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SOLDIERS, MONKS, BORDERS: VIOLENCE AND CONTESTATION ALONG BORDERLINES IN THE GREATER MEKONG SUBREGION.

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Abstract: The struggles of poor communities to negotiate development processes have been increasingly documented in recent years. However, recognition of the agency of the poor should not preclude attention to patterns of oppression that may be intensifying in the face of top-down development processes imposed by increasingly well-co-ordinated elites. Examination of patterns of violence in border areas across the Greater Mekong Subregion suggests that integration facilitates the collusion of state actors in the dispossession of the poor in a manner that is deleterious to ethnic minorities, internal migrants, and other vulnerable populations. National political processes are not offering mechanisms by which such populations can seek to contest this trend.

Keywords: Greater Mekong Subregion, regional integration.

In examining the impact of neoliberal strategies for economic growth on the poor, much commentary has emphasised the importance of giving the poor their due, noting their agency and creativity in developing strategies for coping with the most drastic upheavals. In a companion volume to the 2009 World Development Report, Jonathan Rigg and Chuak Wittayapak (2009: 93) discuss the promotion of integration and ‘connectivity’ by the Asian Development Bank

(ADB) and other donors in the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS), and find the impact of regional integration schemes on the poor mixed – ‘a mosaic of sometimes contradictory process and effects.’ As such, they argue, grounded, micro-level studies rather than statistical averages are needed in order to better understand the impact of regional integration on marginal and minority populations. Although the poor start from a disadvantaged position, they argue, we should not assume that they are powerless to grasp the opportunities that come their way. Andrew Walker’s (2007) studies of rural Thailand similarly emphasise the extent to which the poor desire to be part of economic development, rather than excluded by it.

Yet equally, micro-studies demand comparison in order to highlight broader patterns, and as such, the agency of various poor communities in particular localities needs to be linked to admittedly sketchy statistical evidence of overall trends. In the case of the GMS region, a striking trend is the broad picture of widening inequality and increasing landlessness. According to the ADB (2006:3), absolute poverty has reduced in the region, more so in Thailand and Vietnam than in Laos or Cambodia, over the past fifteen years since integration began to be seriously pursued. But critics of the integration strategy, such as Oxfam Australia, respond that in all the GMS countries except Thailand income inequality increased since the early 1990s. As Oxfam Australia (Cornford and Matthews, 2007: 7) point out, this amounts to at best equivocal evidence of socio-economic progress. According to Oxfam, ADB has relied on narrow monetary measures in making claims about poverty in the region, and has little to say about patterns of human development in the populations most affected by the developments, which targeted studies commissioned by the Bank itself suggest have been far less positive.

This paper attempts to re-attach contingency and locality back into a broader survey of patterns of change across the Lower Mekong Basin, as a means to raise general questions about the impact of the GMS integration project on practices of governance in four of the countries involved: Vietnam, Cambodia, Thailand and Burma. As Pangsapa and Smith (2008: 485-514) have noted in a review of environmental and labour standards on the borders of Thailand, while the distinctness of the experience of different populations across the three borders between these countries is clear, it is also possible to discern some commonalities. These commonalities cast serious doubt on the claims of the ADB (2007: vii) to be promoting a “shared vision for a prosperous, integrated and harmonious Mekong region,” since they represent efforts by states

concerned to control ‘connectivity’ in a manner which excludes the poor and marginalises regime opponents. This paper seeks to highlight the extent to which military violence harnessed by state-business alliances figure in this process. The period covered by this review –from 2001 to 2009 – can be credibly described as a period of authoritarian drift in all of the four countries in question: arguably, the violence surrounding contestation of resources in the light of the GMS project has facilitated, rather than impeding, this development.

Specifically, this study suggests the emergence of three consistent patterns, although these patterns appear in different guises as they are interwoven with the specificities of local and national politics. First, analysis suggests that one outcome of the regional integration project has been renewed and increased militarisation in borderzones, as the military and police play a part, either as contenders or as hired guns, in contestation over resources and positions of power. Second, this militarisation has been accompanied by increased cross-border co-operation, not only between businesses of various sizes conducting cross-border trade, but also between bureaucrats and militaries seeking to both regulate and profit from such interactions. These two developments not only expand the power of the state in border zones and on borderlines, as Martin Gainsborough (2007: 1-18) has demonstrated with respect to border provinces in Vietnam, but also changes the nature of the border as a space for refuge and dissidence.

Third, the historical tendency of each of these four states to draw upon a repertoire of beliefs about the enmity and/or inferiority of the others as an important plank of legitimacy might have been expected, arguably, to engender some nationalist opposition to the integration strategy. Yet this has not occurred. Even populist politics of the kind that prompted the crisis at Preah Vihear on the Thai-Cambodian Border in 2008 does not actually significantly disrupt this collaboration: indeed, the analysis of the conflict offered below suggests that under cover of the hostilities, state and military officials, on the Cambodian side at least, are securing personal investments in the future economic potential of the area. The use of violence to promote discriminatory and anti-poor regimes of power and development in border zones, the expanding cooperation between state agencies in implementing coercive and abusive policies, and the relative insulation of these policies from popular condemnation, either on the basis of ethnic chauvinism or on the basis of concern for liberal freedoms, has contributed to the narrowing of political space across the region as a whole, over the past decade.

This article begins with an overview of the GMS regional integration project, and then goes on to discuss five case studies of violent contestation across the region, beginning with local manifestations of violence and militarisation and linking these to wider struggles over development and legitimacy in each of the cases. It concludes by examining the impact on strategies both for everyday negotiation of state power and for outright political dissidence, and argues that the curtailment of both has been disastrous for the poor.

Integrating the Greater Mekong Subregion

The regional integration agenda in the Mekong Basin emerged in the early 1990s and was rooted in Thai ambitions to turn ‘battlefields into marketplaces’ at the end of the Cold War (Krongkaew, 2004; Siriluk, 2004; Oehlers, 2006). Subsequently the initiative became harnessed to a variety of different agendas: to the concern within ASEAN to prevent a destabilising rift appearing between more and less developed ASEAN members following the accession of Burma, Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia; to Chinese interests in the development of Yunnan province; and to concerns over the security and sustainability dimensions of hydropower development on the Mekong River (Makim, 2002). These agendas have not always harmonised, but they have attracted political backing from the governments involved, and financial support from ASEAN, Japan and the ADB. The ADB is the major financial backer for the Greater Mekong Subregion project, which it visualises (2007: vii) as a “shared vision of a prosperous, integrated, and harmonious Mekong subregion.”

The strategic framework for the GMS project aims to promote integrated development across the region, via a number of ‘strategic thrusts’, namely, infrastructure linkages; cross-border trade, investment and tourism; private sector development; human development; and environmental protection. These translated into a set of action plans for transport, telecommunications, energy, the environment, tourism, trade facilitation, investment, human resource development and agriculture. Most progress has been made on the provision of ‘hard’ infrastructure such as roads, bridges and energy projects, in the pursuit of what the ADB calls ‘connectivity’ between different parts of the region. Although the ADB has not been responsible for providing all of this infrastructure – much of it has been provided by other donors or by governments of the GMS

countries – the rhetoric of the ADB is arguably significant in that it turns a stubbornly blind eye to the concrete effects of integration on border communities in the region.

