation, \footnote{Phann Ana 2005. Officials invited to court for illegal logging probe. The Cambodia Daily, December 14, 2005.} a dubious claim by most accounts.

But lawyers for the MoE were not about to let Kham Khoeun get off easily, and they demanded that the municipal court investigate and file charges against all government officials implicated, regardless of rank. \footnote{Phann Ana 2006a. Ibid.} In September 2005 court officials in Ratanakiri reported that they were unable to proceed with the case because high-ranking officials, who they declined to name, were involved, \footnote{Phann Ana 2006a. Ibid.} and in October 2005 Kim Sophorn was removed from his position as judge for allegedly, in previous cases, altering charges against suspects without following proper procedure. Before his removal the
judge alleged that Kham Khoeun and Yoeung Baloung, the provincial police chief, knew of the massive logging operation, and he fingered them as probably being involved.\textsuperscript{237} Thus, after a new judge was appointed, Kham Khoeun and Yoeung Baloung, were “invited” to return to court for further questioning in December 2005.\textsuperscript{238}

On January 23, 2006, following the above court appearance, Kham Khoeun and Yoeung Baloung were abruptly removed from their positions in Ratanakiri and were transferred to posts at the Interior Ministry’s National Police headquarters in Phnom Penh. A third senior official, the commander of the Ratanakiri military sub-region, Moeung Samoeun, was removed from his position and transferred to an army base in Military Region 1 in Kampong Cham province. Interior Minister Secretary of State Prum Sokha, Cambodian People’s Party parliamentarian Bou Thang, and Cambodian People’s Party senator Soeuy Keo (see Chapter 6) traveled unexpectedly by large military helicopter to Ban Lung, the capital of Ratanakiri province, to oversee the transfer of power. Once the helicopter had landed, those from Phnom Penh were driven straight to the governor’s office, where Bou Thang read the orders out loud for everyone to hear. One of the deputy governors, Moung Poy, who is ethnic Brao, was appointed to replace Kham Khoeun as acting governor.\textsuperscript{239} Kham Khoeun and Yoeung Baloung were whisked back to Phnom Penh in the helicopter, and word of what had happened spread rapidly in Ban Lung. Rumours suggested that Kham Khoeun had gotten into serious trouble after Bou Thang failed to support him in the face of the scandal. There were apparently other matters that hurt Kham Khoeun, including his failure to complete the paving of the roads of Ban Lung, despite having received a budget from the central government to do so years earlier.

Once the order removing him from office was read, Kham Khoeun clearly saw the writing on the wall, and during a somber speech to about 100 people who attended the ceremony marking the transfer of power, he said that he would miss Ratanakiri, where his career spanned stints as a district governor, provincial police chief and finally provincial official.

\textsuperscript{237} Phann Ana 2006a. \textit{Ibid.}
\textsuperscript{238} Phann Ana 2005. \textit{Ibid.}
\textsuperscript{239} Phann Ana 2006a. \textit{Ibid.}
governor. *The Cambodia Daily* quoted him as saying, “I had struggled from riding an old bicycle to work until I have a concrete house and a Land Cruiser.”

A day later, on July 25, the deputy chief of the O’Yeul border police post in the area of the logging, and the deputy chief of the Dragon’s Tail border police post were charged with bribery and destruction of the environment in relation to logging, and were ordered arrested. They went to jail with the Brao, Yim Sat, who was arrested earlier, and another man who was head of the Dragon’s Tail border police post. Four others were charged, including Koy Sokha, the former director of Virachey National Park, but all remained at large. “I do not know where they are hiding but they are not in the province,” said Ratanakiri’s deputy police chief. “If they were here we would arrest them because the warrants are in our hands.”

In the following months, Kham Khoeun, Yoeung Baloung and Moeung Samoeun were charged with being bribed and destroying the environment in relation to the multi-million dollar illegal logging operation. However, initially, in July 2006, the case against them was deferred while the charges against 11 low-level officials proceeded. The Brao low-level park ranger caught initially, and another official, admitted to accepting a US$1,000 bribe each. The other official told a journalist later that the border policeman who paid him had said, “Keep quiet. This is the superiors’ business,” without specifying what senior officials he was referring to. Five days after the case began, all 11 were sentenced for between five and seven years in prison for their role in the logging, even though seven of the 11 remained at large more than a month later.

This was followed, in August 2006, with the arrest of Khorn Sareth, the former chief of Ratanakiri province’s Forestry Department, was charged with “hiding evidence of forest crimes.”

While some feared that the ringleaders would again deny justice, the trial against them, including Kham Khoeun, was only delayed temporarily, and on October 28, 2006 *The Cambodia Daily* reported that court testimony had been concluded. During the trial,

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dramatic testimony was heard in which witnesses claimed that Kham Khoeun and other provincial authorities allowed a Vietnamese company to plunder the forests of Virachey National Park. A deputy bureau chief of conservation at the national park testified that he saw 20 trucks full of timber pass directly in front of a Cambodian police post, without any reaction from the authorities. The official apparently reported the incident to the former head of the park, Koy Sokha, on May 28, 2004. The park head phoned Kham Khoeun immediately and gave the phone to the witness to talk directly with the governor. There was testimony that the former governor, provincial police chief and provincial army chief had been driven to Vietnam for “private meetings”. A lawyer for the MoE testified that after the World Bank and MoE group had discovered the illegal logging, logs were still inside the park when they reported the incident to Kham Khoeun. The former governor had agreed to keep the logs from being transported out of Cambodia, but by June 16 when an inspection team from the central government arrived at the Dragon’s Tail to investigate further, all the logs were gone.\(^{245}\)

Although the lawyers for the most powerful defendants denied that evidence had been presented that the former top officials of Ratanakiri had taken bribes,\(^ {246}\) on November 23, 2006, almost two-and-a-half years after the illegal logging operation was accidentally discovered, Kham Khoeun was sentenced to 17 years in prison. Moeung Samoeun was sentenced to 15 years in prison and was fined US$20,000, and Koy Sokha was sentenced to 15 years in prison and was fined US$12,500, as were former border police chief, his deputy, and the former commander of the Royal Cambodian Armed Forces Battalion 1.\(^ {247}\) On top of their prison sentences and regular fines, the judge ordered the six officials to collectively pay the MoE US$15 million compensation for the destruction they caused to Virachey National Park. “If they don’t have that money, we will confiscate their properties,” he said. “If they are poor, their sentences will be extended until they pay,” added the judge. The lawyers of the defendants said the


\(^{247}\) The former chief of the Forestry Department in Ratanakiri was given two years probation and was fined US$5,000 for providing false information about the logging operation.
sentences were too harsh, and Kham Khoeun’s lawyer said the sentence would be appealed “to the highest court in the land”, but his complaints were to no avail.\footnote{248 Prak Chan Thul 2006b. R’kiri ex-governor gets 17 years for illegal logging. \textit{The Cambodia Daily}, November 24, 2006.}

However, these sentences did not mean that justice was about to be served, as all six of those facing the heaviest penalties were convicted in absentia, their lawyers claiming not to know their whereabouts. Of the key figures involved in the scandal, only Yoeung Baloung, a former KR army commander who was integrated into the Royal Cambodia Armed Forces in the 1990s after the KR disintegrated, was in custody at the time. He was sentenced to 13-years in prison.\footnote{249 Prak Chan Thul 2006b. \textit{Ibid}.} More recently, Kham Khoeun has been removed from the Central Committee of Hun Sen’s Cambodia’s People’s Party.\footnote{250 KI Media 2007. Hun Sen admits: land-grabbers and power abusers are CPP officials. March 4, 2007.}

It is unknown where Kham Khoeun and the others may be hiding, but \textit{The Cambodia Daily} reported that he was never detained with regard to the case, and that he was apparently “living freely in neighbouring Laos.”\footnote{251 Prak Chan Thul 2006b. \textit{Ibid}.} While it cannot in fact be confirmed that Kham Khoeun is in Laos,\footnote{252 Senior government officials in Attapeu province, Laos denied that he was there in February 2007.} as of December 2007 he still remained at large, with no apparent leads to his whereabouts.

It appears that if Kham Khoeun learnt anything from the Brao people in Taveng who raised him as a child, it is that when it is hot in the south (Cambodia), it is cool in the north (Laos). Just as the Brao have periodically done since the border between Laos and Cambodia was established over 100 years ago, Kham Khoeun may be cooling his heels in Laos today.
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APPENDIX 1

Brao Villages in Laos and Cambodia

Table 2.1 Villages in Laos with ethnic Brao populations
(villages visited are marked *)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>District</th>
<th>Province</th>
<th>Brao population</th>
<th>Sub-groups</th>
<th>Years in present location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Viang Xay* (Jeul Wiang)*</td>
<td>Phou Vong</td>
<td>Attapeu</td>
<td>175 households</td>
<td>Jree</td>
<td>1975-6 some moved down from mountains but some moved back later. Some down in 1991; Phya Vieng combined in 2003; People from Houay Kieng and Vong Lakhone were also moved there. Previously called Ya Gou village</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Cheung Hiang* (Jeu Hiang)</td>
<td>Phou Vong</td>
<td>Attapeu</td>
<td>57 households</td>
<td>Jree</td>
<td>1975-6 down from mountains but returned in late 1970s. 2002-3 from mountains; 2005 to present location</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Vong Xay*</td>
<td>Phou Vong</td>
<td>Attapeu</td>
<td>92 households, 697 people</td>
<td>Jree</td>
<td>1975-6 down from mountains but between 1991 and 1993 returned to the mountains; 2002 were forced to move from the mountains again</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

253 Viang Xay is considered to be the centre of a Focal Site that includes Viang Xay, Phya Viang (now with Viang Xay), Vong Lakhone, Vong Xay and Cheung Hiang. Viang Xay includes the sub-village of Houay Kiang.

