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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SAN DIEGO

Architectures of Citizenship: Democracy, Development, and the Politics of
Participation in Northeastern Thailand's Railway Communities

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree Doctor
of Philosophy

in

Anthropology

by

Eli Asher Elinoff

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2013

The Dissertation of Eli Asher Elinoff is approved, and it is acceptable in quality and

form for publication on microfilm and electronically:

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2013

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CODI: Community Organizations Development Institute
SRT: State Railway of Thailand
RSR: Royal State Railways of Thailand
UC: United Communities network
KKSR: Khon Kaen Slum Revival Network
SIF: Social Investment Fund

NOTE ON TRANSCRIPTION

This dissertation employs the Royal Thai General system of transliteration throughout.

Exceptions are made for proper names.

NOTE ON NAMES

I have employed pseudonymns throughout this study protect the identitites of my study participants. I have also renamed individual communities, but I have not renamed the local networks, non-governmental organizations organizations, or any other government agencies.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Northeastern Thailand. David Streckfuss has been a mentor, friend, and critical advisor throughout this project. It is my hope that this dissertation reflects some of his commitment to Isan, social and environmental justice, human rights, and deep human engagement.

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This work owes its highest debt to the activists and residents living along the tracks. I am thankful for their honesty and openness, sharing their thoughts and struggles with me. I am especially endebted to the many members of the United Communities network and the Khon Kaen Slum Revival network who were generous

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PUBLICATIONS

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    2012. "Provincializing Bangkok: Isan from 'not yet' to 'now.'" *South East Asia Research.* 20 (3): 299-303 "

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERATION

Architectures of Citizenship: Democracy, Development, and the Politics of
Participation in Thailand's Railway Communities.

by

Eli Asher Elinoff

Doctor of Philosophy in Anthropology

University of California, San Diego, 2013

Professor Nancy Postero, Co-Chair
Professor James Holston, Co-Chair

This dissertation explores struggles over citizenship and the practice of politics

in communities situated along the railway tracks in the growing Northeastern Thai city

of Khon Kaen. I develop the concept of "citizen design" to explain how contemporary

disagreements along the tracks over land rights and new urban planning projects reflect

contestations over notions of good citizenship. Such politics, I argue, resonate with

broader transformations in Thailand's social order. In Thailand, "citizen design" is not a

new practice. Rather, successive eras of state and non-state development initiatives have

been imagined as means of transforming the nation's "villagers" into proper citizens.

Throughout this history, technologies of administration, democracy, security,

authenticity, and sufficiency have reproduced a developmental notion of citizenship that

marks the poor as needing training prior to deeming them capable of "ruling and being ruled." Through an ethnographic examination of the Thai state's new participatory housing policy, the *Baan Mankong* (Secure Housing) project, I show how this logic persists and is being challenged. Although envisioned as a means of stabilizing the social order, transforming the city, reforming the values of the poor, and producing harmonious urban communities, Baan Mankong has become a site of these politics in its own right. This research, conducted between 2008 and 2010, follows government architects, NGO activists, and residents of the railway communities, exploring the intersection between the project's aims of "developing people" (*patthana khon*) and the residents' efforts to secure lease rights to their land. I show how poor communities use the policy to make claims to being legitimate citizens, while development experts attempt to reform participants' values through the policy's trainings, community organizations, and spatial designs. Instead of creating united communities as the policy's discursive framework suggests, the planning processes intensified disagreements over distributions of power among local activist networks, rights to the city, and visions of citizenship. These disagreements reveal how those living on the cusp of belonging in both city and nation are reclaiming politics to reconfigure normative notions of citizenship, transforming Thailand's political order in the process.

Chapter 1:

Introduction: Smoldering Aspirations in the Harmonious City

On the day that Thailand's Community Organizations Development Institute (CODI) was set to inaugurate the UN's "Year of the Harmonious City," October 8th, 2008, Bangkok's streets were being cleared of rubber bullets, blood, and spent teargas canisters.[1] The previous day, a violent conflict had erupted between the anti-government protesters known as the People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD) and the Thai police, leaving one dead and several more wounded. The PAD had been occupying the lawn of the Thai Government House to provoke government reform in the wake of elections of surrogates to the popular, and very controversial, Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra, who was removed by a military coup in 2006. Shinawatra's successor governments were elected by wide margins based on support among voters in the provinces and among the rural and urban poor.

The conservative elite, Bangkok based upper- and middle-classes, and, paradoxically, many former NGO activists on the left, saw Shinawatra and his heirs to power, as corrupt impediments to the nation's progress. With the return of electoral democracy in the spring of 2008 and the subsequent re-election of a Shinawatra surrogate party, PAD and their "Yellow Shirt" supporters resumed their pre-coup occupations of the Government House, demanding a "new politics" (*kanmuang mai*) as a cure to what they saw as a corrupt government and electorate.

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[1] UN Habitat Day is designated as the first Monday in October every year as a day "to reflect on the state of our towns and cities and the basic right of all, to adequate shelter." (http://www.unhabitat.org/categories.asp?catid=700 Last Accessed 4 April 2013).

The "new politics" was the PAD's call for the reform of government institutions—allowing the King to choose the Prime Minister in accordance with Section 7 of the Thai constitution and replacing the elected parliament with one that was 30% elected and 70% appointed—in order to make them less susceptible to the votes cast by the "ignorant masses." In their eyes, Thailand's democratic experiment had failed because the majority of the nation's poorest citizens were not ready to participate responsibly. As one PAD supporter put it, "Rural people have good hearts but they don't know the truth like we do in Bangkok" (12/1/08 *Bloomberg*).

As images of the previous day's violence began circulating through the city, the main plaza at CODI's office in Bangkok offered another vision of the poor and their capabilities. The open terrace was decorated with displays and exhibits showing modest houses being renovated, residents meeting cooperatively in groups, and architectural models demonstrating "before and after" transformations of irregularly arranged slums becoming organized communities (Figures 1.1 and 1.2). The event was the public inauguration of month-long series of events attached to the celebration of UN Habitat's "World Habitat Day." The events were meant to highlight the achievements of poor communities throughout Thailand and to attract new participants to the organization's signature initiative, the *Baan Mankong* (Secure Housing) project.

Baan Mankong was passed in 2003 during the Thaksin administration as a participatory solution to the nation's housing crisis. In a now familiar story of late-capitalist boom and bust, the 1997 Thai economic implosion followed on the heels of some of the fastest economic growth in the world. This collapse led to a rapid expansion of poor, insecure housing in the country's capital and provincial cities. Preceeding the

crash, Thailand was the darling of the global economy. It became a Newly

Industrialized Country (NIC) through a fast growing export sector, state guided

development with foreign investment, and cheap money international loan money

(Bello et. al. 1998). Though economic instability was built into this system, the bubble

itself popped through real estate speculation, which led to structural adjustment and

currency devaluation. The crisis, exacerbated by already high rural debt loads, increased

dispossession, quickening the already fast pace of rural-to-urban migration.

The Baan Mankong policy was an intervention into these processes, seeking to

secure tenure and improve the homes and communities of over two hundred thousand of

the nation's poorest families. The policy uses participatory methodologies including

savings groups, participatory administration and design, and the creation of new "city

committees" (*kammakan muang*) to link residents of poor urban communities with

government officials and experts with the aim of improving infrastructure and housing.

Proponents of these methodologies claim that they "develop people" (*phatthana khon*)

as a means of improving physical conditions in these impoverished urban spaces. In this

case "Developing people" means reforming and replace consumerist values with

communality and moderation, hallmarks of the "sufficiency economy" model proposed

by the Thai king after the crash. CODI planners argue that "developing people" first,

leads to more durable development than the kinds of development policies that led to

the 1997 economic crash. Moreover, the project's planners assert that Baan Mankong

transforms residents of poor urban neighborhoods into "legitimate, normal citizens"

(Somsook 2005: 42).

Figure 1.1: The Thai Minister of Social Development and Human Security hands participants in the Baan Mankong Project flags to inaugurate World Habitat Day. The sign behind them reads, "The revolution of the Thai slums will fix the entire city."

Figure 1.2: "Before" and "After" images from CODI materials given out at the World Habitat Day event 10/8/2013

CODI's World Habitat day put these claims on display. Speakers highlighted Baan Mankong's emphasis on remaking the city and nation by remaking its citizenry, pointing out that that with the help of allies, appropriate training, and community cooperation, the poor are, as one speaker put it, capable of "developing the city and the nation on their own." With the blood from the previous day's events not yet washed from the streets, the contrast between the dreams of "harmonious cities" and the raw violence of the real one was stark. As different as both events were, each hinged on the very same questions: What are the political capabilities of the poor? How should they be included in democracy? Are they ready to be included at all?

Citizenship Along the Tracks: Not Yet and Now.

The prevailence of the above questions in contemporary Thai politics is tied to the growing sense among the poor that they have always been legitimate citizens entitled to engage in politics. In the wake of the Shinawatra regime and the 2006 military coup that ousted it, these questions came to the fore as competing protest groups—Yellow and Red Shirted—argued about the composition and capabilities of the nation's population.

Prior to Shinawatra's election, the assumption that the poor were not ready to participate was a foundational assumption of the practice of "government" (Foucault 1991) in Thailand. Such programs understood the poor through a developmental conceptualization of citizenship that categorized them as "villagers" not yet prepared to practice politics (see Connors 2007; c.f. Chakrabarty 2000). The results of this

conceptualization were that poor citizens were relegated to secondary forms of membership, which deferred their claims to political legitimacy and enabled the prescription of development interventions seeking to transform them into more appropriate national citizens.

Shinawatra's success was, in part, rooted in his ability to harness the interests of these not yet citizens. He appealed to Thais beyond the Bangkok middle and upper classes as voters targeting them with policies—housing policies, increased access to credit, and a national health care system. Yet, these changes also sparked cries of populism and corruption from the conservatives and destabilized the alliance between NGO activists and the poor that had gained strength throughout the 1990s. Such destabilizations came to a head between 2008 and 2010. Those years saw a complete government shutdown due to the prolonged occupation of the Government House, a ten day occupation and closure of Suvarnaphumi international airport (one of the region's busiest international hubs), the removal of two elected prime ministers by judicial orders, a four day siege of Bangkok in which natural gas busses and taxis blocked intersections posing as possibly leaky, potential car bombs, and several extended states of emergency.

The most spectacular display of the changes under way occurred during April and May of 2010 during a month long occupation of Bangkok's central shopping artery by the Red Shirted protestors and the United Front for Democracy Against Dictatorship (UDD). The Red Shirts (as I will call them) became the pro-poor/pro-democracy opposition to the Yellow Shirt (PAD) conservative movement. The central demand of their occupation was a return to electoral democracy and an end to military

interventions in politics. The mobilization of several hundred thousand protesters, most of whom traveled to and from Bangkok regularly to take part in the occupation of the city's public space, underscored the depth of the transformation at work. The event culminated with a violent dismantling of the protest encampment by the Thai military. These events left nearly one hundred protesters dead, a thousand more injured, and several of the capital's massive shopping malls and eleven provincial government halls in varying states of smoldering ruins.

Although the dramatic events associated with the Red Shirts became global news, I argue that they are merely evidence of a broader set of processes tied to the reclaiming politics and challenging of developmental citizenship occurring elsewhere in Thailand during this period. My field sites, the settlements build along the Railway tracks in Khon Kaen city, reveal the processes associated with these assertions of belonging and the complexities associated with the unwinding of Thailand's historically embedded notion of the poor as not yet ready for citizenship.

Khon Kaen is located approximately four hundred kilometers to the northeast of Bangkok (Figure 1.3). The Northeast region, Isan as it is called, is the nation's poorest region and is largely populated by people who are ethnically Lao. The region has been home to periodic political conflicts beginning around the turn of the twentieth century with millenarian revolts that were responses to the way the region had been included in the Siamese kingdom's boundaries (Keyes 1977). Later it became home to a strong contingent from the communist party of Thailand during the 1960s and 70s and a very active NGO movement in the 1990s. It has now become the heartland of the Red Shirt movement. As Streckfuss (2012) points out, these movements have typically been read

through the lens of insurrection. He argues that, contrary to this perception, such movements have also served to expand the range of citizens substantively included in the Thai state. In Khon Kaen city, the residents of the settlements built in the narrow corridor paralleling the city's Railway tracks, have been wrestling with the dilemmas posed by this unfolding history of developmental citizenship since their founding during the middle of the 20th century (Figure 1. 4).

Changing notions of the relationship between citizenship and politics have been particularly evident in the last 20 years. In the wake of the Thai economic collapse, residents faced a deepening threat of eviction from their homes built on land owned by the State Railway of Thailand (SRT). Following the economic crashthe Railway was pressured to privatize by international lenders compelling residents to organize themselves to demand rights to their land. They aimed their efforts at securing communally administered leases from the SRT. These struggles have taken many forms including: direct protests, community organizing, development projects, and contentious local and national negotiations.

These mobilizations have been instrumental in shaping Thailand's broader urban housing movements and in laying the foundation for other communities to gain rights from the wide variety of state agencies that serve as landlords throughout the country. The work of local activists in forming partnerships with NGO organizers and state officials also led to the creation of institutions like CODI, the Non-governmental Four Region's Slum Network, two vibrant local networks of housing activists, and the Baan Mankong participatory housing project.