Examinations of the impact of these various projects concur in remarking a number of common features: increased legibility of longstanding flows of goods and people across these borders, for example, and a flow of new populations to border regions, as settlers, investors or representatives of the state. Both these features imply a potential source of revenue for the state, either formally or informally. Furthermore, regional integration has brought the emergence of new industries that have already become central to national economic development strategies: the expansion of the Vietnamese coffee industry; the emergence of agro-industry in Cambodia; hydropower in eastern Burma; and tourism developments on the Thai-Cambodian border are examples.

The remainder of this article examines how these kinds of developments affect politics and governance, where the latter is conceived as a contested process of expanding state regulation and control over distributions of resources. I will show that the contestation in the border regions emerges from the relationship between the integration of border zones into national development plans; the necessity, to such plans, that particular types of integration and connectivity be driven forward while other types are prevented; and the role of violence in the contestation of these processes.

It will be argued further that the violence ongoing in the border-zones has a detrimental effect, not only on weaker groups in border enclaves and zones themselves, but also, because of the significance of borders to the conception of space across national territories, more broadly in the context of the different national regimes concerned. That is, violence at the national periphery feeds back into more authoritarian control at the centre also. Violence in the borderlands reduces the traditional political significance of borderlines in providing opportunities for flight, while at the same time also reducing the ability of advocacy groups to inject concern for issues such as sustainability and rights into economic development discourses.

Politics in the Borderlands

The significance of border regions emerges from what Decha Tangseefa (2006) calls ‘the kaleidoscopic realities of the border zones’ and the layers of meanings they represent in different

political spaces. As Eric Tagliacozzo (2005: 3) points out, ‘boundary production’ and ‘boundary transgression’ are mutually implicating processes. At the micro-level, border checkpoints have a dual orientation: they are places where flows and exchanges take place, but also where these are checked, channeled, and, sometimes, disrupted, by agents of centralised states headquartered, often, miles away. Viewed as political spaces, they thus have very contradictory aspects, with a local cross-border politics taking a different shape from the national spaces that the borderline divides; yet one function relies upon the other - the significance of the border crossing place as a place of crossing, transaction and linking of groups that live close by and have multiple face to face meetings is also in large part dependent upon the significance of the state-imposed and -policed border line as a disruption to this. As Andrew Walker (1999: 111) has noted, border zones thus derive their significance from their function in sustaining difference as well as in facilitating connections. As such, the political economy of the border is as much a result of state regulation as of market opportunity, and increased interest in the development potential of border areas, consequently, does not entail the retreat or decline of state regulation, but its expansion (Gainsborough; Pangsapa and Smith). Andrew Walker’s contention that local negotiations between public and private officials empower both the market and the state in maintaining the profitability of trading regimes reflect the nature of borders as a source of profit, in a manner which runs counter to the developmental potential attributed to integration by the neoliberal economists of the Asian Development Bank.

Underlying the ADB’s emphasis on flows and connectivity is a view of borders as barriers to integration which threaten to distort the self-regulating market, with costs for efficiency. If one leaves behind the assumption of market self-regulation, however, ‘regional integration’ becomes more appropriately represented as a process by which a new regulatory regime emerges offering new opportunities for profit and power. The activities of both state and private actors – and state actors acting in a private capacity – on these borders indicates both their sophisticated appreciation of this, and the level of contestation which their efforts to gain a share of the spoils entails.

There is a third level of significance surrounding border zones: borders are places where powerful meanings are generated with respect to ideas of national identity and conceptions of security. These processes continue to occupy a central role in state legitimation among the

countries of the Greater Mekong Subregion. Political rhetoric contains a rich repertoire of images deriving force from derogatory portrayals of the regional neighbourhood. Reminders of Vietnam's annexation of lower Cambodia, Thai designs on Cambodia's Angkorean heritage and the barbarous sacking of Ayuthaya by the Burmese form a staple of politics in the region and motivate contemporary political activism. Hence the continued significance in domestic politics of the border as a device for keeping threatening neighbours out.

Furthermore, the geographical distribution of ethnic minorities across borders has long been understood by governments of this region as a central governance concern (Keyes, 2002; 2008, 28-9). For all four countries under discussion in this article, borders serve to sever unruly minorities from potential ethnic comrades, ensuring their minority status in nations dominated by lowlanders. This aspect of the functioning of borders is one that states are loath to surrender, not only because doing so would raise specters of insecurity, but also because doing so would leave tropes of national identity dangerously adrift (Cribb and Li, 2004; Glassman, 2005). Equally, greater emphasis on 'connectivity' of these frontier areas allows greater scope for the state to control and exploit resources located here.

The significance of the border from the perspective of state actors then, is manifold: they are places for facilitating and regulating profitable transnational flows and trades; for exploiting cross-border differentials for private profit and national development; for expanding state control over territory and resources; and for creating a unified sense of national identity and dividing peoples who might pose a challenge to such identities.

The significance of borders in different kinds of political spaces suggests the utility of examining their import at multiple different scales (Sneddon, 2003). Consequently, this study considers the impact of regional integration through three different lenses: the local politics of border crossing points; the political economy of development in border zones and peripheral areas, more broadly; and in national politics and bilateral relations between governments. With respect to border crossing points and the border zones within which they are located, five case studies are considered here: the crossing point at Phnom Den/Tinh Bien on the Cambodia-Vietnam border; the border between Ratanakiri Province in Cambodia and Gia Lai Province in Vietnam; the

border crossing between Cambodia and Thailand at Poipet; the Preah Vihear temple site on the Thai-Cambodia border; and the border crossing point between Thailand and Burma at Mae Sot.

Each of these localities has seen violence and conflict during the last decade, and in each case, this has reflected contestation of development dynamics in the broader districts served by the crossing points – respectively, the Mekong Delta; the central highlands between Vietnam and Cambodia in the area of the Lao-Cambodia-Vietnam growth triangle; North West Cambodia and the Thai-Cambodia border; and the Karen state in Eastern Burma. In each case, development projects and investments stimulated by the GMS integration project are at stake, as are the trade relations, primary commodity flows and markets these investments were meant to promote. Yet equally, the patterns of violence and exclusion in each case have been woven into the dynamics of ongoing local, national and sometimes international struggles over economic and ideological control.

As case studies of areas that have seen violence, these five sites are of course not necessarily representative of all border regions in the GMS at all times. However, the five case studies include some of the most important border crossing points between these countries and are thus significant in their own right. The comparison offered here, furthermore, serves to indicate, not the overall level of violence in the border regions, but the nature of this violence, its links with broader governance trends and its effects on the poor. In this analysis, a series of sporadic and localised conflicts emerge as locally inflected manifestations of a broader *pattern* of violence associated with regional integration.

Arguably, it is also possible to link this to another pattern in the region: a pattern of drift towards or consolidation of authoritarianism across the four countries in question. In Cambodia, this has taken the form of the increasing repression of protest and dissent, and the ever more heavy handed harassment and co-optation of opposition movements since 2001 (Hughes, 2009). In Vietnam, since the 1990s, authoritarian rule has been recalibrated over the past decade producing a more stable and enduring single-party state (Rodan and Jayasuriya, 2007; Dorsch, 2009: 376-9); while in Burma, the resurgence of hardliners in the State Peace and Development Council since 2003 has crushed hopes of genuine democratic opening, the 2010 elections notwithstanding (Jagan, 2004). In Thailand the picture is more complex: retreat from the aspirations of the 1997

constitution, evident first in Thaksin's repressive populism and the subsequent military coup, suggest the pattern held here too for a period. Significantly, the problems the Abhisit government has faced in relations with its neighbours, discussed below, suggest the difficulties of reasserting liberal democratic aspirations in the context of an integrating region.