254 In 2004, four of those families were still holding out in the mountains. 7 families came down in 2002 and 46 came down in 2003. However, in 2005 there were apparently 8 families still in the mountains.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>District</th>
<th>Province</th>
<th>Brao population</th>
<th>Sub-groups</th>
<th>Years in present location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Vong Lakhone</td>
<td>Phou Vong</td>
<td>Attapeu</td>
<td>78 households</td>
<td>Jree</td>
<td>1975-6 down from mountains but later returned, 2001 and 2003 from mountains; some moved from Viang Xay to present village after moving from mountains</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Phou Xay [(Jalong)] #</td>
<td>Phou Vong</td>
<td>Attapeu</td>
<td>48 households and families, 230 people in 2007</td>
<td>Kavet</td>
<td>1976 from mountains; 2000 to present location</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Vong Samphan *</td>
<td>Phou Vong</td>
<td>Attapeu</td>
<td>666 people and 127 families in 1997 (probably more now)</td>
<td>Hamong and others</td>
<td>Established in 1991 when district created. Originally six or more villages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Phou Hom *</td>
<td>Phou Vong</td>
<td>Attapeu</td>
<td>126 families</td>
<td>Kavet and 2-3 Hamong families</td>
<td>1975-6 from mountains but later returned. 1995-6 from mountains. Previously Vieng Kham, Pho Thainy, Phya Vong, Kok Lak and three other villages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Vong Vilai Neua (Ta Pak Reung) #</td>
<td>Phou Vong</td>
<td>Attapeu</td>
<td>85 households, 424 people in 2004</td>
<td>Kavet (few Hamong)</td>
<td>1994 from mountains; Before Phou Phi, Sen Louang and Kong Mi villages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Vong Vilai Tai #</td>
<td>Phou Vong</td>
<td>Attapeu</td>
<td>83 families, 56 households</td>
<td>Half Kavet and Hamong, 3 Jree</td>
<td>1976 from mountains; 1998 from Sekong River; some in 1992</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

255 In 2004, six of those families were still in the mountains. 43 families came down in 2001, and 35 in 2003.
256 Up until 2006, there were 11 Brao families living on the east side of the Sekong River, in Sanamxay district, in an unofficial village called Don Xay (Thep Sam). It is across from Don Hom village, an ethnic Lao village in Sanamxay. They moved to Phou Xay (Jalong) in 2006.
257 There are plans to put Vong Vilai Tai, Vong Vilai Neua, and Tra-oum under a single village administration between 2007-10.
258 There are plans to put Vong Vilai Tai, Vong Vilai Neua, and Tra-oum under a single village administration between 2007-10.
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<th>#</th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Ta-oum (Tra-oum)²⁵⁹*</td>
<td>Phou Vong</td>
<td>Attapeu</td>
<td>60 households</td>
<td>Hamong (few Umba)</td>
<td>2003 from mountains</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Lamong</td>
<td>Phou Vong</td>
<td>Attapeu</td>
<td>50+ households</td>
<td>Kavet</td>
<td>Still in mountains</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Palai²⁶¹</td>
<td>Phou Vong</td>
<td>Attapeu</td>
<td></td>
<td>Ka-nying</td>
<td>1975-6 from mountains but later returned. 2001 from mountains; before Sieng Chai and Greut villages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Vang Nyang*</td>
<td>Phou Vong</td>
<td>Attapeu</td>
<td>150 households?</td>
<td>Hamong, Kavet, Ka-nying, Umba</td>
<td>1976 from mountains; some families came from the mountains in 1992</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Na Seuak</td>
<td>Phou Vong</td>
<td>Attapeu</td>
<td></td>
<td>Hamong</td>
<td>1973 from mountains</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Houay Kout</td>
<td>Phou Vong</td>
<td>Attapeu</td>
<td>36 households in 2006</td>
<td>Hamong</td>
<td>1974 from mountains</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Kang*</td>
<td>Phou Vong</td>
<td>Attapeu</td>
<td></td>
<td>Hamong</td>
<td>1976 from mountains</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>I-toum (<em>Ntoum)</em></td>
<td>Phou Vong</td>
<td>Attapeu</td>
<td>117 households in 2003²⁶²</td>
<td>Ka-nying and a few Trabok</td>
<td>1975-6 from mountains but later returned. 2005 to present location; 16 family to Janeet stream in 2006. Before included Phya Tha village</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

²⁵⁹ There are plans to put Vong Vilai Tai, Vong Vilai Neua, and Tra-oum under a single village administration between 2007-10.
²⁶⁰ There are plans to put Mak Kiang and Palai villages under the same village administration between 2007-10.
²⁶¹ There are plans to put Mak Kiang and Palai villages under the same village administration between 2007-10.
²⁶² There were only 100 households in 2004, as 17 households moved into Houay Keo village.
<table>
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<tr>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Phou Yang</td>
<td>Phou Vong</td>
<td>Attapeu</td>
<td>12 of 17 families are Keuyong. The remaining 5 are Brao</td>
<td>Keuyong and Brao</td>
<td>Village to present location in 1994</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Sai Den</td>
<td>Phou Vong</td>
<td>Attapeu</td>
<td></td>
<td>Ka-nying</td>
<td>Still in mountains near Vietnam border</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Houay Le</td>
<td>Phou Vong</td>
<td>Attapeu</td>
<td>37 households</td>
<td>Ka-nying</td>
<td>2005 moved next to Nam Souan village</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Houay Keo (Dak Roo)</td>
<td>Phou Vong</td>
<td>Attapeu</td>
<td>55 households, 357 people in 2004</td>
<td>Ka-nying, Hamong, Trabok</td>
<td>2001-2 village came to present location, which was a Focal Site until 2005; before in scattered groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Nam Souan (Dak Joor)</td>
<td>Phou Vong</td>
<td>Attapeu</td>
<td>60 households, 360 people</td>
<td>Ka-nying, few Trabok</td>
<td>1975-6 from mountains but later returned. 2001-2 village came to present location; before in scattered groups. Previously called Pha Kha village, before coming from Cambodia to Laos in 1972.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>Keng Mo</td>
<td>Phou Vong</td>
<td>Attapeu</td>
<td>20 Brao households still residing in old village in Phou Vong</td>
<td>Ka-nying and some Keuyong</td>
<td>Most have moved to km 52 and km 65 (Xaysettha district) since 2005, when village was officially abolished</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>Dak Tout (Pa-la-man?)</td>
<td>Xaysettha</td>
<td>Attapeu</td>
<td>Approximately 66 families (about half are Brao)</td>
<td>½ Sedang and ½ Brao</td>
<td>Some Brao have moved there from Keng Mo since 2005</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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263 Phou Yang and Sai Den villages were put under the single village administration of Phou Yang in 2006.  
264 Phou Yang and Sai Den villages were put under the single village administration of Phou Yang in 2006.  
265 Houay Le was put under the village administration of Nam Souan in 2006.  
266 Houay Le was put under the village administration of Nam Souan in 2006.  
267 Keng Mo was transferred from Phou Vong to Xaysettha district in April 2005, but not all people have agreed to move to along 18B road.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>District</th>
<th>Province</th>
<th>Brao population</th>
<th>Sub-groups</th>
<th>Years in present location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>Boung Vay*</td>
<td>Xaysettha</td>
<td>Attapeu</td>
<td>About 176 families, 146 houses, 938 people (4 people, non-Brao)</td>
<td>Ka-nying</td>
<td>Along the Xexou River since 1975; 10 small villages combined</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>Dak Yieng (Pa-ham)</td>
<td>Xaysettha</td>
<td>Attapeu</td>
<td>Approximately 46 families (almost all Brao)</td>
<td>Ka-nying</td>
<td>Including people at Km 52 of road 18B. Also other location.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>Hat Xan*</td>
<td>Xaysettha</td>
<td>Attapeu</td>
<td>122 families</td>
<td>Ka-nying</td>
<td>2003-4 to present location from Xexou. Includes the former village of Phya Ha</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>Khan Mak Kong</td>
<td>Xaysettha</td>
<td>Attapeu</td>
<td>Number of ‘Brao’ Unknown; mixed groups</td>
<td>Unknown; mixed groups</td>
<td>Now, the people there call themselves ‘Lao’, but ancestors were slaves freed by the French, including many Mon-Khmer speakers; certainly some Brao</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>Don Sim (Dak Det)</td>
<td>Xaysettha</td>
<td>Attapeu</td>
<td>95 families (2/3 Lao 1/3 Brao)</td>
<td>Lao and Ka-nying?</td>
<td>Brao came to Lao village after 1975 from mountains</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31</td>
<td>Don Ngieu*</td>
<td>Xaysettha</td>
<td>Attapeu</td>
<td>136 families, 133 households, 741 people (12 Lao people)</td>
<td>Mostly Hamong, few Ka-nying and Lao</td>
<td>Came in 1975 from mountains. 7 villages brought together</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32</td>
<td>Keng Mak Kheua*</td>
<td>Xaysettha</td>
<td>Attapeu</td>
<td>168 households, 178 families, 921 people (7 non-Brao)</td>
<td>Umba and Me Jundoo, few Hamong</td>
<td>Came in 1975 from mountains. Included Greut village. 5 villages plus some Brao from Cambodia originally there</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33</td>
<td>Halang Noi (Heulang Ke)</td>
<td>Xaysettha</td>
<td>Attapeu</td>
<td>32 families (3 of those are Lao; the rest are Brao)</td>
<td>Umba, Kavet and Hamong</td>
<td>Came to present location from Haling-Halang mountains long ago to escape slave raids</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Hat Xan is presently combined with Boung Vay village along road 18B in Saysettha district.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>District</th>
<th>Province</th>
<th>Brao population</th>
<th>Sub-groups</th>
<th>Years in present location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>34</td>
<td>Samakhi*</td>
<td>Samakhixay</td>
<td>Attapeu</td>
<td>200 families; only 4 very Lao-ised Brao households[^269]</td>
<td>Mainly Lao and Mixed Brao</td>
<td>Village established by Brao in 1982; now considered to be a 'Lao village'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35</td>
<td>Houay Keo</td>
<td>Samakhixay</td>
<td>Attapeu</td>
<td>23 families and 107 people in 1997 (2 families were Lao)</td>
<td>Mixed Brao and Lao</td>
<td>Many families moved from Samakhi village in 1980s. Some families have moved to road to Phou Vong; others still along Xekaman River. Some have moved to Phou Vong.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36</td>
<td>Xekaman Neua</td>
<td>Samakhixay</td>
<td>Attapeu</td>
<td>13 Brao families in village; many more Lao</td>
<td>Some Brao, mainly Lao</td>
<td>The Brao families in the village moved there after 1975</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37</td>
<td>Halang Nyai</td>
<td>Samakhixay</td>
<td>Attapeu</td>
<td>97 Brao families and 5 Lao families; 102 families; 594 people in total</td>
<td>Umba, Kavet and Hamong</td>
<td>Came to present location from Haling-Halang mountains long ago to escape slave raids.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38</td>
<td>Tha Hin*</td>
<td>Samakhixay</td>
<td>Attapeu</td>
<td>Approximately 40 Brao families and twice as many Lao families</td>
<td>Mixed (Hamong and Ka-nying)</td>
<td>Moved to the present location about 30 years ago</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39</td>
<td>Oudomxay (Treo)*</td>
<td>Samakhixay</td>
<td>Attapeu</td>
<td>86 families and 455 people</td>
<td>Jree</td>
<td>Moved to present location in 1958, combining three villages. To forest in 1969 and back to present location in 1972.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40</td>
<td>Muang Mai*</td>
<td>Samakhixay</td>
<td>Attapeu</td>
<td>About 15 Brao families scattered throughout the provincial capital</td>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>Most Brao are government officials; most moved there after 1975</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