On a national level these projects opened up new avenues for the urban poor to contest with the state, but locally these activities produced complex new disagreements tied to struggles over space, resources, and notions of citizenship more generally. These different visions have come to the surface in the form of intense disagreements, which contrast to the Baan Mankong project and its vision of community creation as a mode of personal development through harmony. Indeed, the efforts of progressive planners, activists, and architects to produce "harmonious communities" have been rebuffed as disputes over administrative boundaries have come to the fore.

Only a small number of communities in Khon Kaen have been able to secure their homes by signing lease agreements with the SRT while most of the city's other settlements have become increasingly vulnerable to evictions as their negotiations with state, local networks, and their neighbors have stalled due to intractable disagreements. Nevertheless, the Baan Mankong policy, which aimed to increase tenure security and improve the physical conditions in the settlements, has had some modest success in regards the latter of these aims.

Read in the broader political context, these struggles reveal the binds facing the urban poor in their efforts to secure their rights as citizens and make themselves visible as legitimate political subjects more broadly. Although planners and NGO activists understood the blossoming of disagreements and the failure to make community as further proof of the need for more development, I argue that the disagreements revealed both incipient practices of politics and the limitations of the developmental framework itself
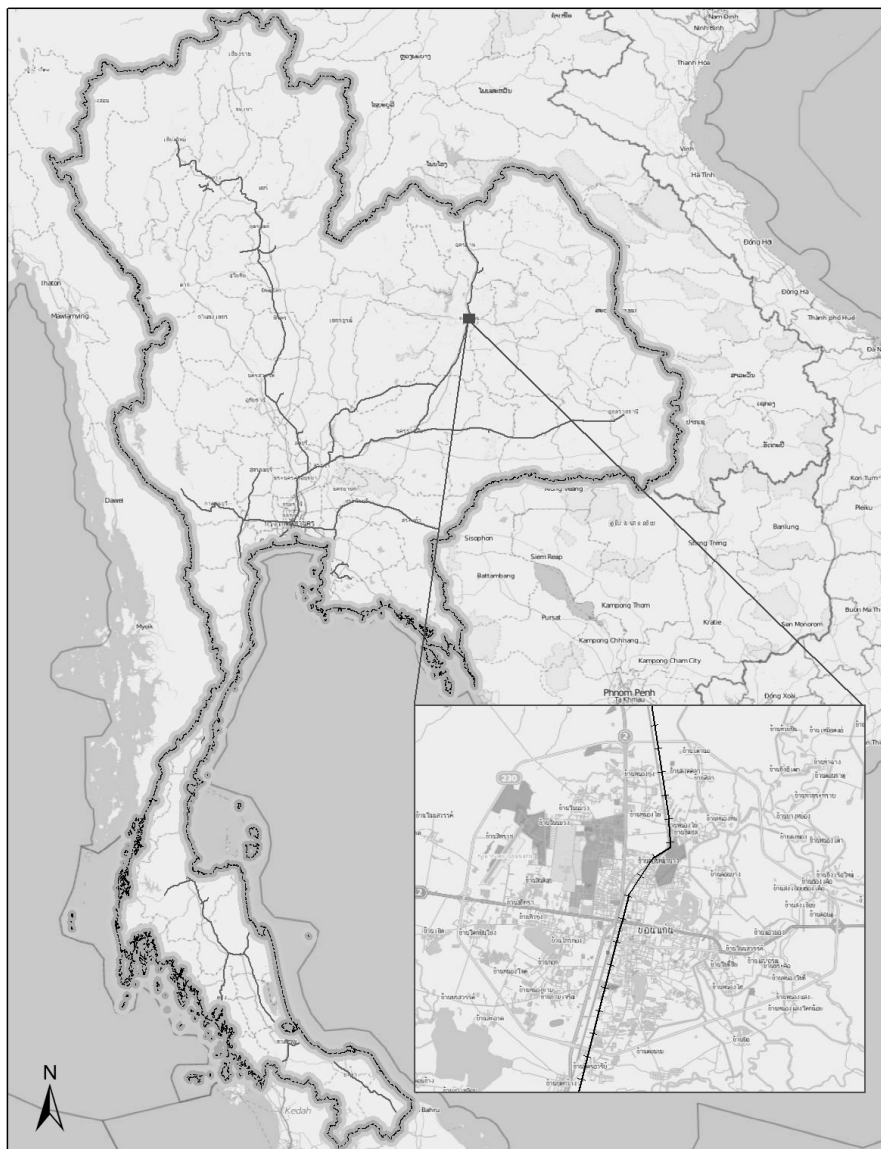
Figure 1.3: Map of the Thailand with the Railway system and Khon Kaen city marked.

Inset: Khon Kaen City with Railway tracks marked. Source: www.openstreetmap.org

Figure 1.4: Khon Kaen's Railway settlements. The rail line runs horizontally across the middle of the image. The eighty meters surrounding the tracks, owned by the State Railway of Thailand, is marked with the line running perpendicular to the rail line.

The communal distribution of rights and resources only served to underscore the bifurcations between the poor and the rest of Thailand's already legitimated citizenry, who by virtue of their individual rights do not have to engage in such communal forms of action. However, residents' dedication to the process of making community and their use of the project to wage disagreement were efforts to both participate in politics and contest existing notions of citizenship. These struggles have had uneven effects, producing vulnerability for some, while securing rights for others.

 In spite of the structural limitations facing residents—poverty, spatial limitations, divisive regulations by the SRT, contested community boundaries, and uneven conceptions of citizenship— they have used community to announce and enact their desires to belong. As I show, such efforts to demonstrate legitimacy are evident in multiple registers. Consumption, disagreement, aesthetic home improvements, and initiating sustainability projects all testify to different modes of asserting a claim to both legitimate belonging and to being competent political subjects. That such practices do not speak to a coherent ideological or discursive project is precisely the point. Rather, in their incoherence and contradictions, these efforts demonstrate a desire to simply belong, as one informant simply put it, "equivalently to everyone else" (*thaotiam kap khon uen*).

When read in light of the struggles within Bangkok, I argue that these efforts to demonstrate belonging disrupt the nation's temporal political landscape rooted in the "permanent deferral" (Wilder 1999) of politics for those not yet considered ready. As I show, the era of developmental citizenship (see Connors 2007) may be running its

course, as politics writ large and small seeks to transform "not yet into right now" (Elinoff and Sopranzetti 2012).[2]

Politics in Eighty Meters

This ethnography explores these contemporary struggles over citizenship from the vantage point of a strip of land that in most places is just eighty meters wide. The Railway tracks —owned, governed, and maintained by the State Railway of Thailand (SRT)—divide Thailand as they spiral out of Bangkok all the way to nation's northern, northeastern, and southern boarders. Although that territorial division enhances the sense of mechanistic linearity tied to the history of rail travel, it turns out that the actual spaces around the tracks are deeply entangled with shifting modes of (global and local) production. Such shifts transformed this space, leading to struggles over citizenship and changing visions of development. In order to make these entanglements clear, I want to briefly describe this space and its history. In doing so, I will introduce the rules that have come to govern the railway communities and the basic contours of the contemporary contestations that have taken place over the land they occupy.

The railway communities in which I conducted research between 2007 and 2010 are located in Khon Kaen. The city's official population is roughly 150,000, but unofficial estimates double and even triple that number. These numbers mark the city as one of several growing provincial urban centers.

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[2] Wilder argues that French "colonial humanist" policy regarded native Africans as in a state of "perpetual adolescence" awaiting an always deferred "moment of maturity when natives would be granted full rights of either political equality or cultural autonomy" (1999: 46). See also Chakrabarty (2000).

Khon Kaen is neither the oldest nor most populous city in the northeast, but it is the provincial capital and the regional capital (home to both provincial and national government buildings), and, since the 1960s, the designated "urban growth pole" for the region marking it as a target for infrastructure and industrial development funds (Glassman and Sneddon 2003). Much of the city's history is tied directly to the railway system, which reached its terminus there from 1933 to 1942, before the Thai state resumed construction of their extension to the Lao after World War Two (Kakizaki 2005: 129). As I describe in detail in Chapter 3, the construction of the Railway line radically transformed Thailand's political economy, and with it, the fate of the city. With the arrival of the Railway, the minor collection of villages that was Khon Kaen was transformed into a new site of investment and migration.

Even though Khon Kaen has been a center for migration, it is also a point of embarkation for urban migrants to Bangkok, which continues to have the largest urban pull of any city in Thailand by far. As geographers Glassman and Sneddon (2003) describe, state planners designated Khon Kaen as a center for growth in the 1970s to balance the uneven weight of the nation's capital. The city has yet to be able to accomplish that task, instead, it has grown into an intermediary jumping-off point for migrants leaving and returning to the region (see Mills 2001, 2012; Keyes 2012). Nevertheless, Khon Kaen has begun to attract new industrial investment and many of these migrants are either staying put or returning from Bangkok and building lives in the growing city rather than in their home villages.

In the contemporary moment, Khon Kaen sits in the middle of a number of proposed visions of national prosperity and regional interconnection associated with the

growing power of the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN). Khon Kaen lies at the center of the Asian Development Bank's long-planned "East-West corridor" highway which, when complete, will link the Burmese coast to the Vietnamese coast with Khon Kaen as the road's midpoint. Moreover, emerging plans to expand the Thai Railway system by constructing a second track and building a high-speed train, all will expand Khon Kaen's importance nationally and internationally.

These shifting political economies have important implications for the spaces occupied by my friends along the tracks. For regional migrants who could not afford to make the trip to Bangkok, the space around the train tracks has served as an important zone for settlement since their construction. Owing to the fact that the land was reliably vacant, close to sources of labor, and free, newcomers settled there, using the land to find a foothold into their new lives in the city. While early migrants found labor with the Railway, later settlers used the land's central location to find work as vendors, to build small businesses, to work as day laborers, or to scour the city for saleable recyclables. Residents with growing families, or increasing wealth, claimed multiple spaces along the tracks often renting them to new migrants. Others used the space's legal ambiguity to their advantage by building short-term rental houses there.

Early migrants often "rented" the land located within the forty meters along either side of the tracks from people who held agricultural leases to the land (administered by the SRT), from other settlers, or from enterprising local bureaucrats working for the Railway authority. Although the land is spatially located within the Khon Kaen municipality, the State Railway of Thailand owns it and governs it autonomously from the State Railway's offices in Bangkok. As such, local Railway

officials were not responsible for crafting land policy, but nevertheless continued the historical practice of *kin muang* (lit. "eating the city") by extracting rent from new settlers. Most residents however did not rent in this informal system. Instead, they built their homes surreptitiously on land they claimed for themselves, or rented or bought a plot of land from a previous settler.[3]

The residents along the tracks, and their homes, which are always in the process of being improved, are subjects and sites out of place. Although they were built in tandem with the construction of the rail line and the city itself, these settlers have never been "proper" residents of either space. Although residents claimed they had a right to the land because of their informal arrangements with officials, their work as laborers for the SRT during the expansion of the Railway line to Khon Kaen, and their active efforts to develop the city by improving the space, the Railway has not accepted these actions as legitimate grounds for rights to the land. Instead, they see the residents living along the tracks as "trespassers" (*phubukruk*), occupying space to which they have no right. So, although the land has been settled since the middle of the 20th century, it was not until the middle of the 1990s that residents could gain access to basic urban services (like water and electricity), and not until the passage of the of Baan Mankong project in 2003 that the Railway had any official policy of renting their land to "illegal" residential settlements at all.

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[3] The practice of *kin muang* was a legacy of Siam's feudal largesse system, which allowed local lords and later bureaucrats to extract payments from the locals they administered (see Keyes 1979: 216; see also Thak 2007). This practice continued in a piecemeal way until very recently. It even resulted in the first community-wide lease, which was nullified when the SRT learned that it was administered without their permission.

This hybrid manner of settlement continued apace and expanded rapidly after the 1997 economic crisis. After the economic implosion, houses began to stack two and three deep in many places along the tracks, as nearly every parcel of vacant Railway land both within the municipality and its surrounding sub-districts was settled. At the same time that these migrants flooded into Khon Kaen, the space along the tracks became a focal point for international lenders implementing Structural Adjustment. Echoing the global pattern of late capitalist crisis the Thai government took out 17 billion dollars in recovery funds from the IMF to manage the crisis. In exchange, it was forced to fix its ailing economy through austerity and privatization (see Bello et al. 1998; Ferguson 1999; Harvey 2001).[4] The Railway, which was by this point heavily indebted, was put under new pressure to improve its financial situation by privatizing completely. However, the SRT (under pressure from its large and influential union) decided that the best way to fix its debt problem was to maintain state control over rail service, while capitalizing on its massive landholdings through rental agreements with commercial interests.