This analysis will illustrate the level of violence that has been required to achieve this result in these five sites: a level of violence which, although it has been sporadic, has overshadowed everyday practices of negotiation to the point where the ability of sections of the marginalised poor to survive in place has been threatened. In each case, the affected populations are different: although all are poor, in Vietnam and Burma the effects are disproportionately borne by ethnic minorities who are mistrusted by the state. In Cambodia, ethnic minorities also suffer, particularly upland communities in the north-east and the so-called 'Khmer Krom' – ethnic Khmers from the Mekong delta in Vietnam. The effects are also disproportionately borne by Khmer communities comprising relatively recent settlers in regions that were until recently militarised frontiers, and are now highly profitable development areas, where military power is still strong. In the ensuing contestation over control of and access to land and resources, the ability of local people to forge alliances with wider national movements, pro-poor advocacy organisations, or transnational networks of support who might be able to champion their cause, has been heavily curtailed, thus subverting the ability of 'globalisation from below' to challenge or contest the process of 'globalisation from above' represented by the GMS integration project (Falk, 1997).

The Vietnam-Cambodia Border: Land, Monks, and Montagnards

In 2001 and 2004, thousands of refugees crossed the border between Cambodia and Vietnam where it bisects the mountainous region connecting the Central Highland provinces of Dak Lak, Gia Lai and Kon Tum in Vietnam to Cambodia's north-western provinces of Ratanakiri and Mondolkiri (Human Rights Watch, 2002). In both cases, these refugee flows followed crackdowns by Vietnamese police and military on demonstrations over economic and cultural rights in the Central Highlands by members of various highland minority peoples, often known

collectively as Montagnards.¹ Subsequently, demonstrations have continued in the central highlands, the most recent wave occurring in April 2008; and smaller numbers of Vietnamese Montagnards have continued to cross into Cambodia. In August 2008, for example, four ethnic minority villagers were sentenced to jail terms of between two and six years after being found guilty of inciting protests and helping fifty Vietnamese villagers cross illegally into Cambodia.

The story illuminates the effect of economic development and regional integration on interstate relations in the region, and the implications for marginalised groups. The uprisings and subsequent refugee flows were related to the impact of development policies on ethnic minorities in the Central Highlands of Vietnam. The treatment of refugees reflected a high level of cooperation between security forces on the border, both via local ad hoc arrangements and central government directives. These arrangements reflect a concerted effort by Cambodian and Vietnamese authorities to maintain and bolster the divisions imposed by the border on poor ethnic populations living in the area, even while new integration initiatives intended to increase the scope for cross-border cooperation to exploit border resources were being introduced.

According to a review by Oxfam (Gresser and Tickell, 2002), in the Central Highlands, the Montagnards were affected by three policies in the 1990s: policies to resettle Kinh majority people into mountain areas; efforts to ‘modernise’ agriculture there by ending rotational swidden cultivation; and the subsequent massive expansion of coffee plantations in the area. These three reforms found Montagnards increasingly reliant for subsistence upon cash from coffee production, and facing unprecedented competition for land from Kinh in-migrants. The population of the Central Highlands increased from 1.5 million in 1975 to 4.2 million in 2000; while Vietnamese land under coffee cultivation expanded to from 30,000 hectares to more than half a million in 2000. In 2000 Vietnam became the second largest coffee producer in the world.

In 1999 the world price of coffee crashed, causing high levels of poverty and land alienation among Montagnard communities. All farmers were hit hard: but the Montagnards had less

¹ Most of the people concerned were from the Jarai, Ede, and Mnong ethnic groups. The term ‘montagnard’ as a collective noun for a variety of ethnic groups is not a neutral term: it was used by French colonial officials and is sometimes considered derogatory, although it has also been used by some highland people themselves as a mobilising identity. An alternative term is ‘Dega’ although this term has more specifically political connotations since it has been adopted by separatists in particular; not all the refugees who fled to Cambodia had been involved in the separatist movement, although many were accused of this by the Vietnamese authorities.

access to credit than Kinh farmers and fewer opportunities for off-farm employment to supplement incomes. They benefited less from government extension programmes, often because of language issues, and had less secure land tenure, because of lack of recognition of communal lands during settlement campaigns in the past. Consequently they were less able to weather the crisis, and many Montagnard coffee producers lost their land as a result of the crash in 1999, and were forced to sell their labour as plantation workers on the larger, newly planted, Vietnamese-owned farms (Gresser and Tickell, 2002). A study by the Food and Agriculture Organisation (Marsh, 2007: 30) described the ethnic minorities in this region as ‘clear losers’ from the coffee development.

In this context, demonstrations took place in Gia Lai and Dak Lak provinces in February 2001, over land rights, an issue which quickly became linked to demands for freedom of religion. The latter demands related to a strain of evangelical Protestantism among highland communities, which operates through a system of house churches operating beyond the purview of the state-recognised protestant hierarchy. The dangerous brew of religion and land rights drew a swift response from the Vietnamese government. According to the Asian Centre for Human Rights (2004), demonstration leaders were arrested and sentenced to long prison terms and periods of house arrests, for offences such as ‘undermining state and Communist Party policy’ and ‘organising illegal migration to Cambodia’ – the latter charge contrasting interestingly to the stated goals of the GMS project of facilitating flows of goods and people across borders in the GMS region.

Following the demonstrations in 2001, thousands of refugees flowed across the border into the north-eastern Cambodian provinces of Ratanakiri and Mondolkiri. The Cambodian government permitted the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to establish refugee camps in the area, but then allowed members of the Vietnamese security forces to enter the camps, search refugees’ huts, and pressure them to return to Vietnam, prompting UNHCR to suspend operations. Subsequently, reports emerged (Radio Free Asia, 2003; Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organisation, 2005) that Cambodian officials were accepting payment from Vietnamese agents to cooperate in returning individuals to Vietnam – one Cambodian military official was quoted as saying he had repatriated four highlanders in exchange for 100 kilos of rice and 15 litres of petrol. Over the next two years, protests and

crackdowns continued in Vietnam increasing concentrations of security forces in the border area: by the time the Easter protests took place in 2004, the Vietnamese government had stationed hundreds of additional troops and police to the region, checkpoints were routinely stationed on roads, searches of villages and coffee plantations by police with dogs were used to find individuals in hiding, and police officers were stationed directly in the homes of villagers suspected of political activity. According to Human Rights Watch (2004c), even possession of a mobile phone could be cause for arrest. Human Rights Watch reported that ‘returnees from Cambodia’ were particularly a target of suspicion.

In 2004, suppression of Easter weekend protests prompted a further flow of refugees. This time, the Cambodian government denied UNHCR access to highlander refugees for months. The refugees hid in remote Cambodian forests, living in makeshift shelters and dying of disease (Human Rights Watch, 2004c). Eventually, the Cambodian government allowed UNHCR to establish camps, but when the refugees refused resettlement to third countries, the Cambodian government forcibly repatriated them. Human Rights Watch reported (2004c) that the repatriation was conducted with unprovoked violence by Cambodian security forces; and, that large numbers of those refugees that did return to Vietnam were beaten, jailed and tortured, prompting some to flee to Cambodia a second time. The Vietnamese and Cambodian governments argued that the refugees contained a proportion of ‘terrorists,’ seeking to “sow disunity” among the hill tribes in the Central Highlands, and to undermine the Vietnamese state. According to a report in Time Magazine (Zabriskie, 2004), the Governor of Gia Lai province compared the protestors to Iraqi insurgents, commenting: "Terrorism does not mean they have to use explosives... They could even use martial arts." A spokesman for the Cambodian government, similarly, in 2005 was cited (Reilly, 2005) as commenting: "Of the thousands of people [coming over the border], they are not all refugees... Sometimes they are international terrorists.."