[^269]: There used to be 28 Brao families in the village, but most have moved to Houay Keo village.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>District</th>
<th>Province</th>
<th>Brao population</th>
<th>Sub-groups</th>
<th>Years in present location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>41</td>
<td>Don Tome</td>
<td>Samakhixay</td>
<td>Attapeu</td>
<td>Lao and Brao; apparently just a few Brao families</td>
<td></td>
<td>Moved to island to do agriculture since 1975</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>42</td>
<td>Don Xay (Thep Sam)</td>
<td>Sanamxay</td>
<td>Attapeu</td>
<td>2 families now; 11 families in 2005; 200 Brao families were concentrated</td>
<td>Kavet</td>
<td>Moved to adjacent to Sekong River in 1975. Now those people are living in Phou Xay village, Mak Kieng village, Phou Vong district centre and other locations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>in a cooperative there in 1975. In 2007 the last 2 families are expected to move</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>to Phou Xay, Phou Vong district</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>43</td>
<td>Samong Tai</td>
<td>Sanamxay</td>
<td>Attapeu</td>
<td></td>
<td>Half Brao, half Lao, but very Laoised</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>44</td>
<td>Hat Phila*</td>
<td>Sanamxay</td>
<td>Attapeu</td>
<td>70 families, 50 households in 2007</td>
<td>Jree (and Hagoo)</td>
<td>18 villages moved to present location in 1975-6. Many moved back to mountains in 1982.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45</td>
<td>Khan Mak Nao</td>
<td>Sanamxay</td>
<td>Attapeu</td>
<td>51 households, 54 families and 306 people in 2007</td>
<td>Jree?</td>
<td>In same general area since French colonial period. Previously Kong Thani village. Later moved to the mountains during war and back in 1974</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46</td>
<td>Hin Lat</td>
<td>Sanamxay</td>
<td>Attapeu</td>
<td>3 of 120 families are Brao Jree (12 people)</td>
<td>Lao, Heuny and a few Jree</td>
<td>Long established 'Lao village' with some Brao mixed in more recently</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>47</td>
<td>Hat Sai Soung*</td>
<td>Sanamxay</td>
<td>Attapeu</td>
<td>87 families</td>
<td>Jree with some Jru Dak</td>
<td>Down from mountains in 1975; 2004 moved across Sekong River to present location</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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270 There is one Brao family in Sai Don Khong village, Sanamxay district. Mainly people resettled from Sanxay district in 2004 are in village.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>District</th>
<th>Province</th>
<th>Brao population</th>
<th>Sub-groups</th>
<th>Years in present location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>48</td>
<td>Tha Deua²⁷¹*</td>
<td>Sanamxay</td>
<td>Attapeu</td>
<td>114 families; 640 people total; 50 families are Brao</td>
<td>Mostly Lao, and Brao (Jree, Hamong, Kavet) Cheng and Oy</td>
<td>Down from mountains to present location in 1975</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>49</td>
<td>Tat Koum</td>
<td>Sanxay</td>
<td>Attapeu</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Kamainy?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50</td>
<td>Ban Mai</td>
<td>Sanxay</td>
<td>Attapeu</td>
<td>50 families and 300 people in 1997</td>
<td>Kamainy?</td>
<td>Long-time inhabitants of areas adjacent to the Xekaman River. Present village established in 1983</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51</td>
<td>Phya Keo*</td>
<td>Sanxay</td>
<td>Attapeu</td>
<td>70 families; 386 people in 2006 (all Brao)</td>
<td>Hamong, Kavet and Ka-nying</td>
<td>In same general location since 1976. Moved to present location in 1981</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>52</td>
<td>Km 28*</td>
<td>Pakxong</td>
<td>Champasak</td>
<td>308 Brao people in 64 households; they are in the majority of 7 ethnic groups; total of 136 households (146 families), 756 people in village</td>
<td>Umba, Hamong, Ka-nying, Jree, Kavet (the first two groups are the main ones)</td>
<td>1951 Brao first came here; 1955 village established at present location. People came to work as labourers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>53</td>
<td>Km 20 (Sen Keo)*</td>
<td>Banchieng</td>
<td>Champasak</td>
<td>33 households, 41 families, 221 people (including 4 Lao families)</td>
<td>Kavet, Hamong, Ka-nying and Umba</td>
<td>Most people came in 1974 from Kong Mi. Established in 1965.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>54</td>
<td>Km 19 (Houay Ten)</td>
<td>Banchieng</td>
<td>Champasak</td>
<td>125 families, 117 houses in total, 671 people (85 families are Brao) and Lao and Souay</td>
<td>Kavet, Hamong, Ka-nying, Umba, Jree and Heulang</td>
<td>Most came in 1974 from Kong Mi. Village established in 1952 (first came to make French road)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55</td>
<td>Phaosamphan (Khoua Touay)*</td>
<td>Pathoumphone</td>
<td>Champasak</td>
<td>55 Brao families amongst 193 families (1188 people); others are Lao and Ngkriang families</td>
<td>Kavet, Hamong, Ka-nying</td>
<td>Along Touay stream in 1973; present location 1976</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

²⁷¹ In 2006, Tha Deua was administratively consolidated with Mitsamphan, Tabak and Hat Nyao villages. The village is now called Mitsamphan.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>District</th>
<th>Province</th>
<th>Brao population</th>
<th>Sub-groups</th>
<th>Years in present location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>56</td>
<td>Taong (Gabawh)*</td>
<td>Pathoumphone</td>
<td>Champasak</td>
<td>45 households; 51 families; 256 people (some mixed Lao/Brao families)</td>
<td>Lun (west)</td>
<td>Moved to present location after 1975</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>57</td>
<td>Ban Na** (Tambaing and Tih)*</td>
<td>Pathoumphone</td>
<td>Champasak</td>
<td>37 Brao households; 65 households in total (others ethnic Lao)</td>
<td>Lun (west)</td>
<td>Late 1960s or early 1970s (1972?). Originally 4 village (Tambaing, Tih, Cheung Hiang, and Chano)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>58</td>
<td>Houay Keua** (Gamba)*</td>
<td>Pathoumphone</td>
<td>Champasak</td>
<td>92 families in total; 92 Brao people and 271 Lao people; 461 people in total</td>
<td>Lun (west)</td>
<td>In 1949 came down to lowlands and moved around to many places until settling at present location in 1970s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>59</td>
<td>Houay Ko*</td>
<td>Pathoumphone</td>
<td>Champasak</td>
<td>27 households; 30 families; 164 people</td>
<td>Jree</td>
<td>In area for over 100 years; present location since 1974</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60</td>
<td>Km 31 (Ban Khi Thout)</td>
<td>Pathoumphone</td>
<td>Champasak</td>
<td>About 20 Brao families</td>
<td>Brao and many other ethnic groups</td>
<td>Mainly Christian; lepers and their families</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>61</td>
<td>Phon Sa-at*</td>
<td>Khong</td>
<td>Champasak</td>
<td>163 families (plus 40 Lao), 1,309 people total</td>
<td>Lun / Pah (Umba)</td>
<td>1978 to present location; before 1975 on border with Siem Pang. Lao Phya from Thapo Neua village led people from border area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>62</td>
<td>Phon Vixay (Took Look)</td>
<td>Khong</td>
<td>Champasak</td>
<td>Previously spoke “Lun” dialect similar to Ban Na, Houay Keua and Taong villages. No longer calls themselves Brao</td>
<td>Used to have accent like Ban Na village; stopped being Brao over 50 years ago. Old Brao name Took Look</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

272 Ban Na was, in 2006, officially consolidated into Houay Mesang village, along with another Brao village, Houay Keua.  
273 Same as footnote #9.
Table 2.2. Villages in Cambodia with ethnic Brao populations

(villages visited are marked *)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Commune</th>
<th>District</th>
<th>Province</th>
<th>Brao population</th>
<th>Sub-groups</th>
<th>Years in present location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Chuay ('Nchooay')</td>
<td>Taveng Leu</td>
<td>Taveng</td>
<td>Ratanakiri</td>
<td>350 of 350 Kreung in 2003-4</td>
<td>Kreung Dak (recorded as Kreung by province)</td>
<td>Moved to Vietnam in 1975 to get away from the KR. Returned in early 1980s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Chan (Mas)*</td>
<td>Taveng Leu</td>
<td>Taveng</td>
<td>Ratanakiri</td>
<td>158 of 158 Kreung in 2003-4</td>
<td>Kreung</td>
<td>Moved from mountains to Sesan around 1990</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Yorn (Bong)</td>
<td>Taveng Leu</td>
<td>Taveng</td>
<td>Ratanakiri</td>
<td>6 households, 51 people (statistics included in Trabok village); 8 households in 2006</td>
<td>Umba</td>
<td>1973 moved to Vietnam; returned to Cambodia in early 1980s. Moved to present location in late 1990s from Ban Lung area. Presently officially a part of Trabok village</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Tabok (Trabok)*</td>
<td>Taveng Leu</td>
<td>Taveng</td>
<td>Ratanakiri</td>
<td>424 of 424 Brao in 2003-4 (including Bong village); 83 households in 2006</td>
<td>Trabok/ Umba</td>
<td>Moved to Vietnam in 1975; returned to Cambodia in early 1980s. 1983 to near Sesan; historically along Trabok stream</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