Urban activism blossomed in response to the combination of increasing settlement and increasing threats of eviction. Activists from Bangkok, local NGOs, and residents along the tracks, formed a new housing network called the United Communities (UC) network. The new coalition between the UC network and these

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[4] Decades of rapid economic growth—averaging 9.5% GDP growth between 1986 and 1996—created a very large real estate bubble that encouraged huge amounts of speculative capital to be invested in construction. When the economy slowed and the housing glut became apparent, the government tried to inject cash into capital strapped firms. When that failed the economy plummeted and government was forced to float the currency. The baht rapidly devalued losing 20% of its value overnight. The Thai government was forced to take out 17 Billion dollars in loans from the IMF, who implemented a structural adjustment program that forced the government to sell off state-run firms and begin an austerity program (see Bello et al. 1998; Pasuk and Baker 1998).

activists protested the Railway's plan to open the land up to commercial development and pushed the government to allow communities to rent and improve the land themselves. Through negotiations with the city, residents received temporary housing registration numbers (*tabian ban chuakhrao*) which enabled them to receive citizens cards (*bat prachachon*), temporary electrical and water meters, and rights to municipal services like schooling and various urban projects initiated by the municipal government and by state-run organizations like CODI. Although some residents might have had housing registrations in other rural areas, many did not, so this mobilization was one of the first extensions of citizenship rights along the tracks.

The network and its activist partners also managed to pressure the Railway to slow its process of searching for commercial tenants and formulate terms upon which communities could negotiate for rental. The terms they agreed upon were as follows: Leases administered within the 40 meters closest to the tracks were issued on a 3 year renewable basis; beyond 40 meters they were for 30 years and were renewable. Rental rates were 7baht/square meter/year in rural zones; 20baht/square meter/year in urban zones (approximately $.25US and $.70US respectively). Rental rates are determined on a community-wide scale, administrated communally by residents, and jointly monitored by CODI, the local activist network, and the SRT. Finally, by signing the leases, residents agreed to abide by the Railway's spatial regulations which divided the forty meter space along the tracks into two zones: the 20 meters closest to the tracks was a no build zone, while the 20 meters farther from the tracks could contain structures. Any structures that crossed the boundary into the "No-Build" zone were required to be demolished, in part or in whole, to be brought into compliance. These regulations have

had broad effects that I explore throughout this dissertation. However, the most important one was that these new spatial boundaries exacerbated the divergent interests along the tracks.[5]

Eventually, Khon Kaen's single network split into two. As I show later, the split was complex but rooted in different approaches to activism and divergent notions of the relationship between citizenship and politics. The United Communities Network forged close ties with the organization and the activists who became CODI. That group privileged struggles for development, in particular personal development, over struggles for rights. Activists in the UC argued that if residents learned to work together and improve themselves by saving and through community development projects then they would eventually be able to rent. The Khon Kaen Slum Revival Network and NGO activists associated with it felt that durable land rights (in the form of leases) would create community along the tracks. Thus, the fight for more durable land rights in the form communal leases from the SRT was central to their development process.

During my fieldwork, 10 communities associated with the Khon Kaen Slum Revival Network signed leases with the SRT. For residents of these communities, leases meant more than simply a secure claim to land; they were markers of becoming legitimate citizens. As communities signed leases, they became "official" in the sense that they could legally receive funds for CODI upgrades and legally improve their land. As I describe throughout this dissertation, that transition was inaugurated with community projects like gardens, landscaping, infrastructure improvements, and home upgrades (Figure 1.5). Most settlements erected community signs that announced the

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[5] At the time of writing, $1USD is equal to 29 Thai Baht.

name of the new community, the "contract number" with the SRT, and the variety of

development partners involved with the community (Figure 1.6). Additionally, residents

marked their transition by demolishing the homes or portions of their homes that

violated the SRTs spatial regulations. By demolishing and modifying their homes,

residents felt that they showed their willingness to improve themselves and their

communities by negotiating the spatial politics associated with these regulations.

The creation of official communities also had a darker side (as I explore in detail

in chapter 6) in the 17 communities along the tracks that have not signed leases as of

yet. While some communities chose to negotiate, others, especially those with many

residents living in the 20 meters No-Build zone, had a difficult time organizing

residents to sign the SRT's collective leases. In these spaces, upgrade funds were

distributed and used to demonstrate development, but without any agreement on how to

deal with the spatial problems, such efforts were essentially moot. So, although many

communities have received funds as part of the Baan Mankong initiatives, the upgrades

the funds enabled were relatively minor in comparison to the ongoing (and increasing)

vulnerability to eviction by the Railway and, now, their legitimized neighbors.

The cases that I document in this dissertation demonstrate that community has

its costs. For every successful lease signed with the SRT, the "community" signing that

lease split from a larger settlement. Indeed, as I show, disagreement is absolutely

essential to the practice of community. Some settlements have become secure and

others have become more vulnerable. Because consensus was never spatially uniform,

in most legitimized settlements, contested zones emerged in the middle of newly rented

spaces. Now small clusters of houses and even single households find themselves inside

such zones and outside the possibility of leasing agreements. In this way the new forms of citizenship that were claimed by renting communities also underscored the inability and, in some cases, the unwillingness, of others to rent. Moreover, because these newly legitimate communities were threatened by the persistence of these recalcitrant groups, these new citizens often worked against their neighbors who chose not to rent. In doing so, they argued that as they were (now) legitimate rent paying citizens, their neighbors were now trespassers. As I show, the relationship between these notions of status speaks both to the complex politics within urban slum and squatter communities and, more broadly, to the uneven practice of disagreement endemic to politics itself.

A New Language of Citizenship

Although much of this dissertation is about highly local disagreements, these conflicts are reflective of a sea change in the broader political order in Thailand. The spectacular images of a blockaded, bloodied, and burnt Bangkok during the aftermath of the 2010 protest are probably the most enduring images of this change. However, a photo I took at a Red Shirt gathering the following September 2010 evokes the stakes of the conflict more clearly. On that third anniversary of the coup (the first since the May crackdown), protesters conducted a mobile memorial to those killed during the protest. As we walked, protesters stopped to tie memorial ribbons on trees at sites where people were killed. At the end of the walk, protesters gathered, chanting the names of the dead and denouncing the government.

Figure 1.5: Homeowners along the tracks use Baan Mankong funds to enclose their first

floor with concrete bricks.

Figure 1.6: Community sign announces the name, SRT contract number, and associated

development partners in a recently legalized community

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Figure 1.7: Activists from the Red Shirt social movement gather to commemorate the 2006 Coup. The sign says, "Thaksin help erase the debt that those cursed people have given our homeland and to the people." September 12, 2010

There, I met a woman wearing a shirt bearing a message familiar to me, but heretofore unheard of in Thailand (Figure 1.7): "Liberty, Equality, Fraternity, Thailand." Although the words spelled out "LEFT," this ideologically orienting acronym was less important (and less accurate) than the acronym's call to universal citizenship. By calling upon the language of the French revolution**,** the shirt underscored the way the protest had made visible a broad swath of the Thai body politic that had previously been regarded either as invisible or visible in two very particular and associated ways: as "trespassers" practicing politics out of place or as "villagers" to be cared for and improved through development. Thus, these new claims of universal citizenship highlight the degree to which older versions of Thai citizenship are being radically refigured by these political actors.**⁶**

In this section and the one that follows, I will describe the relationship between the citizenship and politics, as I define it, more generally. Most broadly citizenship is a method of distributing membership in the nation-state. This definition is rooted in the Aristotelian notion of those who are capable of "governing and being governed" (1996: 81). T.H. Marshall further articulated this concept by considering the way different dimensions of rights (political, civil, and social) interlock to define the quality of one's membership (Marshall 1949: 78). Hannah Arendt (1967) also emphasized a rights based notion of citizenship defining it as those who are entitled to the "right to have rights."

In this vein, scholars like James Holston and Teresa Caldeira (1999), Evalina Dagnino (2003), and Elizabeth Jelin (1998) have pointed out how the lack of various

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⁶ Tausig discusses how the French national anthem, *La Marseillaise*, has become a popular ringtone among Red Shirt supporters (2013: 273). In 2013, calls to see the movie *Les Misérables* circulated across a number of progressive Thai political websites like Prachatai marking an emerging interest in documents of revolutionary France among political progressives in Thailand (www.prachatai.com).

levels of rights can impinge on one's abilities to participate as a full member. These scholars direct their attention towards what Holston and Arjun Appadurai (1999) have called "substantive citizenship," which, unlike "formal citizenship," attends less to the question of who is a member, in favor of asking how membership is experienced differently by different categories internal to the category of the formal citizen. Nancy Postero emphasizes that citizenships are not simply legal articulations but also tied to a "politics of belonging" that defines "who is called to the table" to participate as a legitimate member (2007: 223).

These perspectives emphasize the dual character of citizenship that is, as Holston points out, a system for distributing inequality and a means for contesting it. That the majority of this intellectual work on citizenship has emerged during the last decade in Latin America speaks to the intense work waged there by citizens, activists, social movements, and academics to effect political change and to rethink the nature of citizenship itself. Indeed, in places like Brazil (Baiocchi 2005; Holston 2008), Bolivia (Postero 2007), Chile (Paley 2001), citizenship has been an essential "language of contention" used to contest the region's historically uneven power arrangements (Roseberry 1996; see also Postero 2007). This use of citizenship to contest and expand the terrain of rights and belonging reflects its "insurgent" dimension (Holston 1999; 2008). This dissertation rests in the gap between these two faces of citizenship in order to think about the uneven processes through which the gap between citizenship's entrenched and insurgent dimensions is briged.

There is a reason why this approach is necessary in Thailand. Until recently, for reasons I explain in Chapter 2, the concept of citizen as one entitled to the right to

govern or the right to rights is almost entirely absent from Thai history. Rather, citizenship has been tied to a variety of ambiguous terms that have produced internally variegated forms of membership that simultaneously produced a national population and obstructed the expansion of citizen's rights. Thus, Thai has a variety of categories of membership that call to mind different facets of citizenship without evoking these liberal democratic definitions.

In Thai, the word citizen can be translated variably to be *chua chat* (nationality), *prachachon* (the people), *ratsadorn* (subjects), *khon Thai* (Thai Person), or *ponlamuang* (citizen). Only the latter, with its reference to *muang* (the city), seems to bear some of the overtones of the concept of membership and rights in a political organization that I described above. The other terms end up being used interchangeably in Thai to refer to national membership, evoking different shades of citizenship without evoking rights. *Chua chat* speaks to nationality—distinguishing Thai from Lao or Burmese, for example, but it is also in tension with race (*chon chat*). National ID cards, which are essential documents of citizenship, do not refer to nationality but rather carry an ideological component—they are called *bat prachachon,* a "People's Card." And occasionally in formal speeches or writing, the word *ratsadorn*, which is closer to "subjects," or even "royal subjects," is also used to denote membership.

This entangled language of membership results in a great deal of confusion over the source of one's rights. Often when I asked someone along the tracks why they had a right to their land, they simply answered "*prawa pen khon Thai*" (because I am a Thai person). This could be taken to indicate either a racial distinction, one of nationality, or one of substantive citizenship, but often it was not clear in which of these frameworks

the claim to rights were rooted. Moreover, the word that most closely resembles the analytic of citizenship I employ, *ponlamuang*, is rarely used, except in high-level seminars or trainings that use democracy as a tool to discipline the poor (see Connors 2007).

The new fascination with ideas of revolutionary France speaks to an increasing interest in the concept of the citizen as a rights bearing subject that is unprecedented in Thai history. Because citizenship is not an emic concept, I employ it as an analytic one. Doing so, demonstrates the tension between different normative notions of membership, the art of government, and the practice of politics. The history of government I present in Chapter 2 emphasizes that development itself was tied to a practice I call "Citizen Design," a faset of development projects that envisions, proposes, and seeks to use development methodologies to produce the ideal citizen. Thai development initiatives rarely lacked some implicit or explicit normative notion of the good citizen at their core. These efforts to improve the population rarely conceived of the citizen as a capable political actor, but rather saw the citizen as essential to administering and modernizing the state; securing it from external and internal threats; democratizing the state (without upsetting the order of power); and moderating its capitalist enthusiasm. Nevertheless, such policies did present an imaginary, a design, through which such citizens might become capable of politics once they mastered the disciplines required of being a good Thai citizen.

Within this framework, the normative conception of the citizen—the one that development projects held out as the model citizen—was "not yet" a political one. This is not to say that notions of politics did not exist or that political actions did not happen,

but rather to point out that from the perspectives of such development policies, the capability to participate in politics was bifurcated: Wealthier citizens, by virtue of their class status, had demonstrated that they were prepared to participate in ruling and being ruled, while the poor were seen as not yet capable of doing so properly. It is this bifurcation between citizens capable of practicing politics and those not capable that is unwinding now. In order to understand what this means more clearly, I want to explain what it is I mean by politics and how it directly relates to citizenship.

Citizenship and the Practice of Politics

As James Holston (2008) has pointed out, citizenships have dual characters. Citizenships are both systems of distributing inequality and mechanisms of insurgency. That is, although citizenship evokes the spirit of equality and commensurability, citizenships are also mechanisms of placing different kinds of political subjects into uneven relationships with one another. Holston argues that in the case of Brazil, the nation's inegalitarian formulation of citizenship "uses social differences that are *not* [original emphasis] the basis of national membership—primarily differences of education, property, race, gender, and occupation—to distribute different treatments to different categories of citizens" (2008:7). In doing so, citizenship "generates a gradation of rights" in which certain rights are restricted to particular "kinds" of citizens (*ibid*).