Just as the Vietnamese authorities were concerned about ‘returnees from Cambodia’ so the Cambodian authorities had reason to fear the arrival in north-east Cambodia of Vietnamese Montagnards. For the Cambodian government, there is concern that the political protests of the Vietnamese Montagnards will lead to solidarity with Cambodian highland minorities who face similar issues of contestation over land. The area is significant to Cambodia’s political

economy: in the 1990s, north-eastern forests were heavily and illegally logged, and the timber was exported to feed the garden furniture industry in Vietnam. The remoteness of the region, and the lack of regulation of the industry, entailed that significant fortunes could be made: profits from forestry and kickbacks from illegal loggers were crucially important sources of income to both the Cambodian military and the then-struggling Cambodian People's Party. Slush funds from the forestry industry facilitated the re-emergence of the CPP as a political powerhouse by the end of the 1990s (Global Witness, 2007). The widespread presence of military in the area facilitated the heavy handed Cambodian government response to the influx of refugees from Vietnam.

Since the passage of a Land Law in 2001, the Cambodian government has shifted to a new strategy of awarding large areas of 'degraded forest' as economic land concessions, which can be cleared to establish plantations. These have become central to the government's strategy to lure investors from China, North Korea, Vietnam and Thailand. Some of these are genuinely interested in plantation agriculture; others have been more interested in speculating on land values. The process by which land has been allocated has been obscure, involving a variety of state agencies including the military. Land disputes between state actors and local ethnic minority people over the status of land purchases have been a feature of Cambodia's border provinces, where tenure is less secure than in the central plains. A high-profile case pitting ethnic minority villagers in Ratanakiri against the sister of Cambodia's Minister for Economics and Finance, Keat Chhon, arose from claims by Highlander villagers in spring 2004 – precisely the time when the Cambodian government was resisting UNHCR intervention in the second refugee crisis - that they were coerced into selling their land (Cambodia Human Rights Action Committee et al, 2007).

The contestation over allocation of land concessions in the area has allowed the Cambodian military to carve out a niche for themselves as security guards for economic land concessions. Indeed, many economic land concessions contain soldiers' villages where groups of military personnel live in order the better to keep an eye on the plantation (NGO Forum officials, personal interview, 2008). The deployment of the military to guard land concessions makes oversight of plantations by civilian local authorities difficult, exacerbating the negative effects

upon neighbouring villages, particularly since few plantations create many local jobs (Hughes et al, 2009; World Bank, 2004).

Cash cropping has not in itself been disastrous to the lives of villagers in the north-east of Cambodia, nor in the central highlands of Vietnam: indeed, some highlander peoples have embraced the cash economy and improved their standards of living. However, contestation over land, between Kinh and non-Kinh on the Vietnamese side of the border, and between rich and poor on the Cambodian side, has prompted violence and repression significantly reducing the extent to which such developments are likely to be 'pro-poor.' Efforts to prevent the poor and marginalised from crossing the border indicate the extent to which immobilisation has been as much a feature of this strategy as 'connectivity.' In 2004, as the second refugee influx was dying away, the governments of Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam announced the designation of this area as a 'growth triangle' intended to attract international investment in hydro-power, mining, industrial crops growing and processing and tourism (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 2004). Linked to the GMS vision of an east-west corridor running from Central Vietnam through Southern Laos into Thailand, the Growth Triangle would see major investment in telecommunications, transport and energy infrastructure, enabling better exploitation of a highland area already transformed by cash crops, and significantly increasing the values of land and resources in the area as a result.

Yet this has occurred in the context of a remilitarisation of the region and the imposition of strict surveillance on marginalised and poor populations among the ethnic minority upland communities. Security forces are being charged with the task of preventing cross-border contact by the indigenous peoples of the area, many of whom have long-standing kin and trade relationships with people on the other side. Sporadic reports of Cambodian ethnic Jarai villagers assisting Vietnamese Jarai to cross the border appear to lead to a level of panic in the Cambodian and Vietnamese governments. In April 2002, Human Rights Watch reported (2002) that armed Cambodian militias were sent into Cambodian villages on the border with the Vietnamese Central Highlands "to order Cambodian villagers not to help Montagnard refugees from Vietnam, or face arrest."

The second case study on this border centres on the border crossing at Phnom Den-Tinh Bien, between the Vietnamese province of An Giang - in the Mekong Delta area known in Cambodia as Kampuchea Krom or 'Lower Cambodia' - and Takeo province in Cambodia proper. In this case, also, the issue was the flight in 2007 of members of an ethnic minority group from Vietnam, complaining of land expropriation and religious oppression, and the assistance provided to them on the Cambodian border by Cambodian citizens. In this case, the refugees were the so-called 'Khmer Krom' or ethnic Khmer of the Mekong Delta, who share a language and religion with the Khmer in Cambodia: indeed, are regarded by many Khmers in Cambodia as evidence of Cambodia's rightful claim to the territory of the Mekong Delta, now part of Vietnam.

The Khmer in Vietnam are mainly rice farmers in the Delta, and, like the Montagnards in the Central Highlands, they constitute a marginalised and impoverished minority. A 2004 poverty assessment of the Delta population (World Vision Australia and Adam Fforde Associates, 2004) found the Khmer were considerably poorer and less well-educated than their Kinh neighbours, and faced language barriers in interacting with the state. Like the Montagnards, they have limited links to the local authorities upon whom security of land tenure is dependent, and limited access to agricultural extension services or credit, placing them at greater risk of land alienation following economic shocks. Like the Montagnards, the Khmer Krom have been marginalised by waves of in-migration to the Delta over the past 30 years, and, since 2002, by the industrialisation of agricultural production in the form of government-promoted investment in shrimp farming (Government of Vietnam, 2001). Like coffee in the Central Highlands, shrimp production in the Delta has had inequitable effects, reducing opportunities for off-farm employment while heightening competition for land. The ethnic Khmer have disproportionately lost out (World Vision Australian and Adam Fforde Associates, 2004). Although the government's 2002 shrimp strategy pays attention to the poor, it does not address issues of marginalisation facing the Khmer. Furthermore, like the Montagnards, the Khmer in Vietnam face restrictions on their religious organisations, and the combination of religious dissidence with land loss has led to intensified surveillance by state security forces.

The Khmer Krom have responded to the relative worsening of their conditions by regular protests over issues of land and religion, and this has prompted a wave of repression, which in

2007 led to flows of refugees across the border into Cambodia, particularly around the border crossing point of Phnom Denh-Tinh Bien. According to Human Rights Watch (2009), a particular feature of this flow of refugees was the prominence of Buddhist monks within it, following some months of activism amongst Khmer temples in the Delta, over the issue of religious freedom and rights to Khmer-language education.

The issue of Kampuchea Krom is difficult for the Cambodian government. Since independence, irridentist claims to the delta have been a staple of political rhetoric by successive governments, and the reliance of the currently ruling Cambodian People's Party on the Vietnamese army during the period of the civil war in the 1980s has been regularly used by opposition parties as a means to raise questions over the party's legitimacy and patriotism. Since 1993, minor border demarcation disputes with Vietnam have been used to mobilise both anti-CPP and anti-Vietnamese feeling by opposition activists in Cambodia (Hughes, 2001).