274 This village was called Lang Chuay when in Viet Nam in the late 1970s.
275 This village is now officially part of Tabok, although it acts independently. It was called 'Lang Yawn' in Viet Nam during the late 1970s. Its oldest known name was Pra-am Bong.
276 This village was called Lang Lua when in Viet Nam in the late 1970s.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Commune</th>
<th>District</th>
<th>Province</th>
<th>Brao population</th>
<th>Sub-groups</th>
<th>Years in present location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Liang Veny (Areng Veny)*</td>
<td>Taveng Leu</td>
<td>Taveng</td>
<td>Ratanakiri</td>
<td>209 of 209 Umba in 2003-4</td>
<td>Umba (Previously Me Jundoo)</td>
<td>Moved to Laos in 1975; returned to Cambodia in early 1980s. 1983 to near Sesan; historically from northern mountains</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Bang Geut (Bang Geut Ke)*</td>
<td>Taveng Leu</td>
<td>Taveng</td>
<td>Ratanakiri</td>
<td>264 of 264 Umba in 2003-4</td>
<td>Umba (Also known as Lun Le Baw. Previously they were also known as Me Jundoo)</td>
<td>Moved to Laos in 1975; returned to Cambodia in early 1980s. 1983 to near Sesan; historically from northern mountains</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Son (Soin or Bang Geut Tih)*</td>
<td>Taveng Leu</td>
<td>Taveng</td>
<td>Ratanakiri</td>
<td>165 of 165 Umba in 2003-4</td>
<td>Umba (Also known as Lun Le Baw. Previously they were also known as Me Jundoo)</td>
<td>Moved to Laos in 1975; returned to Cambodia in early 1980s. 1983 to near Sesan; historically adjacent to Sesan River</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Ke Kuang Thom (Ke Kuang Tih)*</td>
<td>Taveng Leu</td>
<td>Taveng</td>
<td>Ratanakiri</td>
<td>169 of 169 Umba in 2003-4</td>
<td>Umba (previously Me Jundoo)</td>
<td>Moved to Laos in 1975; returned to Cambodia in early 1980s. 1983 to near Sesan; historically from northern mountains</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*All data is from the year 2003-4 unless otherwise noted.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Commune</th>
<th>District</th>
<th>Province</th>
<th>Brao population</th>
<th>Sub-groups</th>
<th>Years in present location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Pleu Toich (Pareu Ke)*</td>
<td>Taveng Leu</td>
<td>Taveng</td>
<td>Ratanakiri</td>
<td>129 of 129 Brao in 2003-4</td>
<td>Lun (recorded as Brao by province)</td>
<td>Moved to Vietnam in 1975; returned to Cambodia in early 1980s. 1983 to near Sesan; historically adjacent to Sesan River</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Pleu Thom (Pareu Tih)*</td>
<td>Taveng Leu</td>
<td>Taveng</td>
<td>Ratanakiri</td>
<td>154 of 154 Brao in 2003-4</td>
<td>Lun (recorded as Brao by province)</td>
<td>Moved to Vietnam in 1975; returned to Cambodia in early 1980s. 1983 to near Sesan; historically adjacent to Sesan River</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Taveng*</td>
<td>Taveng Leu</td>
<td>Taveng</td>
<td>Ratanakiri</td>
<td>41 families; 177 people in 2000; 904 of 904 Brao in 2003-4 (?) (including Cheul?)</td>
<td>Kreung/Lun (recorded as Brao by the province)</td>
<td>Moved to Vietnam in 1975; returned to Cambodia in early 1980s. 1983 to near Sesan; historically adjacent to Sesan River. These people are related to those from Doon village</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Cheul*</td>
<td>Taveng Leu</td>
<td>Taveng</td>
<td>Ratanakiri</td>
<td>125 families; 633 people in 2000 (statistics included in Taveng)</td>
<td>Mostly Umba</td>
<td>District centre established in 1986</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Toon (Doon)</td>
<td>Taveng Leu</td>
<td>Taveng</td>
<td>Ratanakiri</td>
<td>268 of 268 Kreung in 2003-4</td>
<td>Kreung</td>
<td>The people here are related to those from Taveng village</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#</td>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Commune</td>
<td>District</td>
<td>Province</td>
<td>Brao population</td>
<td>Sub-groups</td>
<td>Years in present location</td>
</tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Koh Pong Toich (Koh Pong Ke)</td>
<td>Taveng Kroam</td>
<td>Taveng</td>
<td>Ratanaki</td>
<td>44 of 44 Brao in 2003-4</td>
<td>Umba / Blawng</td>
<td>Moved to Laos in 1975; returned to Cambodia in early 1980s. 1985 near Sesan; historically in mountains</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Tanaich*</td>
<td>Taveng Kroam</td>
<td>Taveng</td>
<td>Ratanaki</td>
<td>211 of 211 Brao in 2003-4</td>
<td>Lun (recorded as Brao by province)</td>
<td>Moved to Laos in 1975; returned to Cambodia in early 1980s. 1981 near Sesan; historically south of Sesan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Siang Sai (including Hamawk (villages separated before)*</td>
<td>Taveng Kroam</td>
<td>Taveng</td>
<td>Ratanaki</td>
<td>179 of 179 Brao in 2003-4. 41 households in 2006</td>
<td>Umba / Kanyoo</td>
<td>Moved to Laos in 1975; returned to Cambodia in early 1980s. 1984 Near Sesan; historically in mountains</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Phayang 1 and 2*</td>
<td>Taveng Kroam</td>
<td>Taveng</td>
<td>Ratanaki</td>
<td>Phayang 1 has 10 households; total of 49 households (2006); 223 of 223 Brao in 2003-4 (total)</td>
<td>Umba (recorded by province as Brao)</td>
<td>Moved to Laos in 1972; returned to Cambodia in early 1976. 1985 near Sesan; historically in mountains</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#</td>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Commune</td>
<td>District</td>
<td>Province</td>
<td>Brao population</td>
<td>Sub-groups</td>
<td>Years in present location</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Viang Chan</td>
<td>Taveng Kroam</td>
<td>Taveng</td>
<td>Ratanakiri</td>
<td>159 of 159 Brao in 2003-4. 30 households in 2006</td>
<td>Umba</td>
<td>Moved to Laos in 1975; returned to Cambodia in early 1980s. 1983 near Sesan; historically in mountains</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Nong Le or Tong Kamal (Dong Kamal)*</td>
<td>O Chum</td>
<td>O Chum</td>
<td>Ratanakiri</td>
<td>534 of 537 Kreung; 3 Brao in 2003-4 (including Dong Krapu)</td>
<td>Kreung</td>
<td>Returned to old village location from Dong Bling in 1992</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#</td>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Commune</td>
<td>District</td>
<td>Province</td>
<td>Brao population</td>
<td>Sub-groups</td>
<td>Years in present location</td>
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<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>Tong Krapu (Dong Krapu)</td>
<td>O Chum</td>
<td>O Chum</td>
<td>Ratanakiri</td>
<td>41 families in 2006 (also statistics included in Nong Le above)</td>
<td>Kreung</td>
<td>Came to present location in 1991 from Dong Bling. It is presently on the old land of Prang village (now in Veun Say). Previously Dong Briang village</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>Trawng Jong*</td>
<td>O Chum</td>
<td>O Chum</td>
<td>Ratanakiri</td>
<td>130 families (3 Khmer; 2 Lao, 3 Kavet; 4 Tampuon people) in 2006; 321 of 333 Kreung in 2003-4 (recorded as just 6 by province – incorrectly mixed with Tampuon)</td>
<td>Kreung; others</td>
<td>Returned to present location after 1979</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>Runjool</td>
<td>O Chum</td>
<td>O Chum</td>
<td>Ratanakiri</td>
<td>Population included in statistics for Trawng Jong</td>
<td>Kreung</td>
<td>Village established from Trawng Jong in around 1996. Soldiers initiated establishment of village</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>O Chum (Khobal O Chum)</td>
<td>O Chum</td>
<td>O Chum</td>
<td>Ratanakiri</td>
<td>165 of 302 Kreung; 3 Brao in 2003-4</td>
<td>Kreung; Khmer; Tampuon; others</td>
<td>Returned to present location after 1979</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>Trawng Svay (Trawng Joo)</td>
<td>O Chum</td>
<td>O Chum</td>
<td>Ratanakiri</td>
<td>394 of 461 Kreung; 7 Brao; 7 Kavet in 2003-4</td>
<td>Kreung; Tampuon; Khmer; others</td>
<td>Originally part of Ga-ol village</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>Tong Bleng (Dong Bling)*</td>
<td>O Chum</td>
<td>O Chum</td>
<td>Ratanakiri</td>
<td></td>
<td>Kreung</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