In this way, national citizenships may be inclusively formulated while still being fundamentally inegalitarian, unevenly distributing rights among their members as different types of citizens. In Thailand, for example, everyone born inside Thailand to a

Thai mother is included in the category of citizen, but a number of different sets of rights—access to a national ID card, education, health care, the right to vote—are tied to housing registration numbers. Property, then, becomes just as essential a part to regimes of citizenship, as birth.

As Holston puts it: "Contemporary citizenships develop as assemblages of entrenched and insurgent forms, in tense and often dangerous relations, because dominant historical formulations simultaneously produce and limit possible counter formulations" (2008: 33). The entrenched and the insurgent are rooted in historical formulations, yet ultimately these historical formulations are lived in the present. How are such entrenched forms experienced in the present? What are the mechanisms and processes through which insurgencies take place?

In order to answer these questions, I turn to philosopher Jacques Rancière who considers the same question by making a distinction between "policing" and "politics." The former, he argues, is an ordering that ascribes particular bodies to particular tasks, roles, and places within the configuration of the social. The police order is not simply one of who is included and who is excluded, but *where* and *how* particular subjects are located within the police order. Rancière argues that the configuration of the police order is not only a legal question but also an aesthetic one—one of what appears to the senses. As such, the question of who is a legitimate subject of politics relates to who can be seen and whose speech is heard as intelligible. Thus, groups may be included while remaining invisible and inaudible. These groups, which are included in the political sphere but essentially invisible to it, are what Rancière calls the "part without a part" (1999: 29).

> The police is thus first an order of bodies that defines the allocation of ways of doing, ways of being, and ways of saying, and sees that those bodies are assigned by name to a particular place and task; it is an order of the visible and the sayable that sees that a particular activity is visible and another is not, that this speech is understood as discourse and another as noise. (*ibid*)

Policing, then, like Foucault's concept of discipline (1977), is a process of maintaining and producing orders of bodies. While Foucault's notion of discipline demonstrates the essential relationship between knowledge/power in the process of producing that order, Rancière's theory focuses on the senses first. Although knowledge/power are inevitably involved in mediating the sensory experience, Rancière privileges the questions of what is visible, audible and (more importantly) intelligible, as the primary methods for constituting the policed order. In this way aesthetics, or what he calls the "distribution of the sensible"—what is apparent to the senses—is fundamental to policing and politics.

Where Rancière is distinct from Foucault is in his notion of politics. Rancière argues that politics is the disruption of the police order through "whatever breaks with the tangible configuration" allowing the parts of the police order who lack a place within that configuration to reconfigure the order itself. Politics is "manifest in a series of actions that reconfigure the space where parties, parts, or lack of parts have been defined" (1999: 29-30). In this sense politics is a practice tied to the redefinition of the police order. Here is where Rancière's conception helps theorize a closer consideration of the breaks, gaps, and disagreements that reconfigure the police order. Put differently, if the distribution of inequality is a characteristic of citizenship, then politics is an essential part of enacting citizenship's insurgent potential. Disagreement and disruption

are necessary to transform the order of bodies and to expand the range of who is
included as a citizen.

The question of politics, then, is not simply one of citizenship (though, as I
show, they are related) because citizenships themselves are prefigured systems for the
ordering of bodies. This is why they are incredibly effective mechanisms of distributing
inequality. In fact, citizenships, read in this light, can be seen as preeminent
mechanisms of policing. In Thailand, this is precisely the case. Normative notions of the
good citizen (*ponlamuang di*) were used to diminish politics, discipline the citizen, and
crush dissent (see Bowie 1998; Thongchai 2000a; Connors 2007). As I show in
Chatper 2, legal restrictions and aesthetic conceptualizations of the citizen attached to
development policies sought to stabilize the population by turning them into good
citizens who would not practice politics until they were ready. For much of the history
of the modern Thai state this has been the case. This accounts for the awkward
relationship between citizenship and politics in Thailand. Politics has been seen as
antithetical to good citizenship, which was first and foremost defined as a mechanism of
producing national unity. This accounts for the pervasive binds I describe throughout
this dissertation. Residents along the tracks find themselves stuck seeking to make
themselves visible and their claims intelligible, but in order to do so they must engage
in politics. However, by engaging in politics they seem to demonstrate that they are not
good Thais.

More generally, it is clear that the question of citizenship itself is not wholly
distinct from this more incipient form of politics rooted in the disruption of the police
order. As Holston argues, citizenship itself can be a powerful mechanism of insurgency.

Citizenship and the language of democracy are built on the *possibility* of equality (See Holston 1999). Citizenship claims themselves may be used to not only disrupt, but also to legally expand the range of bodies that are visible and intelligible. As Holston argues, citizenships are both entrenched and insurgent. Put differently, they are mechanisms of both policing and politics simultaneously. Occasionally, the language of citizenship itself is insurgent (Holston 2008; see also Postero 2007). To my mind this is becoming the case in contemporary Thailand with its increasing interest in the language of universal citizenship tied to the symbols of the French revolution. This turn towards citizenship as a rights bearing subject is far from complete, however.

As this dissertation shows, not all insurgencies are revolutionary. It is precisely this aspect of Rancière's conception of politics that draws from the strengths of ethnographic methodologies. Although Rancière argues that politics is a rare occurrence, attention to everyday disagreements exposes politics in incipient processes of formation. Disagreements big and small resonate with efforts to be seen and understood. Small but lengthy insurgencies—as in the case along the tracks where residents produce their own visions of good citizenship in their efforts to make both material claims and broader claims to belonging—become visible to the ethnographic eye with its attention to the complexity, contradictions, and dispute, highlighting politics in motion. Such insurgencies appear partial and deeply uneven, but nevertheless resonate with these broader aims. Through their reconfigurations of space and aesthetics, the residents along the tracks actively reworked the police order, challenging it and ultimately reproducing it. By repositioning their homes and bodies, residents sought to be seen as proper residents of the city, citizens with the right to have rights,

and legitimate subjects of politics. Although such actions did not transform the entire distribution of the sensible—and certainly did not do away with policing—I argue that their efforts are not insignificant. By merely staking claim to a space within the police order, I show how that order is itself changed irrevocably.

Political Trespassers

My use of Rancière's notion of politics, then, does not seek to isolate politics, but to open it up to deeper ethnographic investigation. In order to understand what fills the gaps between the entrenched and the insurgent, I want to highlight the role of the trespasser as central to moving between these modes of belonging. I take this phrase from the language used by residents along the tracks who often referred to themselves as *phubukruk* (trespassers) to evoke both their illegal status as squatters and their "out-of-place-ness" in relationship to the spatial and political structures of the city and the nation. The feeling of being a trespasser was precisely the feeling that comes from being equal parts unwelcome, illegitimate, invisible, and unintelligible. Stuck between the entrenched and the insurgent, such trespassers feel these binds more potently than other citizens. Attention to these trespassers, and trespassing more generally, links Thailand's national and local political struggles.

As both Mary Beth Mills (2012) and Claudo Sopranzetti (2013) argue, contemporary rural-to-urban migration has transformed Thailand's social terrain. These urban migrants crossed spatial boundaries in defiance of the national spatio-temporal narrative that defines villagers as secondary citizens. Both Mills and Sopranzetti argue that such boundary crossing was essential to the Red Shirt movement. Indeed, the Red

Shirts, the settlers along the tracks, and many other "cosmopolitan villagers" (Keyes 2012) have defied these spatial narratives and in so doing disrupted the previous social order.

Their trespasses then were spatial but also eminently political. Labeled as improper political subjects, Thaksin's supporters transgressed by voting in their own interests rather than the "interest of the whole country"—at least according to their critics. Such critics labeled Thaksin a populist because of his use of policy to appeal to the "masses." These policies—a national health care policy, local credit initiatives, and housing projects— were populist (*prachaniyom*) they pointed out, because they attracted support by appealing to the base material interests of the masses. In doing so, critics argued, these voters violated the norms of good democratic behavior because they traded their votes in exchange for material rewards while allowing Thaksin to enrich himself in the process by ignoring his corruption. Cries of populism and vote-buying, thus extended the discourse about the moral and political capacities of the poor that I have been describing throughout this introduction.[7] Populism and corruption merely repeat this discourse without explaining the process at work.

How might considering trespassing as a political practice help us understand this struggle? Benjamin Arditi argues that populism should be understood not as a pathological form of politics but as internal to democracy itself. From this perspective,

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[7] In my experience charges that Thaksin actual vote buying (*kansusiang*) occurred were intertwined with claims of corruption rooted in the kind of "selfish" (*hinkaetua*) voting. As Callahan (2003) argues, the emphasis on vote buying emerged among bureaucrats, the middle class, and Bangkok based elites as response to electoral reforms that were part of the 1997 constitution. Such reforms enabled new actors to participate in the political process, restricting the power of these groups. Callahan points out that this discourse reached a pitch during the 2001 election of Thaksin because the nation's old cadres were being challenged.

the perception that populism is a corruption of democracy fails to capture the close relationship between these two forms of politics. "Populism thus functions as a mirror in which democracy can look at the rougher, less palatable edges that remain veiled by the gentrifying veneer of its liberal format" (Arditi 2007: 60). In this guise, the residual, those invisible to politics, emerge to disrupt political gentrification like an "awkward guest."

These awkward guests, Rancière's "part without a part," are the residual group that claims on politics from its edges. The question of the "residual" is particularly important to democracy because that is the source of the demos'—the people's—authority. Rancière argues that the demos' residual nature is what provides its validity for inclusion in the political order—as it is neither wealthy, nor excellent. And yet, for Rancière, the demos is both essential to the constitution of the democratic community and it is the group that offends that very community because the demos has no claim to belonging within it. This is precisely the source of elite discontent with the demos, that it has no claim to power other than the fact that it is what constitutes the political community through its own residual claim to freedom to simply be included.[8]

Rancière argues that because the demos are the "part that has no part" they are the "class of the wrong that harms the community and establishes it as a 'community' of the just and the unjust" (Rancière 1999: 8-9*).* By this, he means that the demos itself poses a significant problem in contemporary democracy—they both confirm the political community and highlight its essentially unjust composition. For Rancière it is

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[8] In Aristotelian terms, this claim becomes clearer: Without the demos, a democracy becomes, in its best form, aristocracy, rule by the best persons, (*aristoi*). In its worst form this government is an oligarchy, rule by the wealthy (Aristotle 1996: 71). Rancière reminds us that it is the inclusion of a free class that has no claim to rule other than its freedom that makes a democracy.

that injustice that results in the miscount—who is properly included in the demos is a question of who is a capable speaking subject. That miscount is the source of disagreement, which for Rancière is the essence of politics itself.[9]

This is similar to the critiques of the poor that circulated in Thailand both prior to and especially after the coup. The poor, according to many Thai elites on the right and left, voted for Thaksin because of his "populist" policies, which expanded the kinds of excessive consumption previously available to a distinct class of people. Historian Michael Montesano's description of the elite perspective captures the "pity" expressed over the poor's misguided support of Thaksin, "If only they understood, if only they did not just sell their votes, well these people would not vote for TRT (*Thai Rak Thai*)" (2009:10). This vision of a voting population unsure of its own motivations and corrupting democracy via support of populist policies, is a critical motivation for the split between NGOs and their constituencies and the rise of the so-called "new politics" that sought to restrict the power of the voting public more generally.[10]

The Red Shirt movement marked a reemergence of the residual. It was surprising only because the category had been rendered invisible, inaudible, and unintelligible throughout Thailand's democratic transition. Accounts of the 1992 pro-democracy uprising highlighted the role of the "mobile phone mob" and were quick to label it a middle class uprising, but this obscured the contingents of urban poor and rural

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[9] "The demos attributes to itself as its proper lot the equality that belongs to all citizens…For Freedom—which is merely the position of those who have absolutely no other, no merit, not wealth, is counted at the same time as being common virtue" (Rancière 1999: 8-9).

[10] Colin Crouch (2004) calls this turn against democracy "post-democracy." Although understanding this turn away from democracy in its own right, I am skeptical of attaching the "post" to Thailand's democracy. As many of my informants would probably point out, Thailand's democracy was probably too young to be considered post. Nevertheless, engaging the questions posed by the anti-democratic turn in Thailand is essential.

activists that also sought to democratize the country (Logerfo 2000; Klima 2002).

During the 1990s this groups' voices were also "audible" *through* various NGO

movements (Hewison 2000; Missingham 2004; Pye 2005). Those movements, which on

their surface were localist and seemingly anti-development, were at a deeper level about

a more complex politics of belonging (Logerfo 2000; Hewison 2000). Their targets

(anti-dam, anti-globalization, anti-land dispossession) and roots in the NGO movement

obscured these broader aims because they did not attend to important disjunctures

between the middle class reformers, activists, and NGOs that organized these protests

and those for whom they claimed to speak. The oppositional nature of these movements

obscured their common ground with the state. Indeed, many in the NGO movement

carried with them the same ambitions of citizen design and training the poor that the

state had held.

In this way, both the residents along the tracks and the Red Shirts trespassed

across well-established political boundaries occupying subjectivities from which they

had been proscribed. Thailand's urban transformation was deeply connected to this

process because it has been the growth of cities and the kinds of practices entailed in

settling in them to make a living that has brought about new forms of interaction,

encounters with these uneven structures, and the radical destabilization of the nation's

spatialized political order. Trespassing defies the police order. In doing so it creates a

wide variety of strategies for provoking visibility, allowing subjects to be seen and

heard through their votes, their voices, their homes, and their bodies.