In 2005, Prime Minister Hun Sen signed a controversial border agreement with Hanoi, and returned to Phnom Penh threatening to jail any critics of the deal. Five individuals were subsequently arrested and imprisoned, including trade union leaders, opposition politicians and popular media figures (Committee to Protect Journalists, 2006; Amnesty International, 2006). Although later released, these events intimidated the opposition. With border demarcation disputes resolved and the opposition cowed, the way was apparently open for significant development of the border region.

These achievements were potentially threatened by unrest in the Delta in 2007, and its effects within Cambodia. Early 2007 saw the forcible defrocking and arrest of ethnic Khmer monks in Vietnam following a series of demonstrations. Other monks involved in the protests fled Vietnam, and took up residence in Cambodian temples (Human Rights Watch, 2007). However, the Cambodian government moved aggressively to suppress political activities by Khmer Krom monks in Phnom Penh. In February 2007, a group of Khmer Krom monks held a demonstration outside the Vietnamese Embassy in Phnom Penh, protesting the crackdown. A few hours after the demonstration, the body of Eang Sok Thoeun, a Khmer Kampuchea Krom monk who had participated in the demonstration, was found in a nearby temple with his throat slit. Subsequently, the editor of a Cambodian newspaper, who had editorialised on the issue, was

found dead in the boot of his car. In April, a fist fight erupted outside the Vietnamese Embassy in Phnom Penh between a delegation of Khmer Krom monks seeking to deliver a petition to the Vietnamese Embassy and a counter-demonstration of monks seeking to prevent them from doing so (Heng Reaksmey, 2007).

These protests by monks in the centre of Phnom Penh represented a challenge to a CPP government that has poured money into sponsorship of religion. Subsequently, the government moved to stem the flow of Khmer Krom monks into Cambodia, including by ordering the defrocking of an abbot of a temple at the border crossing point of Phnom Den-Tinh Bien. The abbot in question was a Kampuchea Krom monk called Tim Sakhorn who had lived in Cambodia since 1979. Detractors suggest that Sakhorn was a renegade, performing illegal ordinations, participating in anti-Vietnamese demonstrations, and spreading propaganda produced by separatist groups such as the US-based Khmer Kampuchea Krom Federation (Hun Sen, 2007). The truth of these accusations is unclear; however, it seems apparent that Sakhorn had had a hand in assisting Khmer Krom monks seeking refuge in Cambodia.

The subsequent course of events has been the subject of much rumour and gossip in both Cambodia and Vietnam. The political sensitivity of the topic entails that much of this rumour was heavily politically inflected. It appears that in June 2007, the second most senior monk in Cambodia, Noun Nget, wrote to the Supreme Patriarch (the most senior monk) Tep Vong, to request Tim Sakhorn's removal from his position. On 30 June this occurred: Sakhorn was arrested and summarily defrocked on charges, according to the Phnom Penh Post (Sam and Forsyth, 2007) of "undermining diplomatic relations with Vietnam by trying to establish a religious movement based out of his Phnom Den commune pagoda." Subsequently, eye-witnesses claimed (Guthrie, 2009) that Sakhorn was abducted by two policemen, who drove him to the Vietnamese border and handed over to the Vietnamese authorities – a claim affirmed by Human Rights Watch investigators (2007) and subsequently by Sakhorn himself in an interview following his release (Mundol, 2009). On 1 August, Voice of Vietnam News announced that Sakhorn had been arrested for 'trying to enter Vietnam illegally' and was in prison in Vietnam, although Sakhorn himself subsequently stated (Mundol, 2009) that during interrogation police accused him of "inciting the Khmer Krom living in Vietnam to demand the returns of their lands confiscated by the Vietnamese authority without any compensation." According to the Phnom

Penh Post (Chrann and Strangio, 2009), Sakhorn was subsequently charged, not with illegal entry, but with ‘sabotaging the unification policy’ under Article 87 of Vietnam’s Penal Code, a reference to the unification of North and South Vietnam, and implying that the Vietnamese authorities’ real concern was potential separatist activism amongst the Delta Khmer.

As these events unfolded, publicity surrounding the affair increased, prompting opposition rallies in Phnom Penh and protests by Kampuchea Krom communities worldwide. Nonetheless, Sakhorn was jailed for a year and then placed under house arrest. Finally, he managed to return to Cambodia in mid-2009, where he reordained as a monk, then continued onwards to Thailand to seek assistance from UNHCR. He was eventually resettled in Sweden; although in the same week as his asylum claim was accepted, Thailand deported another 56 Khmer Krom asylum seekers back to Cambodia (Dideriksen, 2009).

Tim Sakhorn’s activities were particularly disturbing to the Cambodian authorities, since his pagoda was situated right on the contentious border, in an area slated for economic development under new border cooperation deals. Phnom Den is a commune in Kirivong District of Takeo Province, a district that has grown rapidly in recent years, largely thanks to the healthy cross-border smuggling trade that takes place there. The commune lies astride National Route 2, the main highway from Phnom Penh to the Delta in Vietnam. Takeo generally, Kirivong in particular, and Phnom Den above all, as the host to the border customs office, are all constituencies that provide solid support to the ruling Cambodian People’s Party (CPP). The CPP occupies six of the seven seats on the Phnom Den commune council. Hun Sen’s right hand man, the powerful and feared deputy prime minister Sok An, was born just up the road from Phnom Den, in Chuan Chum Commune; he is currently responsible for mobilising CPP support in Kirivong district and is a regular visitor to distribute gifts to temples and schools in the neighbourhood (Hun Sen, 2003a).

The border crossing point at Phnom Den/Tinh Bien is surrounded by the 57-hectare site of a US\$100 million Special Economic Zone, under construction by Duong Chhiv group, a well-connected Sino-Khmer company. The CEO of the company, Duong Chhiv, is also president of the Chinese Association of Cambodia, and has been awarded, among other honours, the title of Okhna, a highly politicised title bestowed upon individuals who have donated more than

US\$100,000 to various development projects under the auspices of the ruling party or its development vehicle, the Cambodian Red Cross (Hun Sen, 2003b; Cambodian People's Party, 2009). Duong Chhiv's SEZ is intended to attract foreign investment in the form of food processing factories, combining cheap Cambodian labour with cheap Vietnamese electricity, and offering tax breaks to investors. The SEZ will be one of six along the Vietnam-Cambodian border; according to Duong Tech, general manager of Duong Chhiv Group (Chun and Hor, 2009), the SEZ will provide 50 to 100,000 jobs in Cambodia, and boost Cambodia-Vietnam trade by US\$1 billion dollars a year, making the Phnom Den-Tinh Bien crossing point as important as the crossing point at Poipet on the Thai border for the Cambodian economy.

The degree of central government interest in both Hanoi and Phnom Penh shown in Tim Sakhorn's activities was in part a function of the particular location of his temple in this increasingly strategic area; and in part a function of its role as a conduit for channeling the politics of Kampuchea Krom, in the form of fleeing Buddhist monks, into Cambodian political space more broadly. The case exemplifies the different implications of 'connectivity' for security forces and dissidents, as the opening up of border areas and their increasing economic value entails greater cooperation between security forces to ensure governability. One Khmer Kraom monk interviewed for this study in Phnom Penh (personal interview, 2008), commenting on the difficulties of finding places to hide, commented:

“Actually it is more dangerous for us here than in Vietnam. In Vietnam, if they don't like you they arrest you, but in Cambodia if they don't like you, they kill you.”