277 Officially, this village is part of Dong Kamal or Nong Le village. The oldest name for this village is Dong Briang.
278 Officially, this village is part of Trawng Jong village.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Commune</th>
<th>District</th>
<th>Province</th>
<th>Brao population</th>
<th>Sub-groups</th>
<th>Years in present location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>Chan (Poy)</td>
<td>Chan (Poy)</td>
<td>O Chum</td>
<td>Ratanakiri</td>
<td>167 of 167 Kreung in 2003-4</td>
<td>Kreung</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32</td>
<td>Sontuk (Sha-took)</td>
<td>Chan (Poy)</td>
<td>O Chum</td>
<td>Ratanakiri</td>
<td>Population included with Khamayng village</td>
<td>Kreung</td>
<td>Previously together with Khamayng village. Now near road, while Khamayng is farther from the road. Still officially has same village headman. Village in present location since 1995-6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33</td>
<td>Kroala*</td>
<td>Chan (Poy)</td>
<td>O Chum</td>
<td>Ratanakiri</td>
<td>424 of 424 Kreung in 2003-4</td>
<td>Kreung</td>
<td>Created village from Ga-ol village in 1854</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34</td>
<td>Koy (Kong Koy)</td>
<td>Chan (Poy)</td>
<td>O Chum</td>
<td>Ratanakiri</td>
<td>147 of 147 Kreung in 2003-4</td>
<td>Kreung</td>
<td>Previous called “Khlawng” village, because people with leprosy were moved there. Now there are no lepers there. This village has moved locations many times</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35</td>
<td>Tanaich</td>
<td>Chan (Poy)</td>
<td>O Chum</td>
<td>Ratanakiri</td>
<td>184 of 184 Kreung in 2003-4</td>
<td>Kreung</td>
<td>Previously together with Kong Koy village, but separated since 1980s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#</td>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Commune</td>
<td>District</td>
<td>Province</td>
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<td>Sub-groups</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>36</td>
<td>Svay (Joo Ko Kang)</td>
<td>Chan (Poy)</td>
<td>O Chum</td>
<td>Ratanakiri</td>
<td>228 of 228 Kreung in 2003-4</td>
<td>Kreung</td>
<td>Originated from Ga-ol village, and after that a part of Kroala village. In 1987-8 established present village due to illness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37</td>
<td>Chan (Mas)</td>
<td>Chan (Poy)</td>
<td>O Chum</td>
<td>Ratanakiri</td>
<td>40 families (20 big families); 220 people</td>
<td>Kreung</td>
<td>Before located in areas with lowland paddy, but in 1995-6 they moved to a new area and started doing just swidden agriculture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38</td>
<td>Wawng Leu</td>
<td>Chan (Poy)</td>
<td>O Chum</td>
<td>Ratanakiri</td>
<td>Included in statistics of Kroala village</td>
<td>Kreung</td>
<td>1998-2000 people from Wawng Kandrom and refugees established this village on Kroala and Dong Krapoo land</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39</td>
<td>Kres</td>
<td>Chan (Poy)</td>
<td>O Chum</td>
<td>Ratanakiri</td>
<td>200 of 200 Kreung in 2003-4</td>
<td>Kreung</td>
<td>At present location since 1979</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40</td>
<td>Kayeun</td>
<td>Chan (Poy)</td>
<td>O Chum</td>
<td>Ratanakiri</td>
<td>About half of the official population of Kres village here.</td>
<td>Kreung</td>
<td>This group of people do swidden on the land of Mas village, but are officially part of Kres village, although they rarely go to Kres and do not do ceremonies there</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41</td>
<td>Kacheung (Kancheung)</td>
<td>Chan (Poy)</td>
<td>O Chum</td>
<td>Ratanakiri</td>
<td>285 of 285 Kreung in 2003-4</td>
<td>Kreung</td>
<td>At present location since 1985-6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#</td>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Commune</td>
<td>District</td>
<td>Province</td>
<td>Brao population</td>
<td>Sub-groups</td>
<td>Years in present location</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>42</td>
<td>La-ok*</td>
<td>La-ok</td>
<td>O Chum</td>
<td>Ratanakiri</td>
<td>120 families (2006); 424 of 433 Kreung; 9 Brao in 2003-4</td>
<td>Kreung; Brao</td>
<td>Originated from Ga-ol village. Moved from near Kroala to present location in 1979</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>43</td>
<td>Phum 2 [sic] (Bee)</td>
<td>La-ok</td>
<td>O Chum</td>
<td>Ratanakiri</td>
<td>82 families (2006); 333 of 346 Kreung; 1 Brao in 2003-4</td>
<td>Kreung; Tampuon; Brao</td>
<td>Old village. In same location for a long time, except for KR period</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>44</td>
<td>Yung Ra-Ya</td>
<td>La-ok</td>
<td>O Chum</td>
<td>Ratanakiri</td>
<td>27 families (2006). Officially all population included with Bee village</td>
<td>Kreung</td>
<td>Separated from Bee village in 1997-8. Officially same headman, but they do separate rituals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45</td>
<td>Kok Poy*</td>
<td>La-ok</td>
<td>O Chum</td>
<td>Ratanakiri</td>
<td>45 families (2006); 321 of 345 Kreung; 4 Brao in 2003-4 (including Kok Umbeul)</td>
<td>Kreung; Tampuon; others</td>
<td>Came to present location from KR cooperative after Vietnamese invasion in 1979</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46</td>
<td>Kok Umbeul*</td>
<td>La-ok</td>
<td>O Chum</td>
<td>Ratanakiri</td>
<td>29 families (2006); see 2003-4 statistics for Kok Poy, which includes data for this community</td>
<td>Kreung</td>
<td>In 1988 this village separated from Kok Poy and moved to present location</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>47</td>
<td>Kam (Gum)</td>
<td>La-ok</td>
<td>O Chum</td>
<td>Ratanakiri</td>
<td>120 families (2006); 480 of 480 Kreung in 2003-4</td>
<td>Kreung</td>
<td>Old village. In same location for a long time, except for KR period</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Officially, Kok Poy and Kok Umbeul are the same village, even though the village has unofficially split into two. Mallow (2002) has pointed out that the government no longer allows villages to separate on their own, and that the two sub-villages together had a population of 250 people.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Commune</th>
<th>District</th>
<th>Province</th>
<th>Brao population</th>
<th>Sub-groups</th>
<th>Years in present location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>48</td>
<td>Kalong (Grawlong)</td>
<td>La-ok</td>
<td>O Chum</td>
<td>Ratanakiri</td>
<td>26 families (2006); 109 of 109 Kreung in 2003-4</td>
<td>Kreung</td>
<td>Old village. In same location for a long time, except for KR period</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>49</td>
<td>Thuy Umbeul</td>
<td>Cha Ung</td>
<td>O Chum</td>
<td>Ratanakiri</td>
<td>596 of 604 Brao Tanap; 2 Kavet in 2003-4. 132 households</td>
<td>Brao Tanap (recorded as Kreung by province); others</td>
<td>1979 moved to present location</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50</td>
<td>Thuy Toom</td>
<td>Cha Ung</td>
<td>O Chum</td>
<td>Ratanakiri</td>
<td>276 of 276 Brao Tanap in 2003-4. 68 households</td>
<td>Brao Tanap (recorded as Kreung by province); others</td>
<td>Moved back to present location in 1979, after being in Labung 1 and 2 from 1975-9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51</td>
<td>Cha-Ung Chan*</td>
<td>Cha Ung</td>
<td>O Chum</td>
<td>Ratanakiri</td>
<td>382 of 399 Brao Tanap in 2003-4</td>
<td>Brao Tanap (recorded as Kreung by province); others</td>
<td>Cha-Ung Chan and Kao moved together in 1979. Between 1975 and 1979 they were at Labung 1 and 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>52</td>
<td>Cha-Ung Ket</td>
<td>Cha-Ung</td>
<td>O Chum</td>
<td>Ratanakiri</td>
<td>353 of 398 Brao Tanap in 2003-4</td>
<td>Brao Tanap (recorded as Kreung by province); Tampuon</td>
<td>Moved back to present location in 1979, after being in Labung 1 and 2 from 1975-9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>53</td>
<td>Cha-Ung Kao*</td>
<td>Cha-Ung</td>
<td>O Chum</td>
<td>Ratanakiri</td>
<td>562 of 568 Brao Tanap in 2003-4; 1 Brao</td>
<td>Brao Tanap (recorded as Kreung by province); others</td>
<td>Cha-Ung Kao and Chan moved together in 1979. Between 1975 and 1979 they were at Labung 1 and 2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