Such assertions violated the propriety of what docile poor citizens *should* do.

For example, instead of remaining villagers to be trained, the residents along the tracks

claimed individual rights, upgraded their homes to look modern and sustainable, voted

in their own interests, and invaded new spaces of the city to improve their own lives.

While CODI, various NGOs, and the PAD argue that actors like these were not properly

prepared to participate in either the political sphere or the market place (both of which

Thaksin opened up for them) these citizens have made such spaces on their own.

Indeed, neither the residents along the tracks nor the Red Shirts were welcome in the

city. As signs during PAD counter protests during the May 2010 Red Shirt occupation

read "Hicks Get Out!" (*puak bannork ork pai*) and "Red Shirt Very Bed, Very Buffalo

[sic], Get Out, Get Out From Silom Now!" The presence of these trespassers in the city

was unwelcome, their interests were considered venal, and their politics were seen as

illegitimate.

This broader reading of the trespasser, *phubukruk*, as a political subject reveals

the boundaries in Thai politics between who is proper to politics—ready to rule and be

ruled, ready for the right to have rights—and who is not yet ready. The trespasser, like

the villager, seems to demand development in order to be made ready for politics. Yet,

unlike the villager, the trespasser violates both physical and temporal boundaries to

make a claim to political space. This marks her as a different type of subject from the

villager: one actively claiming space within the political order, thus transgressing

developmental temporality. In this sense, NGOs and CODI sought to remediate the poor

as villagers. This approach failed because reclaiming the slum in the spatial and

ideological mode of village was impossible. Residents along the tracks were in fact

trespassers who needed to right the wrong of their misplacement in the political order.

This misunderstanding animates a number of disagreements that follow.

The trespasser, then, sits at a critical political boundary—not entirely excluded from politics, but also not internal to its practice. Understanding that political space in its own right, not simply on a predetermined transition from excluded to included, is important within the context of Khon Kaen's railway settlements for considering the way the residents of the tracks are regarded as actors and understanding their political goals. Understanding that political space in Thailand more broadly is important within the context of how Red Shirt protesters have transgressed across political boundaries by demanding that their votes be counted and their voices heard; and, in general, for understanding the way political subjects become visible even as they make demands that do not conform strictly to any political or ideological platform. Such political subjects are essential to the both the possibilities of democratic opening and to the anxieties central to emergent forms of democratic foreclosure.

From Governmentality to Citizen Design

Although this book is largely about the practices of politics, it does so in tension with police processes. As such I do not begin with disruptions and disagreements. Instead, I begin my argument in Chapters 2 and 3, with a genealogy of government in Thailand and a description of the production of the Railway as a spatial technology used to secure the territory and govern the population. In doing so, I draw from Foucault's governmentality (1991) to draw attention to the configurations of knowledge/power rooted in institutions that operate through forms of expertise, technologies of care, biopower, and the "conduct of conduct." I begin in this fashion in order to demonstrate the intersection between the practice of government and politics. On the one hand, I

highlight how programs of government—in Thailand frequently articulated through notions of development—seek to "shape, guide, and direct the conduct of others" (Rose 1999a: 3). This Foucauldian notion of government is essential to understanding the discourses and aesthetic fields in which forms of citizenship are produced and embedded. On the other hand, I show how such programs produce the uneven distributions of things and spaces that provoke politics that rupture such programs of government.

My use of governmentality highlights the way pastoral power—power exerted through programs of self-government—is involved in the production of new forms of citizenship. My analysis emphasizes the way that Siamese/Thai monarchs, state-makers, monks, NGO activists, and citizens have produced and reproduced a developmental conception of citizenship rooted in a vision of the population as "villagers" not yet ready for citizenship. I call this aspect of governmental technique "citizen design" to highlight the aspects of these policies that implicitly and explicitly propose normative conceptions of citizenship through their implementation.

By focusing on governmentality through "citizen design" I analyze various configurations of the citizen as they are produced and modified. I characterize these process through the language of design (rather that of subject making) to highlight how such notions of the citizen are rooted in a political problematic, which gets addressed through specifically configured version of policies seeking to remedy the problem by improving the body politic. By approaching governmentality in this way, my analysis

brings the rationale for cultivating particular dispositions, attitudes, and relationships between space, things, and within the population *qua* citizens to the fore.[11]

I show in Chapter 2 that most Thai "citizen designs" respond to a specific problematic that I call the "problem of the villager." This problematic is rooted in a notion of the population as "villagers" with particular dispositions and capacities that need to be transformed to mesh with the modernizing state. Defined through irreconcilable dualities—pure hearted/corrupt, moral/immoral, selfish/cooperative, simple/ignorant, peaceful/volatile—discourses that define villagers mark them as subjects in perpetual need of intervention into their problems. These dualities resonate with colonial conceptions rooted in developmentalist historicisms that charted time as a linear progression undeveloped towards development in a modern European sense (see Hall 1996; Chakrabarty 2000). The villager is that person who might, through the application of technical knowledge, be turned into a proper Thai citizen. However, even as the state has moved forward in developmental time, the villager seems to have remained in the suspended temporality of "not yet."

In the early part of the 20th century such designs were geared towards creating administrative spaces to modernize and civilize the villager. By the 1960s, programs of government sought to promote national security and use democracy to develop the villager into a proper citizen. By the 1980s and 1990s, notions of authenticity and sufficiency arose to reconceptualize the citizen to respond to the social and cultural

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[11] Latour design" has five conceptual advantages over notions of the "constructed" or the "made." Among the advantages he cites are that design tends to be more humble, attentive to detail, attuned to meaning, problem oriented, and subject to ethical evaluation (2008: 3-6). Balsamo argues that designers "work the scene of technological emergence: they hack the present to create the conditions for the future" (2011: 6). Both of these definitions inform my turn away from "making" and towards "design."

destabilizations caused by rapid economic growth and collapse. In each case however, the notion of the villager emerges as a problem to be developed. This framing of the problematic inspired a century's worth of specific interventions in the provinces and among poor Thais that sought to improve the population in specific ways to make them, eventually, into Thai citizens.

For many scholars the turn towards governmentality coincides with "neoliberalism"—the historically situated process of market liberalization that began in the 1970s (Harvey 2005). As Barry et al. point out for example, neoliberalism brought about, to a certain extent, the "degovernmentalizing of the state," which created "chains of enrollment, 'empowerment,' and 'responsiblization'" (1996: 12). In other words, the shift away from state-centered economies towards the market not only implied an economic shift but a shift in the way in which the practice of government occurred. Instead of taking place through state agencies, this new regime of state/society relations diminished the role of the state and transformed its deployment of power by recruiting citizens to take care of themselves and solve social problems together though organizing with NGOs, grassroots movements, and civic groups. Where such forms of mobilization were unavailable, citizens were simply left to fend for themselves in the face of radically changed political economies and diminished state-support.

As I demonstrate throughout this dissertation, governmentality is not strictly a "neoliberal" phenomenon, though late-capitalist neoliberal logics like those described above have become increasingly important in Thai development policies like Baan Mankong. Part of my reluctance to use the phrase neoliberal here is that it is difficult to say whether or not Thailand is "neoliberal." On the one hand, the state's increasing turn

towards a liberalized political economy undeniably transformed the country. Over the last century and a half (and particularly in the last 25 years), considerable economic and political liberalization made Thailand into one of the globe's fastest growing economies and a regional power in the 1990s.

This took place in stages. From the 1950s-1970s the Thai state followed a program of state sponsored Import Substitution Industrialization. When the state-driven economy began flagging in the 1970s, the economy shifted towards Export Oriented Industrialization through increased partnerships with foreign firms. This program was successful enough that by the mid 1980s the Thai economy was one of the fastest growing in the world. Its booming export sector and steadily liberalizing economy transformed the country into the "fifth Asian Tiger" (Bello et al. 1998 10-14). As Mary Beth Mills (2001), Alan Klima (2002, 2004), and Ara Wilson (2004) demonstrate, consumer capitalism and its attendant ideologies, practices of self-making, and uncertainties, are ubiquitous now. Mills points out that new flows of labor have brought with them increasing consumer demands for modernity.

With the 1997 economic collapse and structural adjustment, it would seem that the global script for neoliberal market transformation was essentially complete. Moreover, as I demonstrate, policies like Baan Mankong were cast explicitly in the mold of emerging policies seeking to "empower" (Sharma 2006) through new mechanisms of community savings (Lazar 2004; Karim 2011) and social capital (Elyachar 2002). Indeed, the language of personal development calls on the notions of the "conduct of conduct" essential to late-capitalist versions of governmentality.

More recently, however, the state has expanded. Liberalization was never as complete as the international lenders would have desired. In the last five years there have been moves to expand the services of some state enterprises like the State Railway of Thailand. Moreover, after Thaksin, the Thai state began offering new forms of credit to the poor, new public housing options, and a national health care system. Each of these programs demonstrates a complex new imbrication between state and market.

At best, it can be said that Thailand operates through the logic that Aihwa Ong (2006) calls, "neoliberalism as exception and exceptions to neoliberalism," which points out that neoliberalism is simply *a* technology of government in "sites of transformation where market-driven calculations are being introduced in the management of populations and the administration of special spaces" (2006: 3). Such partial liberalization deemphasized top down spatializations of power by selectively including horizontal arrangements—like new social movements and NGO projects—yet it did not erase vertical power arrangements. Instead, these modalities of power operated in tandem, with both state and non-state agents administering new configurations of power by enlisting citizens and non-governmental organizations in the roles of service providers (Ferguson and Gupta 2002). Although such governmentalizing rationalities seek to "enroll" and "make" subjects ready to care for themselves, they often do so as a means to establish and deepen state power itself.

This dual logic has been essential to the "art of government" in Thailand. As many anthropological approaches to governmentality have shown, programs of care and enrollment are also important sites for the production of notions of citizenship. Anthropologists have documented a range of state and non-state interventions seeking

to promote environmental responsibility (Agrawal 2005; Li 2007), multiculturalism (Postero 2007), empowerment (Sharma 2006), and public health (Paley 2001). These studies suggest that programs of government, even as the state diminishes its role, are never distinct from state power. In this dissertation, I follow their lead by starting with a historical genealogy of Thai programs of government. I do so in the aim of demonstrating how different notions of government emerged and transformed ideas of citizenship while maintaining an essential developmental character at their heart. This genealogy helps lay the ground work for understanding the visions of "personal development" espoused by CODI's planners and to explaining the way politics is made problematic by notions of the good citizenship.

However, I am not simply interested in documenting governmental logic as it makes people into docile, governable bodies, caring for themselves through community. Rather, by examining the rationales of such programs in light of their effects it is possible to see how these programs become sites of politics in their own right. Because of this, I pair my analysis of government with a focus on both space and contestation. In doing so, I tie governmental rationales to enactments of particular spatial orders, which, following Henri Lefevbre (1991), are produced in tandem with, and through, modes of economic production. The production of an ordered national space was a specific aim of the Siamese and Thai state-builders. Indeed, the Railway project itself was a means of transforming the territory and its population while also asserting Bangkok's political and economic authority over the territory (see Chapter 3). The numerous governmental programs that I describe in Chapter 2 speak to these dual objectives as well.

These projects were not simply about state power, but were intimately related to specific economic orders that, in turn, constructed space within a particular way. Such schemes of territorial governance, however, were not limited to state actors acting on a national territory. Rather, the process of constructing a national territory was intricately connected to shifting global political economies—first through colonialism, then the cold war, and finally through late capitalism. This relationship not only demonstrates the way global geopolitics have been implied and implicated in Thai practices of government since at least the middle of the 19th century, but also how space emerged through practices produced by and responding to shifting political and economic trajectories (Hart 2000: 13).

These spatialized political economic trajectories not only structured relations of power, but also created new terrains of contestation. Space itself is a product of such shifting political terrains. For example, my description of the building of the Thai Railway (Chapter 3) and its relation to particular economic spatial regimes demonstrates the way certain economic orders created both the context for the settlement of the tracks *and* the for new interventions and contestation of those interventions. In the latter half of the dissertation (Chapter 4-7) I explore the relationship between politics and the productions of space through the lens of Baan Mankong. There, I highlight how the post-crash economic conjuncture and theories of economic development rooted in participation, community, and social capital were essential to the production of notions of community along the tracks. I also show how different disagreements over community boundaries and politics itself are articulated through space and aesthetics of space (6 and 7). In this way, I show how the

contemporary form of community being implemented along the tracks is not primordial but fundamentally new and closely related to specific economic conditions. Such conditions, while not strictly (or singularly) neoliberal, are deeply rooted in *both* the economic and social logics associated with late capitalism. This approach seeks to build on what Gillian Hart has called a "critical ethnographic approach," which is attentive to the "dialectical relationship between the concrete-in-history and the production of knowledge" (2004: 97).[12]

By documenting the way citizenships emerge from the multisided, multivocal, and contested processes through which regimes of government get put into practice, I aim to demonstrate why it is that development has been an essential site for the production of new forms of citizenship. As I show, the frameworks of knowledge and expertise that undergird Baan Mankong are only part of the picture. It is in the implementation of the project that its stakes become apparent as politics erupt showing disputes over existing forms of membership and the production of new possibilities through the practice of politics. It is impossible to understand the implications and politics of projects' rationales without considering their implementation and lived effects. Here, I follow anthropologist Tania Li who argues that combining an analyses of governmental interventions with attention to what happens when they are implemented helps move "beyond the plan, the map, and the administrative apparatus, into junctures where attempts to achieve the 'right disposition of things' encounter— and produce—a witches' brew of processes, practices, and struggles that exceed their

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[12] Hart argues that critical ethnography is an essential methodology for such an approach as it "refuses to take as given discrete objects, identities, places, and events; instead it attends to *how* they are produced and changed in practice and relation to one another" (Hart 2004: 98).

scope" (2007: 28).   By analyzing both ends of the Baan Mankong project—its conceptualization and its implementation—I show how development becomes a site in which government and its "citizen design" is pried open by politics.