Khmer Krom monks in Phnom Penh were stringently monitored, allocated to particular temples where they were under surveillance by security forces and by pro-CPP abbots. Their automatic entitlement to Cambodian citizenship precluded appeal to UNHCR, unless they could make it further on to Thailand.

The case studies on this border demonstrate increased cooperation between Cambodian and Vietnamese authorities in managing unruly ethnic minorities who have gained relatively little from development projects, and whose protests threaten the elite grip on power and profit in both countries. They also demonstrate that increased connectivity between security forces across this border is used in the interests of dividing and ruling populations that might otherwise gain

considerable cross-border sympathy. Furthermore, the development opportunities of the border have not only brought coercion for minority populations who live there, but also, in the case of Cambodia, for the populist opposition politicians who might have harnessed these protests to their own interests of attacking the legitimacy of the ruling and increasingly authoritarian Cambodian People's Party. As such, consolidation of authoritarianism on both sides of the border, in part as a product of these developments, is associated with the division, immobilisation and heightened surveillance of populations and the militarisation of development zones.

The Thai-Burma Border: Energy, Insurgency and Exiles

The Burma-Thai border has also long been characterised by flows of refugees and economic migrants fleeing the harsh realities of the Burmese military regime. The town of Mae Sot is situated in the Thai province of Tak, on the border with Burma. It straddles ASEAN Highway 1, across the border from the town of Myawaddy in Burma's Karen State, the scene of civil war and insurgency for fifty years. Since 1997, Mae Sot and Myawaddy have been connected by a Friendship Bridge built with funding from the Thai government.

Mae Sot is an important border crossing and trading point, between Thailand and Burma. It is also a key nodal point in the developing infrastructure and energy connections linking the GMS economies and broader United Nations ambitions for an integrated system of Asian Highways. Further, it is both an important location for Thai industry taking advantage of the willingness of insecure cross-border migrants to work for low pay; and home to a community of political exiles. As such, the town exemplifies a number of dimensions of connectivity, combining opportunities for refuge and exploitation, cross-border movement and political surveillance. On the Burmese side of the border, equally, the economy of Karen State has until recently been characterised by subsistence farming. During the 1990s, the Burmese army's policy of forcing ethnic minority families off their land led to considerable upheaval in landholdings, and more recently, the area has become a focus of national development in agro-industry and hydroelectricity, awarding large profits to the Burmese government while weakening potential bases of ethnic insurgency.

These different dimensions are closely interconnected. The Burmese army's development of Karen State is closely associated with infrastructure developments in the area, which improve links to both the Thai economy and the GMS more widely. Since 2006, the Burmese government has built a new road network in the Karen State, close to the border crossing to Mae Sot, where the Asian Highway is planned to pass through. Although the Burmese government does not receive financing for these projects from multilateral aid agencies, it is included in regional meetings on GMS infrastructure integration projects, and has been awarded funding and technical assistance from the ADB (ADB, 1999: 4) in order to maintain its participation, thereby facilitating the integration of development in Karen state with Thai markets. Watchdog NGO Earthrights International (2007) maintain that the ADB has actively assisted the Burmese government to mobilise private sector funding for its road-building initiatives, as a means to advance the GMS integration project. The impetus behind these investment projects has also been assisted by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for the Asia-Pacific's project of mapping roads across Asia for the Asian Highway initiative (UNESCAP, 2003). The crossing at Mae Sot is specified by UNESCAP as part of Asian Highway 1, which continues through the Karen State and central Burma to connect with the Indian road network. The road is regarded by UNESCAP as the key link between South East and South Asia and therefore as a priority for upgrading. At Mandalay, close to the site of the new capital city at Naypyidaw, the Highway is joined by Asian Highway 14 leading north into China. A network of smaller roads links the Asian Highway to a range of hydropower projects, including a series of projects on the Salween River in the Karen State.

The Burmese government's stated purpose (Than Shwe, 2007, cited in Karen Human Rights Group, 2007) in this road building development is "building social infrastructures to cement amicable relations among the national races of the Union." However, the Karen Human Rights Group (2007) has documented widespread violence, land expropriation, and forced labour in construction of these roads. Strings of military camps are located along the road, imposing stringent travel restrictions policed by checkpoints, in a bid to provide security for hydropower projects which will cause the inundation of extensive areas of farmland.

Hydro-electric developments similarly result from Burma's trade relations with Thailand, and figure in strategic plans for greater regional integration. Three large scale dams are planned for

the Salween River which runs through the Karen State close to the Thai border. The first in Karen State is the Hat Gyi dam, which was begun in late 2006. This dam is being jointly developed by Burma's Department of Hydroelectric Power, the Electricity Generating Authority of Thailand (EGAT) and the Chinese company Sinhydro Corp. 85 per cent of the electricity produced will be exported to Thailand.

Thailand's investment in hydropower on the Salween has been significant: the earmarked funds when disbursed will amount to nearly double the whole of Burma's foreign direct investment since 1988 (Karen Human Rights Group, 2007). The social impact will be severe. The Hat Gyi dam will flood 5 square kilometers of land and entail the displacement of 5000 people. This is an area in which guerrilla fighters associated with the Karen National Union are strong: consequently, for the Burmese government, the dam kills two birds with one stone, raising enormous amounts of revenue while significantly disrupting the support base of its enemies (Salween River Watch, 2006). In 2009, military activities in the area included offensives by the Burmese military against ethnic-based insurgent armies to win control of roads and power lines, as well as fighting between pro and anti-government ethnic-based armies over control of business interests, for example in logging (*The Irrawaddy*, 2009; Saw Yan Naing, 2009).

As with the development projects on the Cambodian-Vietnam border, then, these projects are accompanied by intensification of the military presence. The NGO Salween River Watch (2006) claims that between 1992 and 2004, the number of army garrisons in Papun District, to the north of Mae Sot, where two of the dams will be located, increased from 10 to 54. Three quarters of the villages close to the dam sites have been forcibly removed to relocation sites controlled by the army, the group claims.

On the Thai side of the border, the economic benefits of integration are also felt. Not only does Thailand benefit from gaining a new source of energy imports, but the extent of displacement and repression in Burma directly feeds into the profitability of 200 garment factories located in Mae Sot, which employ exiled Burmese at wages and in conditions that Thais will not countenance (Pangsapa and Smith, 2008). According to a report in *The Irrawaddy* newspaper (Min Lwin, 2009), 80 per cent of Mae Sot's garment factories underpay their workers and ignore Thai laws regarding workers' protection, using the threat of withholding work permits as a

means to gain workers' compliance. The border and the migration regime, although relatively porous to both refugees and economic migrants, thus facilitates economic exploitation.

Longstanding Thai tolerance of a community of political exiles in Mae Sot entailed that the town also serves as a refuge for a number of leaders of Burmese insurgent movements, and activists releasing reports on issues related to human rights, war crimes and democracy in Burma. However, Thailand's investment in the Hat Gyi dam reflected a broader shift in relations with Burma after Thaksin Shinawatra came to power with a policy of economic nationalism in 2001. Motivated by concerns to promote the Thai economy and build infrastructure links through Burma to China, Thaksin and his successor Samak forged a warm relationship with the Burmese government (Marker, 2006). In Mae Sot, the conditions of exiles and migrants were directly affected by this policy, as attitudes to Burmese political refugees hardened. By 2003, Thailand and Burma had signed a Memorandum of Understanding allowing Thailand to deport refugees to special holding centres run by Burmese military intelligence. Thai authorities also began informally deporting refugees through the Mae Sot crossing point, in a move which brought them into conflict with UNHCR, and rounding up refugees in urban areas and shifting them into refugee camps on the Burmese border (Human Rights Watch, 2004a; 2004b).