448
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Commune</th>
<th>District</th>
<th>Province</th>
<th>Brao population</th>
<th>Sub-groups</th>
<th>Years in present location</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>54</td>
<td>Cha-Ung Kriang</td>
<td>Cha-Ung</td>
<td>O Chum</td>
<td>Ratanakiri</td>
<td>Approx. 20 families. Population officially included</td>
<td>Brao Tanap (recorded as Kreung by province)</td>
<td>Moved back to present location in 1979, after being in Labung 1 and 2 from 1975-9. Does separate rituals from Cha-Ung Kao, but is officially a part of Cha-Ung Kao village</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55</td>
<td>Kalai 1 (Klai 1)*</td>
<td>Kalai</td>
<td>O Chum</td>
<td>Ratanakiri</td>
<td>286 of 286 Kreung in 2003-4</td>
<td>Kreung</td>
<td>Previously Keu-nao village. Moved to present location in 1979 after staying at Kalai Dak near Sesan River during KR period</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>56</td>
<td>Kalai 2 (Klai 2)</td>
<td>Kalai</td>
<td>O Chum</td>
<td>Ratanakiri</td>
<td>461 of 475 Kreung in 2003-4; 1 Brao</td>
<td>Kreung; others</td>
<td>Previously Rong, Trai and Keula villages. Moved to present location in 1979 after staying at Kalai Dak near Sesan River during KR period</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>57</td>
<td>Kalai 3 (Klai 3)</td>
<td>Kalai</td>
<td>O Chum</td>
<td>Ratanakiri</td>
<td>325 of 327 Kreung in 2003-4; 2 Kavet</td>
<td>Kreung; Kavet</td>
<td>Previously Jo village. Moved to present location in 1979 after staying at Kalai Dak near Sesan River during KR period</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#</td>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Commune</td>
<td>District</td>
<td>Province</td>
<td>Brao population</td>
<td>Sub-groups</td>
<td>Years in present location</td>
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<tr>
<td>58</td>
<td>Kalai Trawng (Klai Tawawng)</td>
<td>Phnom</td>
<td>Veun</td>
<td>Ratanakiri</td>
<td>129 of 131</td>
<td>Kreung</td>
<td>1979-80 moved near other Kalai villages Kalai commune to Phnom Kok commune</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Kok</td>
<td>Say</td>
<td></td>
<td>Kreung; 2 Brao in 2003-4</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>59</td>
<td>Kalai Sapun (Klai Shabol)</td>
<td>Phnom</td>
<td>Veun</td>
<td>Ratanakiri</td>
<td>176 of 182</td>
<td>Kreung; Brao</td>
<td>1979-80 moved from near other Kalai villages in Kalai commune to Phnom Kok commune</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Kok</td>
<td>Say</td>
<td></td>
<td>Kreung; 6 Brao in 2003-4</td>
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<tr>
<td>60</td>
<td>Tiem Kroam (Reundiem Kandrom)</td>
<td>Phnom</td>
<td>Veun</td>
<td>Ratanakiri</td>
<td>29 families; 246 people in 2000</td>
<td>Kreung Lun</td>
<td>Over 25 years in same location; historically in same general area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>Kok</td>
<td>Say</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>61</td>
<td>Wai (Prang)</td>
<td>Kachon</td>
<td>Veun</td>
<td>Ratanakiri</td>
<td>161 of 163</td>
<td>Kreung; others</td>
<td>Originally from mountains in Poy commune. Moved to present location in 1961. They returned to the mountains in 1963, but in 1972 they were told by the KR to return to the lowlands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Say</td>
<td></td>
<td>Kreung in 2003-4</td>
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<tr>
<td>62</td>
<td>Wawng Kroam (Wawng Kandrom)*</td>
<td>Kachon</td>
<td>Veun</td>
<td>Ratanakiri</td>
<td>190 of 243</td>
<td>Kreung; Tampouon;</td>
<td>Originally from mountains in Poy commune. Moved to present location in 1961. They returned to the mountains in 1963, but in 1972 they were told by the KR to return to the lowlands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Say</td>
<td></td>
<td>Kreung in 2003-4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#</td>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Commune</td>
<td>District</td>
<td>Province</td>
<td>Brao population</td>
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<td>Years in present location</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>63</td>
<td>Kaleum (Haleum)*</td>
<td>Kachon</td>
<td>Veun Say</td>
<td>Ratanakiri</td>
<td>81 families; 389 people in 2000 (?); 282 of 291 Brao; 6 Kavet in 2003-4</td>
<td>Umba; Kavet; others</td>
<td>1979 near Sesan; historically in mountains along Heulay (Lalay) stream</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>64</td>
<td>Krong</td>
<td>Veun Say</td>
<td>Ratanakiri</td>
<td>Lun</td>
<td>Not an official village</td>
<td></td>
<td>Located on the north side of the Sesan River near the border with Taveng district</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65</td>
<td>Tiem Leu (Reundiem Peung)*</td>
<td>Kachon</td>
<td>Veun Say</td>
<td>Ratanakiri</td>
<td>267 of 275 Kreung; 2 Kavet; 1 Brao in 2003-4</td>
<td>Kreung Lun (recorded by province as Kreung); others</td>
<td>Village was established in area in 1905; 1975 to present location</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>66</td>
<td>Phak Nam</td>
<td>Ko Piak</td>
<td>Veun Say</td>
<td>Ratanakiri</td>
<td>99 families; 891 people in 2000 (?); 875 of 1,069 Kreung; 1 Kavet in 2003-4</td>
<td>Kreung, Lao, Kachok, Tampuon, Khmer; others</td>
<td>Moved to same general location in 1930</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>67</td>
<td>Khuon</td>
<td>Ko Piak</td>
<td>Veun Say</td>
<td>Ratanakiri</td>
<td>116 families (62 large families); 498 people in 2006; 467 of 473 Kreung; 1 Brao in 2003-4</td>
<td>Kreung; others</td>
<td>Moved to same general location in 1930</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#</td>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Commune</td>
<td>District</td>
<td>Province</td>
<td>Brao population</td>
<td>Sub-groups</td>
<td>Years in present location</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>68</td>
<td>La Meuay (2 parts of village – La Meuay Sesan and La Meuay Heulay)*</td>
<td>Kok Lak</td>
<td>Veun Say</td>
<td>Ratanakiri</td>
<td>103 households (2006), 406 people total (La Meuay Heulay – 46 families, 240 people); 443 of 480 Kavet; 14 Kreung; 9 Brao</td>
<td>Kavet; Kreung; Brao; Jarai; Tampuon; Khmer</td>
<td>Moved to Laos in 1968 and returned to Cambodia in 1975, 1979 near Sesan from cooperative in Stung Treng; historically in mountains; La Meuay Heulay to present location 1997</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>69</td>
<td>Drak ('Ntrak)*</td>
<td>Kok Lak</td>
<td>Veun Say</td>
<td>Ratanakiri</td>
<td>208 of 224 Kavet; 11 Kreung in 2003-4; 48 households in 2006</td>
<td>Kavet; Kreung; Tampuon</td>
<td>1997 to present location; historically in mountains</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70</td>
<td>Lalay (Heulay)* 380</td>
<td>Kok Lak</td>
<td>Veun Say</td>
<td>Ratanakiri</td>
<td>297 of 321 Kavet; 4 Kreung; 13 Brao in 2003-4; 72 households in 2006</td>
<td>Kavet; Brao; Lao; Kreung</td>
<td>Previously Vang Khe and Phya Bao villages. 1997 to present location; historically in mountains</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>71</td>
<td>Rok*</td>
<td>Kok Lak</td>
<td>Veun Say</td>
<td>Ratanakiri</td>
<td>524 of 543 Kavet; 6 Kreung; 132 households in 2006</td>
<td>Kavet; Lao; Kreung; Kachok</td>
<td>1997 to present location; historically in mountains</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>72</td>
<td>Kong Nawk</td>
<td>Veun Say</td>
<td>Veun Say</td>
<td>Ratanakiri</td>
<td>505 of 505 Kavet in 2003-4</td>
<td>Kavet</td>
<td>Previously Kanan village. Moved back to present area from cooperative in Stung Treng in 1979</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>73</td>
<td>Po Hoi</td>
<td>Koh Pong</td>
<td>Veun Say</td>
<td>Ratanakiri</td>
<td>143 of 143 Brao in 2003-4</td>
<td>Umba / Blawng</td>
<td>Moved to Laos in 1975 and returned to Cambodia in early 1980s. 1985 near Sesan; historically in mountains</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

380 Village previously called Phya Bao.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Commune</th>
<th>District</th>
<th>Province</th>
<th>Brao population</th>
<th>Sub-groups</th>
<th>Years in present location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>74</td>
<td>Pateng (Poteng)*</td>
<td>Koh Pong</td>
<td>Veun Say</td>
<td>Ratanakiri</td>
<td>288 of 288 Brao in 2003-4</td>
<td>Umba / Blawng</td>
<td>Moved to Laos in 1975 and returned to Cambodia in early 1980s. 1985 near Sesan; historically in mountains</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>75</td>
<td>Lang Ao</td>
<td>Koh Pong</td>
<td>Veun Say</td>
<td>Ratanakiri</td>
<td>212 of 212 Brao in 2003-4</td>
<td>Umba / Blawng</td>
<td>Moved to Laos in 1975 and returned to Cambodia in early 1980s. 1985 near Sesan; historically in mountains</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>76</td>
<td>Phnom Kok Brao (Tiem Lun)*</td>
<td>Phnom Kok</td>
<td>Veun Say</td>
<td>Ratanakiri</td>
<td>258 of 295 Brao; 24 Kreung</td>
<td>Lun Tat Peur (recorded by province as Brao); Kreung; others</td>
<td>Came to present location in around 1966</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>77</td>
<td>Rompuot Leu (Lam Pat)*</td>
<td>Hat Pok (Hat Po)</td>
<td>Veun Say</td>
<td>Ratanakiri</td>
<td>12 families; 78 people in 2000</td>
<td>Kreung (Lun Tat Peur or Brao Tanap?)</td>
<td>1981 to present location; historically in same general area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>78</td>
<td>Khamphong Cham (Pak Kalan)</td>
<td>Pak Kalan</td>
<td>Veun Say</td>
<td>Ratanakiri</td>
<td>115 of 436 Brao in 2003-4 (this data is expected to be completely wrong; no Brao there)</td>
<td>Lao; Brao? It is expected that there are no Brao, or only a very few, in this village</td>
<td>This village was established at the end of the 19th century, as an ethnic Lao village</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>79</td>
<td>Katiang (Kantriang)*</td>
<td>Labang 2</td>
<td>Lom Phat</td>
<td>Ratanakiri</td>
<td>98 families, 460 people (2006); 27 others in 2003-2004</td>
<td>Brao Tanap (recorded as Brao by province); Khmer and others</td>
<td>Evicted by rubber plantations in 1962; 1973 moved to present location</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#</td>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Commune</td>
<td>District</td>
<td>Province</td>
<td>Brao population</td>
<td>Sub-groups</td>
<td>Years in present location</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>80</td>
<td>Kachaign (Kanchaign)</td>
<td>Labang 2</td>
<td>Lom Phat</td>
<td>Ratanakiri</td>
<td>122 families, 464 people (2006); 24 others in 2003-4</td>
<td>Brao Tanap (recorded as Brao by province); Khmer and others</td>
<td>Village went to forest to join revolution in 1962. Returned to village in 1970s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>81</td>
<td>Katiang (Kantiang)</td>
<td>Labang 1</td>
<td>Lom Phat</td>
<td>Ratanakiri</td>
<td>354 of 437 Brao Tanap</td>
<td>Brao Tanap (recorded as Brao by province); Khmer and other</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>82</td>
<td>Khamphleng (Kamplenh)</td>
<td>Labang 1</td>
<td>Lom Phat</td>
<td>Ratanakiri</td>
<td>236 of 245 Brao Tanap in 2003-4</td>
<td>Brao Tanap (recorded as Brao by province); Khmer</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>83</td>
<td>Banteung (Kateung)*</td>
<td>Labang 1</td>
<td>Lom Phat</td>
<td>Ratanakiri</td>
<td>67 families (2006); 253 of 264 Brao Tanap in 2003-4; 2 Kreung</td>
<td>Brao Tanap (recorded as Brao by province); others</td>
<td>1979 moved to present location. 1975-9 near dam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>84</td>
<td>Krolong (Kalong)</td>
<td>Labang 1</td>
<td>Lom Phat</td>
<td>Ratanakiri</td>
<td>166 of 173 Brao Tanap in 2003-4</td>
<td>Brao Tanap (recorded as Brao by province); others</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>85</td>
<td>Teun</td>
<td>Teun²⁸¹</td>
<td>Kon Mum</td>
<td>Ratanakiri</td>
<td>551 of 616 Brao Tanap in 2003-4 (122 families in total in 2001, including ones in Srejong and Meun Thang 1)</td>
<td>Brao Tanap (recorded as Kreung by province); Khmer, others</td>
<td>12 families at Srejong, 18 at Meun Thang 1 and at 17 at O’Jouan area near border with Cha-Ung commune in 2001. Moved to present location in the 1980s</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

²⁸¹ In 2004, there were 2,115 people in 466 families in Teun Commune (Baird 2005).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Commune</th>
<th>District</th>
<th>Province</th>
<th>Brao population</th>
<th>Sub-groups</th>
<th>Years in present location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>86</td>
<td>Kambak*</td>
<td>Teun</td>
<td>Kon Mum</td>
<td>Ratanakiri</td>
<td>347 of 352 Brao Tanap in 2003-4 (77 families in total in 2001, including ones in Meun Thang 2)</td>
<td>Brao Tanap (recorded as Kreung by province); Khmer</td>
<td>23 families at Meun Thang 2 in 2001. Moved to present location after fired burnt former village in around 1999</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>87</td>
<td>Taheuay*</td>
<td>Teun</td>
<td>Kon Mum</td>
<td>Ratanakiri</td>
<td>574 of 585 Brao Tanap in 2003-4 (130 families in total in 2001, including ones in Srejong, Meun Thang 1 and Meun Thang 2)</td>
<td>Brao Tanap (recorded as Kreung by province); Khmer, other</td>
<td>12 families at Meun Thang and 4 families in Srejong in 2001. Moved to present location in the 1980s after fire burnt former village site</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>88</td>
<td>Srejong282*</td>
<td>Teun</td>
<td>Kon Mum</td>
<td>Ratanakiri</td>
<td>Population statistics included together with Teun (12 families) and Taheuay (4 families) villages (2001)</td>
<td>Brao Tanap (close to all or all)</td>
<td>Community established since 1994. Do their own rituals even though not an official village</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>89</td>
<td>Meun Thang 1283</td>
<td>Teun</td>
<td>Kon Mum</td>
<td>Ratanakiri</td>
<td>Population statistics included together with Teun (18 families) and Taheuay (18 families) villages (2001)</td>
<td>Brao Tanap (close to all or all)</td>
<td>Community established since 1994. Do their own rituals even though not an official village</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