From Urban Peril to Urban Promise

Finally, in addition to speaking to Thailand's national concerns, this investigation into the Baan Mankong project is an intervention into the growing global anxiety over the fate of the city itself. As Mike Davis (2006) and the UN Habitat's *Challenge of the Slums* (2003) report demonstrate, cities are now being radically refigured through an influx of poor migrants due to rural dispossessions and structural adjustments. The UN's *Challenge* report paints a grim portrait of the city as "the dumping ground for a surplus population" displaced by successive rounds of economic destabilizations (2003: 40). He argues that these migrants are pushed out of rural zones and often find themselves in cities ill-equipped to handle the incomers arrival. Such urban spaces offer limited available (affordable) space and overburdened infrastructure while they are lacking in real labor opportunities. In these settings, pervasive illegality and inequality are the norm (see Holston 1991; Roy 2002). For Davis, these features mark the city, in the wake of neoliberalism, as a site of radical inequality, environmental degradation, and exclusion.

The contemporary city is also seen as a place of promise. Urbanists like Jeb Brugmann (2009) and Edward Glaeser (2011), argue that cities, if freed from the constraints of bad regulations and shortsighted bureaucrats, are critical, the future of environmental and economic justice. Brugmann for example argues that more tightly

integrated forms of expertise among urban coalitions (planners, architects, government officials, business interests, and citizens groups) might result in the production of more "strategic" cities capable of building on the inherent possibilities of urban scale, density, and interaction. Glaeser argues that the main problem is bad regulations and tight constraints on the built environment through which planners and bureaucrats make cities unaffordable and exclusionary. Both scholars see the city as the crucial (and inevitable) pathway to human flourishing in the twenty-first century and beyond.

A third group, generally made up of progressive urban planners, see participatory policies as essential to making the city more fair and more livable. These scholars argue that to make cities more livable, citizens must be included in the processes of city making (see Evans 2003; Appadurai 2003; Baiocchi 2005). For these scholars, participatory urban planning initiatives hold the potential to transform the voices of the poor and make the politics of the city more democratic and the city more livable.

As city planners and architects have become central actors in these new efforts to make the city more just, design itself has been called upon to "rescue" the poor and the city simultaneously. As the curator of the "Design for the Other 90%" initiative has pointed out, "Good design involves bringing not just a fresh eye to problems but, most of all, listening to the people who live in those communities. We're talking about a billion people living in informal settlements today," the curator added. "You can see them as a billion problems or a billion solutions."(*New York Times* 10/21/2011). In

either case, my work demonstrates that all design is not neutral, but has the potential to both police and produce politics.[13] [14]

Although I retain hope for initiatives that seek to displace the role of experts and employ novel solutions to pressing problems, this dissertation demonstrates that whatever solutions attempt to intervene in the urban future will entail disagreements and the practice of politics. As both Holston (2008) and Harvey (2008; 2012) demonstrate politics are *the* essential component of urban transformation. These scholars see the city as a space in which new forms of political struggle make the city more equitable if not always more livable. For these scholars, politics itself is central to remaking the legal, environmental, and economic structures that have created numerous zones of urban neglect and exclusion.

I situate Baan Mankong at the nexus of these four narratives of urban transformation. The policy's architects frame it ambitiously, as an effort to mobilize architecture to simultaneously improve physical infrastructure, remediate poverty, build a sustainable urban environment, and transform the values of the city's poorest residents. At the same time, this policy is of the largest attempts at participatory urban planning in the world.

The policy's chief architect, Somsook Boonyabancha (2005), argues that Baan Mankong is an effort to "scale up" participatory urbanism from the small-scale projects that typified this type of development into a national housing policy. As she describes it:

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[13] A Baan Mankong project community is a featured part of this traveling exhibition.
[14] See also Architecture for Humanity 2006

> The city-wide scale that Baan Mankong supports is critical for the new kind of slum upgrading – by people. Working on a city-wide scale suddenly makes apparent the differences between all the slums within the same constituency. And if this is done properly, people start to understand these differences – for instance, differences in land ownership and in legal status, differences in the availability of infrastructure and in housing and environmental conditions, differences in people, and differences in degrees of vulnerability (Somsook 2005: 35).

Although Baan Mankong is cast as a new solution in Thailand's housing policy approach, it is built on years of World Bank pressure to move from state centered housing projects towards "self help" style housing policies (Chiu 1981; Giles 2003). The policy also drew from both national interests in small-scale development (see Reynolds 2009) and a turn in international development towards participation, community and social capital (see Dagnino 1998; Rose 1999a; Elyachar 2002). Rooted in cooperative housing projects, savings groups, and community organizations, the project is based around the relatively simple idea that poor neighborhoods can be improved through building cooperation among residents and alliances with experts and city officials. Planners posit that through these activities and small community administered grants, residents will not only be able to improve their homes but that they will learn to work together and form strong communities that promote new values of cooperation, unity, and sufficiency.

> And change can only be possible if people change themselves. This is why upgrading is a powerful intervention to spark this kind of change, because it is so active and because it involves changing the status of these poor communities. It involves a lot of doing, a lot of management, a lot of pulling, a lot of communal decision-making, a lot of physical change being done right in front of your eyes. Its not talk, its change. And so many experiences in Baan Mankong show that people can create something new and beautiful out of a very dilapidated settlement. They make change themselves. Upgrading is a powerful way to create space,

so that poor people come back to believing in their power. (Somsook 2005: 44).

Sufficiency forms a cornerstone of the project's conception of personal change. This notion is rooted in the Thai King's notion of "Sufficiency Economics" (*sethakit por piang*). First articulated after Thailand's 1997 economic implosion, the sufficiency economy theory sought to rebalance the country after its rapid boom and bust. The basic contours of the idea rest on the notion that Thailand's rapid economic growth fueled, and was fueled by, excessive desires, over-consumption, and environmental degradation. King Bhumipol proposed that the remedy for the economic crisis was to be found in addressing these excesses through a rediscovery of personal moderation, emphasized through home-based production, collective cooperation, and self-sufficiency. Thus, Baan Mankong is not simply a designed based intervention into the physical city but also an intervention into the values of its poorest residents. Through the policy, planners hope to remake the city by remaking its citizens.

As I describe in Chapter 4, Architects play a key role in these processes. They not only create housing plans and house designs, but they also facilitate community meetings, help organize savings groups. They are frequently called upon to trouble-shoot and intervene in complex disputes between neighbors. CODI argues that the role of architect here is to listen to the community and help it to facilitate its own vision. Yet, this role sits in tension with the agency's own acknowledgement that community must be made. In this way, architects do more than simply listen but they play a critical role in the construction of community itself, According to Sakkarin Saphu, an architect with CODI and a Faculty member at Mahasarakham university, community architects,

"should concentrate less on getting the houses done, and more on getting people to organize into groups. Once we have strong working groups, the people would find ways to get things done themselves" (www.codi.or.th/CommunityArchSakkarin.html last accessed 12 March 2013). As I show, this claim is a charged one. In light of residents' aims to make themselves seen as legitimate subjects, the aesthetic materiality of the house is potent.

Building on over two decades of scholarship into the anthropology of development (See Ferguson 1994; Escobar 1995; Edelman 2000; Sharma 2006; Li 2007; Postero 2007; Kerim 2011) I take each of the processes associated with the Baan Mankong project to be inherently political and productive of politics itself. By considering these interactions in this way, I demonstrate how incipient forms of urban politics congeal and break apart in Thailand's effort to remake the city through its citizens. I demonstrate that projects of remaking the city that bracket political questions often fail to achieve their goals. Moreover, I show how, amidst unevenly distributed access to rights and resources, disagreements are essential to the process of transforming the city. This insight does not seek to derail the complex work occurring in emerging efforts at participatory architecture and urban planning, but rather as a provocation to experts, policy makers, and citizens to think deeper about the importance of politics in both making community and remaking the city. To put it another way, whatever the "triumph of the city" (Glaeser 2011) might be, it will no doubt be waged through and produce new forms of politics.

This dissertation demonstrates how an old development problematic rooted in techniques of community and participation has been built into new approaches to urban

improvement (see Ferguson 1994; Cook and Kothari eds 2001; Li 2007). I extend these insights into the "anti-political "sides of participatory development to show that ultimately what James Ferguson (1994) famously called an "anti-politics machine" remains effective, but is also leaky. The efforts of planners, architects, and activists, to keep politics at bay inevitably fail in both large and small ways. Thus, where Baan Mankong is most effective is where it becomes a site of politics itself.

While residents have been quick to criticize the project they are also quick to come to its defense and often mobilize to protect the project's budget. So, while I present a highly critical picture of the project's politics, I nevertheless am sensitive to the way it has mobilized resources towards communities that previously did not have access to such resources. Moreover, I remain hopeful that through the efforts of project participants to assert themselves, this project might become a potential site of new political engagement. As J. K. Gibson-Graham point out, projects intent on cultivating new ways of being are constitutive of new futures and thus cannot always be assessed accurately in their present forms (2006: xxvii). Thus, projects like Baan Mankong are generative and, while they are related to (and reproduce) deeply unbalanced historical structures that is not all they produce. As Aradhana Sharma points out, development programs "are neither self-evidently good or bad; instead…these project carry predictable and unforeseen dangers and provoke bitter and often empowering political struggles" (2006: xix). I show that projects like Baan Mankong do offer significant new spaces for rethinking relations between city residents, cultivating new types of urban spaces, and (perhaps one day) enabling political action if opened to the possibility of disagreement.

An Ethnography of Disagreement

I deal with all of the complexity I have described above through an ethnography of disagreement. It was not my intention to write such a work. Initially, I hoped, somewhat naively, that the Baan Mankong initiative might offer a potential window into the remaking of the city and Thai democracy from the ground up. Having been involved in pro-poor activism in Thailand since 2001 and the nation's anti-dam movements, Baan Mankong seemed a radical departure from the state-centered planning that produced the Pak Mun Dam, which spawned the protests I studied and participated in as an undergraduate. In my early discussions with CODI planners and by reading project literature, I learned about the project as a new means of making harmonious communities and pursuing development through what appeared to be deeply participatory methodologies. These perspectives and the project's innovative design and planning methodologies, as well as the optimism of some of the planning literature above, made the project stand out against the increasingly grim political backdrop of post-coup Thailand and the pervasive narratives of collapsing neoliberal global cities.

Instead of finding harmony, however, I found only disagreement. While conducting an initial site survey in Bangkok, Khon Kaen, and Chiang Mai in the summer of 2007, I saw small indications of this in the friction embedded in these projects. On the edges of project communities in Bangkok, for example, stood disaffected houses not included in newly reorganized communities. In Khon Kaen, this tension was more visible as residents described the city's multiple conflicts between its

community networks and between the NGOs that had been operating along the tracks since the middle of the 1990s and the architects at CODIs offices.

Responding to these conflicts, my research design traversed through these conflicting spaces. Resonating George Marcus' notion of "following the conflict" (Marcus 1995: 110), I moved along with these disputes through multiple sites, from the offices of CODI in Khon Kaen, to the local community network offices, to the homes of residents, to the offices of the SRT and CODI in Bangkok. Along the way I conducted formal interviews, and many more informal interviews, with residents, architects, and NGO activists. Though such direct interviewing yielded important insights, I spent a great deal more time observing and participating with these different groups. I attended countless meetings with different project participants—planning meetings, network meetings, (city, regional, national) CODI approval meetings, community meetings—protests, planning sessions, seminars, and trainings. I aided in a few upgrade projects, but I observed many more. I watched architects draw community plans, I helped them and small groups of residents survey and map communities, and watched community and network leaders negotiate with residents. I waited while projects were approved in government offices.

Although my research navigates a wide variety of settings, it primarily follows four different parties: 1) architects and planners from CODI; 2) NGO activists; 3) residents and community leaders involved in settlements that belonged to Khon Kaen's United Communities Network; 4) and leaders and residents in communities that belonged to the Khon Kaen Slum Revival Network. My initial contact with these networks—especially the United Communities (UC) network—occurred through CODI.

By attending planning meetings and organizational meetings with "community architects" based out of CODI's Isan office (headquartered in Khon Kaen), I met Mae Horm and the rest of her leadership group in the UC. By attending their planning meetings, protests, and other activities, I met residents in their constituent communities.