In this environment, economic migrants also suffered. In 2001, a new registration system had been implemented to regulate migrants working in Thailand. As Thai-Burmese relations warmed up, this system tightened on the grounds that Burmese migrants in Thailand were a 'security' issue, and the week after Thaksin's 2001 visit, hundreds of police descended on Mae Sot to arrest and deport Burmese migrants to the tune of 600-700 a day (Human Rights Watch 2008). Arnold and Hewison (2005: 319-340) report that in the early 2000s, Burmese workers attempting to organise in the factories of Mae Sot were increasingly subject to threats and harassment to the extent that, "intimidating and sacking Burmese migrant workers who demand their rights has become a management strategy for Mae Sot-based companies." In 2004, Thailand replaced tolerance of illegal migration with a formal labour export programme conducted with the Burmese government. According to Human Rights Watch (2004b), this apparent regularisation of the conditions in which migrants crossed the border amounted to collaboration in their surveillance on behalf of the Burmese military regime.

Greater regulation and surveillance of the movements of people across the Thai-Burma border rendered the community of political exiles on the border even less secure again. In Mae Sot, rumours of the infiltration of the political exile community by Burmese intelligence agents began to circulate; and in 2008, the Karen National Union's leader in exile, Pado Mahn Shar was shot by assassins at his home in Mae Sot. Speculation on who was responsible ranged from rival Karen groups, to the Burmese intelligence service, to the elements of the Thai government frustrated at Mahn Shar's refusal to sanction dam building in Karen state. Meanwhile, as with the Khmer Krom issue in Cambodia, attempts by the Thai authorities to control the activities of Burmese dissidents has led to periodic crack-downs on political activity as far afield as the capital city. According to Human Rights Watch (2004b), when Thailand first began rounding up Burmese refugees in urban areas in 2004, Thai and Burmese organisations offering relief services to migrants and refugees were threatened; human rights activists were warned not to speak out, and Thai newspapers refrained from reporting on the subject out of fear of reprisals.

Since the return to power of the Democratic Party, relations between Thailand and Burma have soured somewhat; Thai Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva's 2009 criticisms of Burma's further detention of Aung San Suu Kyi caused an angry reaction from the Burmese government. Significantly, reaction came not only from the Burmese government but also from influential Thai figures including both General Sonthi Boonyaratglin, the leader of the 2006 coup against Thaksin, and Thaksin's former legal advisor and ex-foreign minister Noppadon Pattama (Kavi, 2009). The unlikely alliance between these two figures on Burmese affairs reflects the significance of Thai investments in Burmese energy projects and of Thai manufacturing reliance on Burmese migrants. Indeed, in October 2009, following the row, the Thai cabinet approved the construction of a second Friendship Bridge in Mae Sot and called for the speedy development of a border economic zone in the area, noting approvingly the importance of 1 billion-baht-a-month Thai-Burma trade across the existing bridge in the context of the global economic downturn (Usa, 2009; Government of Thailand, 2010). The pursuit of connectivity with Burma may constrain the possibility of any government elected in Thailand from taking a critical stand on Burma's human rights abuses, while foreign direct investment from Thailand continues to be a significant resource shoring up the Burmese regime. This is particularly important in the context of recent legitimacy crises faced by the Burmese government, such as

the mass protests in 2007 emerging from the government's economic mismanagement; and the criticism it received for its defensive response to the disaster of Cyclone Nargis in 2008.

Despite the clear differences in political and economic circumstances between the Thai-Burma and Vietnam-Cambodia borders, the impact of cross-border development seems to have had similar effects: increasing the interest of national politicians, intensifying military presence, prompting expropriation of land and resources, and closer collaboration of governments across borders in identifying potential trouble makers and silencing them. The apparent impunity with which Pado Mahn Shar's killers operated in Thailand is similar to that of the Vietnamese authorities who abducted Tim Sakhon from Cambodia. Expanded state surveillance ensures profitability for border enterprises exploiting differentials between the Burmese Karen and Thai populations in incomes and in levels of ability to resist the imposition of devastating development projects like hydro-electric power plants. However, the case also highlights the level of violence that is involved in policing this difference; the level of cooperation between the Burmese and Thai authorities despite both ancient animosities and recent tensions; and the willingness of militaries on the two sides to resort to similar violent practices in dealing with Burmese citizens.

The Thai-Cambodia Border: Soldiers, Veterans and Temples.

Developments on the Thai-Cambodia border illustrate a similar point. There have been no refugee flows across this border since the late 1990s, and the minefields and resistance enclaves of the Cold War have been replaced by border trading and casino towns patronised by wealthy Thai gamblers crossing the border. Effects of integration can be seen all along the border areas from Thai investments in sugar plantations in Koh Kong to the homeworking garment industry in Poipet, in Banteay Meanchey province, based upon the labour of Khmers crossing to the market in Rong Kluea, Aranyaprathet. The latter is a trade that is of significant benefit to the local economy, employing local people who work as small-scale traders, rather than under the control of large monopolies. A recent study found that the personal ties between traders and border guards are important in facilitating the trade, and that the small scale of the industry, and the

failure of larger business or bureaucratic interests to capture it thus far, makes it genuinely pro-poor (Murshid and Tuot).²

Yet violence remains a feature of life here, intertwined with economic opportunity. The opening of the Thai border in 1997 was an immediately attractive proposition to impoverished Cambodians, despite continued insecurity: families from across the country braved the insecurity of an ongoing war and a high concentration of land mines to clear land along the border and settle here. The village of Kbal Spean, in which the Poipet border crossing is located, was created in this manner in the early 1997. The village, comprising houses constructed largely of plastic sheeting, nestles against the earthworks of the abandoned 1980s K5 defence project. The villagers are inward migrants: poor landless families from other parts of the country, demobilised soldiers, and returnees from Thai refugee camps who settled in the area in the hope of making a living from the border gate. They cleared the land of jungles and mines by hand to construct their huts. Today, the same land fetches a high price due to its proximity to the border gate; to the highway that links Ho Chi Minh City, via Phnom Penh, to Bangkok; to the casinos and brothels of Poipet; and to the Poipet Special Economic Zone currently under construction.

As a result, Kbal Spean has been the site of a number of landgrabs, organised by powerful provincial businessmen in alliance with state actors, both civilian and military. In 2005, one such landgrab drew international attention because the military were drafted in to overcome resistance by the villagers, resulting in five deaths. The land in question, in this case, had been granted by local authorities to demobilised soldiers, to live on after they left the army. However, the authorities neglected to give the demobilised soldiers title, and once the land value rose, a local official, apparently acting as a front man for an unnamed more powerful figure, claimed prior title, a claim that was supported by the provincial court. The case was notable for the violence surrounding it: more than 100 military, police and military police were sent to forcibly remove the villagers, leading to a fight between villagers armed with knives and axes, and security forces armed with guns. The security forces opened fire, killing five villagers and seriously wounding 14 more (Cambodian Human Rights Action Committee, 2007). The case

² This resembles Andrew Walker's findings with respect to traders on the border between Thailand and Laos, in Walker, *The Legend of the Golden Boat*.

caused an outcry and some members of the security forces were arrested, but they were subsequently acquitted and released.