282 This village is officially part of Teun village.
283 This village is officially part of Teun village.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Commune</th>
<th>District</th>
<th>Province</th>
<th>Brao population</th>
<th>Sub-groups</th>
<th>Years in present location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>90</td>
<td>Meun Thang 2(^{284})</td>
<td>Teun</td>
<td>Kon Mum</td>
<td>Ratanaki</td>
<td>Population statistics included together with Taheuy (12 families) and Kambak (27 families) villages (2001)</td>
<td>Brao Tanap (close to all or all)</td>
<td>Community established since 1994. Do their own rituals even though not an official village</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>91</td>
<td>Taong 1 (Taong Kate)</td>
<td>Taong</td>
<td>Kon Mum</td>
<td>Ratanaki</td>
<td>97 families, 409 people (2006); 21 Cham and 2 others in 2003-4</td>
<td>Brao Tanap (recorded as Kreung by province); Cham; others</td>
<td>Moved to cooperative between 1975 and 1979</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>92</td>
<td>Taong 2 (Taong Umbok)</td>
<td>Taong</td>
<td>Kon Mum</td>
<td>Ratanaki</td>
<td>159 families, 573 people (2006); 7 others in 2003-4</td>
<td>Brao Tanap (recorded as Kreung by province); others</td>
<td>Moved to cooperative between 1975 and 1979</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>93</td>
<td>Tuh (including Tuh Kandrom and Tuh Peung)*</td>
<td>Taong</td>
<td>Kon Mum</td>
<td>Ratanaki</td>
<td>111 families (including 38 in Tuh Kandrom), 436 people (2006); 19 Khmer in 2003-4</td>
<td>Brao Tanap (recorded as Kreung by province); Khmer</td>
<td>Relocated to present location in about 1964 due to rubber plantation development. Moved to cooperative in 1975 and back to present location in 1979.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>94</td>
<td>Seuk (Chek)</td>
<td>Taong</td>
<td>Kon Mum</td>
<td>Ratanaki</td>
<td>125 families, 524 people (2006); 66 Khmer in 2003-4</td>
<td>Brao Tanap (recorded as Kreung by province); Khmer</td>
<td>Moved to cooperative between 1975 and 1979</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>95</td>
<td>Ta Kap (Tang Kap)</td>
<td>Taong</td>
<td>Kon Mum</td>
<td>Ratanaki</td>
<td>103 families, 452 people (2006); 41 others in 2003-4</td>
<td>Brao Tanap (recorded as Kreung by province); Khmer; Lao; other</td>
<td>Moved to cooperative between 1975 and 1979</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^{284}\) This village is officially part of Kambak village.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Commune</th>
<th>District</th>
<th>Province</th>
<th>Brao population</th>
<th>Sub-groups</th>
<th>Years in present location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>96</td>
<td>Khamung</td>
<td>Laming</td>
<td>Bokeo</td>
<td>Ratanakiri</td>
<td>39 Brao of 443 (2003-4)</td>
<td>Tampuon; Brao; others</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(Provincial data claims there are 400 Brao and just 39 Tampuon – this data is almost certainly incorrect)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>97</td>
<td>Phum 1</td>
<td>Kachaign</td>
<td>Ban Lung</td>
<td>Ratanakiri</td>
<td>289 of 1,293 are Kreung/Brao Tanap; 8 Brao (Umba) (2003-4)</td>
<td>Khmer, Cham, Tampuon, Brao Tanap (recorded as Kreung by province); Umba; others</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>98</td>
<td>Phum 2</td>
<td>Kachaign</td>
<td>Ban Lung</td>
<td>Ratanakiri</td>
<td>269 of 1,809 Brao Tanap/Kreung (2003-4)</td>
<td>Khmer, Brao Tanap (recorded as Kreung by province); Tampuon, Cham; others</td>
<td>Rubber originally planted near this village in 1964</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>99</td>
<td>Phum 3</td>
<td>Kachaign</td>
<td>Ban Lung</td>
<td>Ratanakiri</td>
<td>552 of 643 Brao Tanap/Kreung (2003-4)</td>
<td>Brao Tanap (recorded as Kreung by province); Khmer; Viet</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100</td>
<td>Phum 4</td>
<td>Kachaign</td>
<td>Ban Lung</td>
<td>Ratanakiri</td>
<td>48 of 1,315 Brao Tanap/Kreung (2003-4)</td>
<td>Khmer; Lao; Brao Tanap (recorded as Kreung by province); Cham; others</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>101</td>
<td>Phum 1</td>
<td>Labansick</td>
<td>Ban Lung</td>
<td>Ratanakiri</td>
<td>133 of 6,597 Kreung/Brao Tanap (mixed up) (2003-4)</td>
<td>Khmer; Viet; Cham; Brao Tanap (recorded as Kreung by province); Chinese; others</td>
<td>Kreung/Brao Tanap working in the province. They don't have village.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#</td>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Commune</td>
<td>District</td>
<td>Province</td>
<td>Brao population</td>
<td>Sub-groups</td>
<td>Years in present location</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>102</td>
<td>Phum 2 (Phum Thmey)</td>
<td>Labansiek</td>
<td>Ban Lung</td>
<td>Ratanakiri</td>
<td>170 of 1,373</td>
<td>Kreung; Lao; Kreung/Brao Tanap (mixed up); 10 Brao (Umba) (2003-4)</td>
<td>Kreung/Brao Tanap did rubber tapping before and stayed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>103</td>
<td>Phum 5</td>
<td>Labansiek</td>
<td>Ban Lung</td>
<td>Ratanakiri</td>
<td>383 of 1,132</td>
<td>Khmer; Lao Brao; Kreung; Tanpuon; others</td>
<td>Brao and Kreung mainly soldiers and other jobs; Brao from Taveng</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>104</td>
<td>Phum 6</td>
<td>Labansiek</td>
<td>Ban Lung</td>
<td>Ratanakiri</td>
<td>114 of 798</td>
<td>Brao; 26 Kreung (2003-4)</td>
<td>Brao from Taveng; came here from Taveng, after returning from Laos and Vietnam. Ya Muong Poy’s village</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>105</td>
<td>Phum 7*</td>
<td>Labansiek</td>
<td>Ban Lung</td>
<td>Ratanakiri</td>
<td>275 of 703</td>
<td>Brao (Umba); Kreung; Lao; others</td>
<td>Brao originally from Taveng; including Bong village; Came to present location in about 1984 after returning from Laos and Vietnam. First at O Trao. Tanpuon are original people. Shrook Dar Dar came in 1979</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>106</td>
<td>Jree</td>
<td>Yak Loam</td>
<td>Ban Lung</td>
<td>Ratanakiri</td>
<td>92 of 418</td>
<td>Tampuon; Kreung; Khmer; others</td>
<td>Some married, work as soldiers and police, or in other positions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>107</td>
<td>Ngeun Military development area*</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>Siem Pang</td>
<td>Stung Treng</td>
<td>About 20-30 Brao families</td>
<td>Brao plus people from other ethnic groups</td>
<td>Army based established in mid-1990s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#</td>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Commune</td>
<td>District</td>
<td>Province</td>
<td>Brao population</td>
<td>Sub-groups</td>
<td>Years in present location</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>108</td>
<td>Kiribas Leu ('Ntrak)*</td>
<td>Santipheap</td>
<td>Siem Pang</td>
<td>Stung Treng</td>
<td>80 households (2006)</td>
<td>Kavet</td>
<td>Called 'Ntrak village before the 1960s. Most were in Laos between 1979-1983</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>109</td>
<td>Kiribas Kroam</td>
<td>Santipheap</td>
<td>Siem Pang</td>
<td>Stung Treng</td>
<td></td>
<td>Kavet</td>
<td>Called Kavet village before the 1960s. Most were in Laos between 1979-1983</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>110</td>
<td>O Chay*</td>
<td>Santipheap</td>
<td>Siem Pang</td>
<td>Stung Treng</td>
<td>164 households (2006)</td>
<td>Kavet and Lun Din Deng</td>
<td>1983 returned from Laos; historically in mountains except for Lun Din Deng. Prior to the 1960s the villages were called Gleun, Taneul, Ganom and Lun Din Deng villages. Most were in Laos between 1979-1983</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>111</td>
<td>Ti Tiem*</td>
<td>Santipheap</td>
<td>Siem Pang</td>
<td>Stung Treng</td>
<td>77 households (2006)</td>
<td>Kavet</td>
<td>Prior to the 1960s there were two villages, Changam and Tangao. Most were in Laos between 1979-1983</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>112</td>
<td>Kirivongsa Leu</td>
<td>Santipheap</td>
<td>Siem Pang</td>
<td>Stung Treng</td>
<td></td>
<td>Kavet</td>
<td>Called Chamong village before the 1960s. Most were in Laos between 1979-83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>113</td>
<td>Kirivongsa Kroam</td>
<td>Santipheap</td>
<td>Siem Pang</td>
<td>Stung Treng</td>
<td></td>
<td>Kavet</td>
<td>Prior to the 1960s there were two villages, La Yum and Tra. Most were in Laos between 1979-83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#</td>
<td>Name</td>
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<td>Years in present location</td>
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<td>----------------</td>
<td>---------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>114</td>
<td>Din Kon Kon</td>
<td>Chantu</td>
<td>Siem Pang</td>
<td>Stung Treng</td>
<td>Lun Vang</td>
<td>285</td>
<td>Located near the Samong Stream. Khmer Rouge forced to live in Veng village up until 1979. Most were in Laos between 1979-83. Area known as Dong Plawng</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>115</td>
<td>Santi (Lun Samong)</td>
<td>Chantu</td>
<td>Siem Pang</td>
<td>Stung Treng</td>
<td>Lun Vang</td>
<td>8 families?</td>
<td>Located on the Sekong River near the mouth of Samong stream. Khmer Rouge forced to live in Veng village up until 1979. Most were in Laos between 1979-1983</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>116</td>
<td>Charop (Ka-yoon)*</td>
<td>Charop?</td>
<td>Sesan</td>
<td>Stung Treng</td>
<td>Khmer and some Brao (Tanap?)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Evicted from Ratanakiri rubber plantations in 1960s; KR resettled to present location in 1971</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>117</td>
<td>Sre Sanuk*</td>
<td>Kabal Romeas</td>
<td>Sesan</td>
<td>Stung Treng</td>
<td>Brao (Tanap?) mixed with Bu-nong and Khmer</td>
<td>81 families; 414 people (not sure how many of the above are Brao)</td>
<td>1948 established village; some Brao (Me Ka-yoon) moved from Charap village</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