My initial contact with the UC was through CODI. However, I quickly began attending the group's activities on my own and eventually they began to understand my work as distinct from that agency. Far more problematic (from the UC's perspective) was my interaction with the activists and the residents from the Khon Kaen Slum Revival Network (KKSR). Although both networks were originally part of the same single network (until 2001), the split between the two (which in detail later) has created a great deal of acrimony between these activists and conflict across community boundaries.

My relationship with the KKSR is rooted in my time as an undergraduate when, as a study abroad student, I met some of their affiliated NGO activists. Using these contacts, in 2008, I began attending the groups meetings, protests, and workshops at the same time I was working with the UC and CODI. I also attended special weekend retreats and trainings held by the network and its national affiliate the Four Region's Slum network.

Although my involvement with these multiple parties could have been a source of tension—and occasionally it was something that came up in my interactions with these groups—my methodological insistence on moving across the boundaries of each group was productive. Not only did my time with each of these groups broaden my perspective on their work, but by constantly crossing the lines between different

networks, with CODI, with communities, and spending time with households that did not agree, I was able to consider the production of politics as such. On more than one occasion, I attended protests with opposing groups, encountering friends and informants on both sides of a particular dispute. I do not say this to imply objectivity. Rather, by doubling back on myself, I was forced to re-encounter old disagreements from different angles.

In re-hearing stories multiple times, I had to bracket my conclusions and hold disjunctive narratives in tension with one another. This was both challenging and deeply frustrating. Sometimes to my dismay, this approach to my data was unyielding. It resisted a clear political or theoretical programmatic, and offered a difficult often confusing picture to reconstruct during the writing process. Yet, these complicated, interwoven disagreements evoked the stakes of that very practice and its relationship to the fraught process of forging belonging in multiple contested spaces, sites, and scales. Though my research did not yield the "true" story of how these networks have gone about improving the city, deepening democracy, and producing innovative forms of egalitarian participation, it yielded a "truer" story about the binds, conflicts, and politics required to make a home along the tracks in the economic and political volatility that mark contemporary Thailand.

The opinions of my informants became multi-vocal and difficult to categorize in a simple way: Architects from CODI would offer critical assessments of their own work over dinner, then repeat the same errors the following day in a planning meeting. Similarly, residents would criticize the pressures placed on them by NGOs to act as community, while also exerting those same pressures on one another. Activists would at

once organize massive demonstrations for rights to the city, then, seemingly, obstruct the work of other rival networks. NGOs would insist that their process gave communities a voice—successfully helping them negotiate leases—and then silence those voices through more trainings and workshops. Instead of reading these positions as internally contradictory, I allow them to remain in tension with themselves and each other as a means of taking seriously the difficulty entailed in struggles for belonging, rights, and a better life. Moreover, it is *precisely* from within these contradictory positions that such disagreements evoke the politics of remaking self and city simultaneously.

In order to both contextualize and explain the roots of such struggles this dissertation is constructed around both history and ethnography. In the first part, I present histories of government and histories of space along the tracks. In the second part, I use ethnographic description to analyze the implementation of the Baan Mankong project and the aesthetics of its bureaucratic practices of representation aimed at producing harmonious communities, the disagreements such practices inspire, and finally, the way aesthetics of the house becomes a complex domain for expressing desires of belonging.

In Chapter 2, I begin my argument with a genealogy of government and an exploration of the design problematic of the villager. There I offer an account of the various ways throughout the 20th century that the Siamese monarchs and later Thai state-makers have attempted to use notions of village and villager to redesign their citizenry. Through my exploration of both historical and increasingly contemporary

frameworks, I show how an imaginary of the vulnerable and undisciplined villager has propelled the temporality of "not yet" into the present.

In Chapter 3, I offer a spatial history of the Railway and the communities in Khon Kaen. Moving from macro to micro spatial levels, I demonstrate how the Railway (itself a program of governmentality) was essential to the production of the Thai nation-state and to the emergence of the city of Khon Kaen and the settlements lining the tracks. Beyond arguing that the Railway produced such communities, I show how Thailand's shifting political economies produced different spaces at different times. It is precisely these pressures that give shape to the space itself and the types of conflicts that I describe throughout the dissertation. At the end of the chapter, I show how community in its contemporary sense emerged as a technology of administration and contestation for residents facing the radically altered political economy of post-crash Thailand. I also move, at the end of the chapter, towards an ethnographic description of the emergence of community demonstrating how the particularities of activism in the wake of the crash laid the groundwork for the disagreements that I describe in the chapters that follow.

In Chapter 4, I begin my ethnographic description of the Baan Mankong project and its methodology. In addition to explaining the project's processes, I explore the conflicts that have arisen through its vision of citizenship. In particular, I examine how "development first" approaches to community building sought to downplay conflict, while "rights first" approaches enhanced such conflicts. Such differences not only produced different methodologies but also spatial schisms between residents. Although I attend to actual architects here, I also pay attention to others like NGOs, community

leaders, and city bureaucrats who also play a role in shaping the projects contestations over citizenship.

In Chapter 5, I describe the bureaucratic aesthetics of community making. In doing so, I demonstrate how notions of the harmonious community were produced through bureaucratic forms of representation. Because of the importance of harmony and unity as metrics of a strong community, bureaucratic forms like community plans, ledgers, and documents became essential ways that residents and architects attempted to manifest harmony in an effort to obscure the disagreements fundamental to community. In doing so, I argue that such forms were effective for mobilizing resources where community reached its limits, but that they were not only unsuccessful in securing residents from the possibility of eviction, in some cases they actually exacerbated such vulnerabilities.

In Chapter 6, I engage directly with these vulnerabilities by considering the politics of disagreement. On the one hand, I show how residents who successfully waged disagreements were also those who were successful in signing rental with the SRT. On the other hand, I show how such successes spawned new disputes and created problematic zones in which residents became ever more vulnerable.

In Chapter 7, I explore the aesthetics of belonging and the way disputes over aesthetics evoke the complex and contradictory terrain of citizenship in contemporary Thailand. I demonstrate how particular aesthetic programmatics were associated with certain visions of appropriate citizenship. However, I also show how residents navigated these aesthetic demands constructing a pastiche that simultaneously proposed that they were engaged in multiple visions of belonging. That pastiche sought to address

both political and moral questions at the same time. Through a close examination of the everyday aesthetic forms and debates that took place around such forms I show the close relationship between aesthetic practices and belonging itself. Finally, I show how such debates make claims towards legitimacy even as they do not necessarily unseat hegemonic visions of the good citizen itself.

Given the range of novel interventions and approaches taken by CODI it is a mistake to consider this dissertation to be the final word on the Baan Mankong project. Other scholars have considered the policy through a direct focus on the architects (Torvich 2011) and through a focused set of surveys and interviews in project communities in Bangkok (Archer 2009; 2012). Archer (2009; 2012), for example, echos my concerns about the limited effects that the policy has had improving the security of land tenure. However, these studies offer different perspectives on the policy from different vantage points—mainly situated in Bangkok.

My analysis offers a viewpoint on the project in that it is situated outside Bangkok and in a setting that has a deep political history in Thailand's slum organizing movement that preceded the Baan Mankong intervention. These historical and spatial particularities are significant for the effects of the policy on this space. Moreover, this vantage point speaks loudly to contemporary efforts to transform Thailand's political order. Thus, my methods have their limits when using this case to consider the whether the Baan Mankong project as a whole has worked. Indeed, the policy has had diverse results that vary from setting to setting. I am careful to highlight the unique concerns of the Railway tracks. This is a limitation that should be taken seriously when using this

work to evaluate the broader policy. As my friends at CODI often cautioned me, Khon Kaen's Railway tracks are home to a unique case.

Nevertheless, this ethnography is written in the spirit of disagreement and where it produces friction over the policy's ideas and methodologies, it is welcomed. The political approach that I take is one that eschews technical assessments in favor of engaging with the incomplete and contested processes through which the policy was implemented. In this sense, it offers a necessary addition to the growing interest in the Baan Mankong project and participatory urban planning. Where community and harmony have emerged as panaceas to the contemporary urban crisis, then disagreement is surely being ignored. As the Baan Mankong methodology spreads—it is now finding footing in countries as diverse as Fiji, Mongolia, and Laos (See Archer et al. 2012)—a critical engagement with the specific politics and practices of community in those locations becomes ever more important. While my work does not seek to unseat the project itself, it is my hope that it will provoke the project's planners to reconsider their practices in the aim of reinvigorating politics in these diverse settings.

Finally, my research straddles a complex period in recent Thai politics. Working simultaneously to think through both citizenship and the practice of politics itself, is my effort to begin a broader rethinking what citizenship in Thailand might mean. Elsewhere, I have argued that scholars of Thai politics need to be attentive to the history of membership (Elinoff 2012). Rather than regard the nation's emergent political terrain through the bifurcations that have been historically productive throughout Thai history, this dissertation, alongside analysis of "political peasants" (Walker 2012), cultural citizenship (Mills 2012), and "cosmopolitan villagers" (Keyes 2012), stand as a step

towards a critical rethinking of such categories altogether. As I demonstrate throughout, such bifurcations have demanded mass mobilizations and continued trespasses, in the first place. By exploring the production of such bifurcations, this research highlights how those once (and still) invisible to politics are always, already, proper to them.

Chapter 2:

The Problem of the Villager: A Geneaology of Citizen Design

In Thailand, the history of government has been a history of citizen design. In successive eras, responding to shifting global and national contexts, policies and government initiatives served were embedded with both a problem—a populace not yet developed, not yet Thai—and a design to transform that populace into an imagined citizenry to come. Through various technologies of administration, democracy, security, authenticity, and sufficiency these efforts cast the nation's population as villagers demanding development. These designs theorized that governing the village, improving it physically, and developing the character, values, and aesthetics of the villagers themselves, might make the nations' distant, uncivilized poulation ready to rule and be ruled. Yet, these projects have had a paradoxical effect of always suspending that transition, marking the villager as that subject always, not yet ready for politics. While the Siamese monarchs and later Thai state-makers were successful in mobilizing such technologies towards the end of securing the nation-state, creating a rapidly expanding capitalist economy, and producing new forms of development, the problem of the villager persists as a driving logic behind new initiatives. In this chapter, I demonstrate how this persistent problematic has been productive.

In *Provincializing Europe,* Dipesh Chakrabarty, argues that the temporality of the colonial project, deployed via historicism—a developmental narrative that demarcates time as the linear movement towards European modernity—had a critical

MAJOR PROBLEMS FACING THE VILLAGER IN THAILAND

(Identified by village leaders attending over 200 Village Leader Training Meetings)

1. ECONOMIC

    A. Low Income

        1. Agriculture:

            a. Lack of water in dry season.
            b. Low fertility of the soil.
            c. Lack of operation funds.
            d. Crop and livestock pest.
            e. Lack of technical know-how.
            f. Lack of improved crop varieties.
            g. Lack of proper marketing facilities:
                1) outlets,
                2) storage,
                3) processing facilities.

        2. Other sources of time:

            a. Lack of opportunities for full time employment for all ages.

2. SOCIAL RELATED PROBLEMS

    A. Health and Sanitation

        1. Lack of drinking water.
        2. Lack of sanitary disposals of waste.
        3. Unclean houses and surroundings.
        4. Shortage of doctors, midwives and medical supplies.

    B. Education

        1. Inadequate school buildings and teaching facilities.
        2. Lack of opportunities for training of children above Pathom 4.
        3. Lack of opportunities for adults to learn.
        4. Some children do not attend school.

Figure 2.1: The "Problem of the Villager" outlined in a community development handbook (Suvitya 1965: 101).

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C. **Communications**
   1. Lack of village roads.
   2. Lack of local reading materials.

D. **Religion**
   1. Wat or Mosque in bad state of repair or none at all.
   2. Lack of interest and respect for religious activities.

E. **Community Cooperation**
   1. Lack of understanding of various government assistance.
   2. Lack of cooperation among village people.
   3. Lack of cooperation between government and village people.
   4. Lack of village institutions or on-going organizations.
   5. Lack of incentives, recognition and awarding of village people.
   6. Lack of meeting place.
   7. Lack of opportunities to interest youth to remain in villages.

3. **POLITICAL**

A. **Lack of Security**
   1. Too much thievery.
   2. Too much gambling.
   3. Too few police.
   4. Police do not respond to call.
   5. Police are not efficient.
   6. Poor relation between police and people.
   7. Alloting of forest products not same for all villagers.
   8. Alloting land for resettlement not same.
   9. Collection of taxes not according to property evaluation.

Figure 2.2: More problems outlined in the same handbook (Suvitya 1965: 102).

effect of global creating spaces of "now" and spaces of "not yet." Chakrabarty argues that the effect of historicism has left a curious tension in ex-colonial spaces between, "two aspects of the subaltern or peasant as citizen. One is the peasant who has to be educated into the citizen and therefore belongs to the time of historicism; the other is the peasant who, despite his or her lack of formal education, is already a citizen" (2000: 10). This poses a problem not only for the state but for that peasant himself, who is seen as both a proper member of the state though not yet prepared to participate as a full citizen.