Subsequently, other land disputes have emerged in the same area. In 2008, another set of householders in Kbal Spean were told that the vice-president of the provincial Chamber of Commerce held the title to their land. If the court supports his contention then the householders in the area have been told they will be put in jail for trespass (personal interviews with villagers and NGO workers, Kbal Spean, January 2009). In shifting the poor away from the border gate, this kind of land-grabbing threatens to transform not only land distribution but the economy of the area, from small-scale low cost household production to a trade consolidated in larger business entities. The problems faced by the villagers at Kbal Spean are common to other villagers along the border, as Cambodian courts consistently back provincial business against the poor in land claims in the northwest of the country, resulting in rapid concentration of landholdings.

On the Thai border, particularly, there is a further dimension to the issue: namely, longstanding claims to the area on the part of the Cambodian military. As the site of the frontline in the 1980s and 1990s, the northwest has been regarded by the military as their turf, and military commanders have claimed large tracts of land in the area for the ostensible purpose of settling demobilised soldiers or building military bases. Military claims to land have re-emerged as a significant issue following the stand-off at Preah Vihear, and raise the threat of renewed militarisation of the Thai-Cambodia border, but in the interests of profit rather than security.

The World Heritage listing of Preah Vihear in July 2008, shortly before a Cambodian national election, prompted dancing in the streets of Phnom Penh. However, the issue quickly became embroiled in the politics of anti-Thaksinism in Thailand; the Thai opposition accused the government of Thaksin's successor Samak Sundaravej of selling the nation's interests in cooperating in Phnom Penh's bid for listing. In supporting the bid, Bangkok was adhering to the aspirations of the integrated tourism strategy for the Mekong Basin, and betting on the benefits to the Thai economy of cross-border tourism, since the Preah Vihear temple is actually more easily accessible from the Thai side of the border. However, the location of the border, and

consequently ownership of the temple, has long been disputed, despite a decision by the World Court in the 1960s in Cambodia's favour. The result was the journeying of a group of anti-Samak protestors to the temple to demonstrate; their detention by Cambodian guards; the appearance of the Thai military, on the pretext of preventing the demonstrators from doing any harm; and the inevitable sabre-rattling response of the Cambodian government in an election year.³

On the Thai side, then, the dispute was closely entangled with patriotic rhetoric in the politics of red-shirt/yellow-shirt mobilisations. In Cambodia, the response was equally opportunistic, with nationalist rhetoric used to effect in the 2008 elections. Subsequently, the Cambodian military has benefited substantially from the situation. It successfully gained a doubling of its budget for 2009, following years of gradual budget reductions and in the face of long-standing policy on the part of the Cambodian government of reducing military spending in favour of spending on social services (Reuters, 2008). It was also the beneficiary of a public appeal by Cambodian radio and television stations which raised millions of dollars from the Cambodian public for troops.

But perhaps the most significant windfall has been in the acquisition of further land on the Thai border. The military has petitioned the government to allow it to recruit more troops, and to grant tracts of land on the border for the settlement of these troops, once the crisis is over, in 'soldiers' villages' in strategic areas. No details have been released, but recruitment did take place, with the promise of land in such soldiers' villages used as an incentive to young men to join up. Furthermore, village militias, prevalent in Cambodia until the 1990s, were re-formed along the Thai-Cambodia border in the wake of the dispute (Xinhua, 2008). The soldiers' villages idea had been raised previously by the military, as part of their own plans for demobilisation during the 1990s, and the military were reportedly awarded thousands of hectares of land for development as a means to give soldiers productive work. The exact location of these military development zones has, however, never been released, despite continued demands to reveal these by donors and non-governmental organisations in Cambodia (Phnom Penh Post, 2006). Land rights NGOs in Banteay Meanchay reported in early 2009 that land disputes with the military were increasing, with commanders claiming more land to build military bases on the back of the Preah Vihear crisis (personal interviews, Sisophon, 2009). Such land, located on the

³ See various reports in the *Phnom Penh Post*, June-July 2008.

borders, represents an excellent investment for the future, notwithstanding the current global financial crisis.

An interesting feature of the Preah Vihear conflict is that there have been few shots fired. Over the course of the eighteen month stand-off, seven soldiers have been killed, mostly in limited firefights begun accidentally. Elsewhere on the border, life and trade continue as normal. This contrasts to the spectacular nature of the anti-Thai riots in Phnom Penh in 2003, which saw the Thai embassy and a number of substantial Thai businesses razed to the ground and the evacuation of Thai nationals. Both sides appear willing to tolerate the risks involved in an armed stalemate, while undertaking desultory negotiations. Under cover of the insecurity, the Cambodian government has requisitioned privately held land around the Preah Vihear temple site for future 'national development' purposes. The militarisation of the area associated increases the likelihood that, like development in the more centrally located Angkor Park, the temple's tourist potential will eventually benefit the military and well-connected businessmen rather than the poor or middle class investors in Phnom Penh. As such, the Cambodian government's patience with Thai protestors can be expected to pay economic dividends to its key business and military supporters.

The Preah Vihear dispute, and the subsequent diplomatic row when Hun Sen appointed Thaksin as his economic advisor in November 2009, illustrate the continued political dividends to be gained from cheap nationalist point-scoring. However, the fact that there have been no riots, little fighting on the border, and almost no interruption to cross-border trade suggests that the cross-border collaboration among elites, facilitated and motivated by strategies of economic integration, is playing a role to limit the opportunity for armed conflict between states in the GMS subregion. While this is obviously significant, on this border of all places, the nature of the peace that has been achieved requires scrutiny. It is a fragile peace forged between elites, which operates at the expense of the opportunities of the poor, and is associated by often savage violence against them.

Conclusion

This overview of five border crossing points, and their relationship to the political economy of development and the rhetoric of state legitimation indicates the way in which economic change

in the context of regional integration development projects has affected patterns of access to land and resources. The result has been a variety of forms of contestation: this contestation is not only about the distribution of land and resources, but about the nature of governance, the role of coercion, and the cooperation of elites, often across borders, at the expense of weak and marginalised groups. The forging of regional markets and the opening of border areas for easier access and exploitation has given rise to a process of violent contestation in which states, businesses and militaries have sought to ensure their control over both material and ideological resources.

The pattern across the five case studies, particularly while Thaksin held power in Thailand, was of convergence and ‘connectivity’ between security forces and business elites, at the expense of poor settlers, marginalised migrants and ethnic minorities. The pattern varies across the cases in line with the nature of political space and patterns of legitimation. In Thailand, the use of violence has been largely confined to state-business harassment of illegal migrants and exiles. In Vietnam it has taken the form of marginalisation and repression of ethnic minorities. In Burma, it has intensified longstanding patterns of warfare against highly mobilised ethnic groups. In Cambodia, violence has been used by the rich against poor settlers, comprising demobilised soldiers, internally displaced people or internal migrants from other parts of the country. But in each case violence has been mobilised specifically to ensure the emergence, not just of integrated regional markets, but of particular kinds of integration which promote particular kinds of political power and economic control.

Since Thaksin’s departure from power, Thailand’s relations with Burma and Cambodia are more fluid. However, the changes wrought by regional integration restrict both, with the effect of restraining descent into war in the case of Preah Vihear, but also weakening the impact of Abhisit’s criticisms of human rights in Burma. Violence continues in this region, suggesting that in the short run at least, the transformative potential of development projects and marketisation schemes is limited: outcomes reflect rather than reshape national and regional orders of power.

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