285 There are apparently about 70-80 Lun Vang families in Cambodia, but they are now separated in a number of different villages. The Lun Vang are named after their former leader, Ya Vang.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Commune</th>
<th>District</th>
<th>Province</th>
<th>Brao population</th>
<th>Sub-groups</th>
<th>Years in present location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>118</td>
<td>Katot*</td>
<td>Khamphun</td>
<td>Sesan</td>
<td>Stung Treng</td>
<td>52 families; 272 people in 2006</td>
<td>Brao Tanap and few others</td>
<td>1963 came to present location; before in same general area; From 1975 and 1979 was at cooperative at Yeun village, along the Sekong River. 1981 came back to present location</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>119</td>
<td>Rompuot Kroam (Lum Pat)*</td>
<td>Talat</td>
<td>Sesan</td>
<td>Stung Treng</td>
<td>38 families; 168 people</td>
<td>Lun Tat Peur? / Kreung (Brao Tanap?)</td>
<td>1982 present location; 1976-82 north side of Sesan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>120</td>
<td>Sen Monorom Provincial capital area</td>
<td>Sen Monorom</td>
<td>Speanmeanchey, Mumnea, Rumea, Sen Monorom, Sokh Dom??</td>
<td>Mondolkiri</td>
<td>598 Brao (mostly Kreung?)</td>
<td>Kreung (Brao Tanap?)</td>
<td>Most Kreung appear to have moved here after 1979. However, Guérin (2003) reported that there were 142 Brao in Kratie in 1903-4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX 2

Photographs

Photo 1.1 'Viang' village gate of the Brao Umba from Bang Geut village, Taveng district, Ratanakiri province, northeastern Cambodia (2006)

Laos

Photo 1.2. Postcard photograph of a Brao Kavet woman from Vong Vilai Neua village, Phou Vong district, Attapeu province, southern Laos
Photo 2.1. The author drinking some jar rice beer with Brao Umba people in Taveng district, Ratanakiri province, northeastern Cambodia (2006)

Photo 2.2. Men are not the only drinkers of jar rice beer. Here, a number of Brao Blawng (Umba) women drink rice beer in Pateng village, Koh Pong commune, Veun Say district, Ratanakiri province, northeastern Cambodia (February 2007)

Photo 3.3 Brao Umba elder in Bang Geut village, Taveng district, Ratanakiri province, Cambodia (2005)
Photo 3.4. A Brao Hamong man sings the Brao epic story ‘meut mooan Groong Yoong’ in Tra-oum village, Phou Vong district, Attapeu province (2005)
Photo 3.5 The Brao Jree lead the husband of a family from his in-laws’ house to his parents’ house as part of the ‘jundrao’ bilateral custom of the Brao, in Viang Xay village, Phou Vong district, Attapeu province, Laos (2004)

Photo 3.6. The Brao Jree lead the wife of a family from her parents’ house to her in-laws’ house as part of the ‘jundrao’ bilateral custom of the Brao, in Viang Xay village, Phou Vong district, Attapeu province, Laos (2004)
Photo 3.7 A recently prepared Brao Umba swidden field with large felled trees in Bong village, Taveng district, Ratanakiri province, Cambodia (2003)

Photo 3.8 A recently prepared Brao Ka-nying swidden field with cut bamboo in Houay Le village, Phou Vong district, Attapeu province, Laos (2005)
Photo 3.9 Three Brao Umba men from Trabok village, Taveng district, Ratanakiri province, Cambodia, making holes in the ground of a swidden field with dibble sticks, in preparation for planting rice and other seeds (2003)
Photo 3.10 Brao Umba woman deposits rice and other seeds into a hole made by a dibble-sticking man ahead of her (2004)

Photo 4.1 One variety of Brao Umba house, Bang Geut village, Taveng district, Ratanakiri province, Cambodia (2006)
Photo 4.2. Brao Hamong house, Tra-oum village, Phou Vong district, Attapeu province, Laos (2005)

Photo 4.3 Brao Umba house, Bang Geut village, Taveng district, Ratanakiri province, Cambodia (2006)

Photo 4.5. A type of small house in the Brao Umba village of Bang Geut, Taveng district, Ratanakiri province, Cambodia (2005)
Photo 4.6 A Brao Umbar house in Bong village, Taveng district, Ratanakiri province, Cambodia (2005)
Photo 4.7 A house in Trabok village, Taveng district, Ratanakiri province, Cambodia, with a taboo stick in front (2006)
Photo 4.8 A Brao Umba house in Bang Geut village, Taveng district, Ratanakiri province, Cambodia (2005)
Photo 4.9 A Brao Ka-nying house in Phou Vong district, Attapeu province, Laos (2005)
Photo 4.10 A type of Brao Umba house, Bang Geut village, Taveng district, Ratanakiri province, Cambodia (2005)

Photo 4.11 The concentric circular Brao Ka-nying village of Houay Le, Phou Vong district, Attapeu province, Laos (2005)
Photo 4.12 A ‘gachooay’ taboo stick for warning that it is taboo to pass

Photo 4.13. The materials used for conducting a Brao Kreung Animist ritual for correcting a situation when an ‘huntre’ taboo has been broken, Dong Krapu village, O Chum district, Ratanakiri province, Cambodia (2006, photo by Phao Khem)
Photo 5.1 An illustration of Khou Phonsamek, the ethnic Lao founder of Champasak, Champasak district, Champasak province, Laos (2006)
Photo 5.2 Chao Khamsook, the King of Champasak at the time of French colonial expansion into Laos
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Photo 5.4 Brao men as seen by early French explorers of southern Laos (1891)
Photo 5.5 Chao Raxadanai, the last King of Champasak, in November 1940

Photo 6.1 Tanh Homrasmy, the Brao Hamong Chao Muang of Kong Mi (Muang Lave), Attapeu province (photo provided by Tanh’s son, Takto Homrasmy)
PHOTO(S) NOT INCLUDED
(UNABLE TO SECURE PERMISSION FOR USE)
PHOTO(S) NOT INCLUDED
(UNABLE TO SECURE PERMISSION FOR USE)
PHOTO(S) NOT INCLUDED
(UNABLE TO SECURE PERMISSION FOR USE)
PHOTO(S) NOT INCLUDED
(UNABLE TO SECURE PERMISSION FOR USE)
Photo 7.1 School in Viang Xay Focal Site in Phou Vong district, funded by the ADB’s ‘Dek Nying’ Girls’ Education Project

Photo 7.2 Concrete toilets in Viang Xay Focal Site in Phou Vong district, funded by the international NGO ADRA

Photo 7.3 Cheung Hiang village houses relocated along a new road in 2005, two kilometres from the Nam Kong River, the only dry-season water source at the time
Photo 7.4 Tra-oum village in the lowlands, after many houses located in lines along a road have been abandoned for other houses in nearby fields (2005)

Photo 7.5 Tractors owned by the Vietnamese agriculture company Chong Dao in 2003 before the company abandoned its cashew plantations, which can be seen partially behind the tractors. The dry stream that Houay Keo (Dak Roo) people used to collect water from year-round can also seen between the cashew plantation and the tractors.
Photo 7.6 At Houay Keo (Dak Roo) there are a large number of metal ploughs, stored unused, indicating that plans to expand lowland paddy production there have not gone nearly as well as initially hoped (2004).

Photo 7.7. A Vietnamese logging truck near Houay Keo (Dak Roo) village. Logging has been intense in the area in recent years.
Photo 7.8 A young Brao man from Tra-oum village tries to make a house post that looks like a sawn Lao house post. Since he cannot use a saw, he is using an axe (2003).

Photo 7.9 Recently resettled Brao Jree families located along a road in Viang Xay village, Phou Vong district, Attapeu province, Laos. Notice that each household has a zinc roof provided as an incentive to move to the lowlands (2004).
Photo 7.10 A house-making Animist ritual taking place at the Lun village of Ban Na, Pathoumphone district, Champasak province, Laos (2005)

Photo 7.11 Brao Jree men in Viang Xay village, Phou Vong district, Attapeu province prepare to move a ‘permanent’ solid wood house from one part of the village to another (2005)
Photo 7.12 Houses owned by newly arrived ethnic Lao families living next to the paved national highway Route 13 south, in Ban Na, Pathoumphone district, Champasak province. The ethnic Brao houses in the village are located in a circle away from the road (2006).

Photo 8.1 Brao Umba people from Son village, Taveng Leu commune, Taveng district, Ratanakiri province, Cambodia, put a ritual village gate (*Viang* in Brao) across a road in the district, indicating their desire to recreate a sense of a Brao village proper. It also indicates that cars never travel the road, and that the road is wider than required (2005).
Certificate of Approval

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR
Le Billon, P.

DEPARTMENT
Geography

NUMBER
B04-0690

INSTITUTION(S) WHERE RESEARCH WILL BE CARRIED OUT

CO-INVESTIGATORS:
Baird, Ian George, Geography

SPONSORING AGENCIES
Social Sciences & Humanities Research Council

TITLE:
Natural Resource Management in Border Areas: The Case of the Brao in Cambodia and Laos

APPROVAL DATE
Nov 2004

TERM (YEARS)
1

DOCUMENTS INCLUDED IN THIS APPROVAL:
Sept. 28, 2004, Consent form

The protocol describing the above-named project has been reviewed by the Committee and the experimental procedures were found to be acceptable on ethical grounds for research involving human subjects.

Approval of the Behavioural Research Ethics Board by one of the following:
Dr. James Frankish, Chair,
Dr. Cay Holbrook, Associate Chair,
Dr. Susan Rowley, Associate Chair
Dr. Anita Hubley, Associate Chair

This Certificate of Approval is valid for the above term provided there is no change in the experimental procedures.