Thailand may have never been formally colonized, but such insights resonate as colonial notions of developmentalism are closely linked to the political dilemma facing Thais like those living along the tracks. As I describe in detail below, the early Siamese monarchs both expanded their power and held neighboring colonizers at bay by formulating an inclusive policy towards its population. Although such efforts at building a citizenry that was uniquely "Thai" were inclusive, they were variegated internally by a developmental notion of citizenship. The nation's distant, its ethnically distinct, its rural poor, and its urban poor were all seen through the same lens as Thai, but not quite Thai enough. In order to transform them, programs of government entailed a practice of "citizen design," which sought to rectify precisely this developmental gap. The notion of the "villager" became crucial for both the articulation of the problematic and the designed response to the problem as villages became spaces of pedagogy into correct forms of Thai-ness (which, of course, have varied across time).[15]

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[15] This chapter's focus on the relationship between development policy and citizenship seeks to extend Michael Kelly Connors' excellent account of the effects of "political developmentalism" in his work

Taken in sum, the category of villager is not a coherent one, so much as a problematic positioned between the uncivilized forest and the always, eventual possibility of inclusion in the administrative city or *muang*. Development policies aimed to resolve the spatio-temporal dilemma posed by the colonial imperative to inclusively formulate the national population and restrict the influence of many those subalterns recently included in that population. Although such designs intervened in this political problematic in order to improve the extant body politic through techniques of government but, as I show in the rest of this dissertation, the practice seems to only have extended the problem indefinitely.[16]

Instead of resolving the problem, state and non-state experts built a corpus of knowledge and techniques about what it is that might improve the political and moral capacities of the villager. Although villagers are often cast as the "backbone of the nation," *kraduk senlang haeng chat,* they are also seen as needing direction, control, and improvement. The contradictory discourses that define "villager-ness" (*khwam pen chaoban*) mark them as at once passive and incendiary, complacent and demanding, cooperative and divisive, simple and greedy, sage and ignorant, communitarian and capitalistic, generous and covetous, and collective and individualistic. As such they demanded intervention in the form of techniques of government rooted in European notions of territorial administration, cold war democratic trainings, shifting theories of

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Democracy and National Identity in Thailand (2007). Although I draw explicitly from this account in the section on democracy, his insights are essential to this entire chapter's structure.

[16] Thailand was never formally colonized, thus it is not exactly "ex-colonial" and does not completely align with the framework proposed by Charabarty. Nonetheless, as this chapter will show a number of ways, Siam was influenced by colonial pressures and the Siamese monarchs employed colonial techniques to extend their power over the Thai hinterlands. In portraying 19th and early 20th century Siam in this way, I follow a number of other scholars (See Anderson 1991; Thongchai 1994; Jackson 2010).

economic development, counter-hegemonic culturalist social movements, and emergent ideas about sufficiency and moderation. Villagers (*chaoban*) and villages (*muban*) became objects of tutelage and sites of administration, respectively.

This "problem of the villager" and its related field of expertise sits at the heart of many of Thailand's programs and technologies of government. As I describe in the introduction, I use the idea of government to refer to pastoral forms of power rooted in notions care of the population, the "conduct of conduct," and the "art of government" itself, which seeks to organize the "imbrications of men and things" (Foucault 1991: 94). By failing to behave in ways that reflect various notions of the good villager-ness—migrating, consuming too much, living in cities, taking on debt, mono-cropping, not behaving communally—the poor appear ungovernable, unable to cooperate, and still not ready to care for themselves. "The problem of the villager" marks the rural and urban poor as secondary types of members while simultaneously creating justifications to intervene on their behalf. The effect of such a problematic has been that contemporary poor citizens—inevitably classified as "villagers" irrespective of their rural or urban settings— appear out of place and not yet ready to participate in the practice of politics.

This type of subject category, the "not yet" citizen, is common across Latin America and the colonial world. Anthropologists Charles Hale (2002) and Nancy Postero (2007) point out how indigenous groups in Mexico and Bolivia have historically been categorized as not-yet ready for citizenship. Postero's historical examination of "The Indian Question" reveals how the history of citizenship in Bolivia has revolved around the question of the relative inclusion and exclusion of indigenous

populations—both to control the population while also controlling its land, labor, and resources (2007: 9, 23-86). Hale (2002) has argued that "neoliberal multiculturalism" in Mexico helped to produce a category of, what he calls, "indios permitidos"—authorized Indians—which rewards the rational and modern indigenous subject while neglecting and excluding indigenous people who appear otherwise.

Similarly, Anthropologist Gary Wilder (1999) describes how French colonial administration, operating through a mode of "colonial humanism," produced a similar sense of "permanent deferral" for native subjects. He says, "Colonial humanism thus produced native subjects defined by a double bind: destined to become rights-bearing individuals, but always too immature to exercise these rights" (1999: 47). Wilder shows how this formation lead to a series of policies and interventions designed to simultaneously "know" native populations and to direct it in a "preserved but improved form" (1999: 46).

In this chapter, I consider the "problem of the villager" and the "citizen designs" that sought to resolve it through a genealogy of government in Thailand from the late 19th century until now. I explore five frameworks of government in through which citizen designs were enacted: Administration, Democracy, Security, Authenticity and Sufficiency. My aim here in employing these frameworks is not to reify temporally (they are not organized sequentially and they, in fact, overlap) or as hard analytic categories, but rather to demonstrate the way that these frameworks give rise to particular normative binds relating questions of good citizenship in the present. Attention to cumulative history of these formulations locates the villager in relation to the citizen and excavates the political binds facing the residents of Khon Kaen's railway

communities as they try to participate in the Baan Mankong project and gain durable

occupancy rights to their homes along the tracks.

Populating Siam

Before I go deeper into this history of government, it is necessary to

contextualize the production of Thailand's system of national membership more

closely. Indeed, it is that system that produced the gaps between the racially Thai

national, the villager, and the rights bearing citizen that enabled the practice of "citizen

design." This gap is rooted in what Michael Kelly Connors has called the Siamese

kingdom's "people problem" (Connors 2007; See also Streckfuss 1993, 2012;

Thongchai 1994), which stemmed from the efforts of the Siamese monarchs avoid

colonization, on the one hand, and to consolidate their rule over the loosely held

territory and its diverse people, on the other.[17]

Starting at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries the Siamese

monarchs began addressing the "people problem" by transforming their censuses to

transform the ethnically varied subjects living within the territory of Siam racially, into

Thai nationals. This task required that the monarchs erase previously held distinctions

between, for example, Thai and Lao (Streckfuss 2012: 306-307). By including the

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[17] In 1939 Siam became known as Thailand, a name that is deeply fraught in contemporary political discourse. In order to avoid confusion, I refer to the territory pre-1939 as Siam and post-1939 as Thailand. Accordingly, I refer to the Chakri monarchs who served prior to 1932 as Siamese, while the monarchs who served after 1932 as Thai. As will become clear throughout this chapter, the transition from Siam to Thailand is an ongoing process that has had broad effects, which some regard as incomplete. My use of this scheme is for clarity in naming, although as my characterization of this history will make clear, that the process itself was neither free from the effects of colonization nor was it linear or final. For further analysis of Thailand's "colonial traces" see Harrison, Jackson, and Chakrabarty, eds 2010.

previously distinct groups within the nationality of Thai the monarchs were able to make national claims to populations of different ethnic groups living near the boundaries of the British and French colonies on either side of the kingdom. This effort to create a distinct population demanded that the Siamese kings propagate a national identity and national culture that transformed those subjects from their previous ethnic identities and included them in the new territory without upsetting the power structure that placed Bangkok and its monarchs at the center of the nascent state. In this section I show how Thai citizenship has been both inclusive but internally variegated since its inception.

This historical tension surrounding the constitution of the population, which was inclusive, on the one hand, yet internally differentiated on the other, resulted in an ambiguous relationship between nationality and citizenship. As historian David Streckfuss points out, the production of a hegemonic, Thai national identity (produced through colonial applications of anthropological concepts of race) was related to the production of a developmental notion of citizenship, which included "others" within the national body politic while selectively discriminating against them through cultural institutions that regarded them of inferior "Thai-ness" (1993; 2000; 2012). Such institutions maintained that the Thai nationality was inclusive, but regarded different ethnicities and classes as occupying different positions levels in a developmental scale.

As Thai legal scholar Phunthip Saisoonthorn argues, prior to the formulation of the modern Thai state, the concept of "Thai-ness" (*khwampenthai)* was essential to determining membership in the kingdom. Thai-ness, Phunthip argues, was figured by *jus sanguinis* principles based on the nationality of a child's parents or royal decree.

Phuntip argues that the "Thainess of people" was identical to the concept of

"nationality" in the western world" (2006: 41). This conception of Thai-ness proposes a

racial model of nationality that obscures the historically salient internal variations

within that model. So, although different ethnic groups came to be included in that

nationality, as Streckfuss (2012: 306) demonstrates, in this new order some Thais were

simply more Thai than others. The internal tension between nation/race and legal status

undergirds Thai citizenship, producing an ambiguity surrounding what Thai-ness is,

how to demonstrate it, and how much "Thai-ness" itself is necessary to deserve the

same rights and responsibilities as other citizens.

This tension begins to be visible at the turn of the 20th century when the Siamese

monarchs radically refigured the ethnic composition of the territory's population. In

1908, non-Thai nationals, once prevalent in colonial accounts of the country, seem to

disappear census entirely. This "conjuring trick," as Streckfuss (2012) calls it,

transformed the nation's numerous ethnic groups into Thais. As he shows, ethnic groups

previously seen as distinct (Lao, Thai, Malay, etc…) became Thai (albeit in subordinate

status). He cites early colonial ledgers that detail the territory's various "nationalities,"

noting that early colonial contacts often remarked on the fact that they were surprised

how a relatively small number of ethnically Thai people could maintain power over

such a diverse territory where that ethnicity was in fact in the minority. By 1904 many

of these other ethnicities were expunged from the national census (Streckfuss 2012:

307).

Thailand's national citizenship laws legalized these newly homogenized ethnic

distinctions. In 1913, the Thai Nationality Act granted nationality to all people born on

Thai soil. Because Thai nationals were granted membership in the nascent nation-state, and because that category had recently been expanded to include the nation's ethnic minorities, this was a moment of broad inclusion. Although contemporary Thai citizenship is a mixture of *jus soli* and *jus sangunis* logics, this early law used the colonial logics of race to produce a large population of Thais where only a small population existed before.

Anthropologist G. William Skinner describes this period as pro-assimilationist, even though the period also saw the Chinese Nationality act of 1908 set out to distinguish Chinese nationals by principles of blood (1957: 244). Similar to Streckfuss' analysis of the cultural politics of the period, Skinner shows how ethnicities began disappearing as this more inclusive framing of national membership emerged. By the time Siam becomes Thailand in 1939,

> 'Thai' became polysemous, signifying nationality, race/ethnicity, the name of the people specifically in the central region of Thailand, the name of the language family and the name of the language. Simultaneously, ethnicity was subsumed by region. New regional identities (Isan Thai, Northern Thai) emerged already situated in an implicitly ethnic hierarchy. Yet, people from Bangkok only occasionally refer to themselves as Central Thai, more commonly they are just Thai. (Streckfuss 2012: 313)

By the 1950s, the Nationality Laws became stricter combining both *jus soli* and *jus sangunis* schemes of membership (Phuntip 2006). This period required both Thai parentage (where the mother had Thai nationality) and birth within the territory to be considered a national. Moreover, new distinctions appeared in the form of language laws and cultural mandates, which required people to dress in particular ways and speak Central Thai. Citizenship laws became even more rigid in the 1970s with the

implementation of national ID cards and registrations, as well as stricter previsions

regarding blood distinctions. While such regulations became more stringent, so too did

the range of efforts at "national integration" which aimed to enhance the "Thai-ness" of

the subordinate ethnicities within the nation-state (Keyes 2002). The shifting cultural,

legal, and geopolitical histories of Thai-ness resulted in an ambiguous legal status that

linked race and citizenship in a way that has never quite resolved itself.[18]

This was particularly the case in the northeast, or Isan as the region is known.

There, the large ethnically Lao population was not only considered a security threat but

also subordinate culturally. This position resulted in the creation of what Charles Keyes

famously called the "northeastern problem" in which the region became subject to a

wide range of development -based intervention that sought to improve the population by

making it Thai, securing the area from without and within (Keyes 1967, 1977; Thak

2007). The effect of this intervention is that the "Thai-ness" of the region's residents

always seems suspect and insufficient in a way that marks Isan people as inferior

(McCargo and Krisadawan 2004; Mills 2001).

In short, the Siamese rulers had to expand the racial range of the "Thai"

population while restricting what was proper to that population. Thai became a

nationality that subsequently produced "Thai-ness," which was a varied capacity,

differently distributed across internally variable ethnic groups. So, although Thailand's

ethnically diverse population was included in the nation-state at the turn of the 20th

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[18] The current nationality act allows for both *Soli* and *Sanguinis* characteristics to define citizenship. As such children born of Thai parents can become citizens as well. Nevertheless, citizenship remains an issue for many ethnic groups in Thailand who, though eligible, have not been recognized as citizens because of both a lack of proper documentation or reluctance to file such documents.

century, such groups were internally subordinated to groups and classes considered more Thai.

Such notions of gradation and ascension to truth resonate with the nation's Theravada Buddhist religion which itself has a developmental logic. As Streckfuss points out, "Of course, Buddhism allows for an infinite degree of impurity and insight between the most evil cur and the wisest religious virtuoso. What separates these two types of human is a graduated path to the truth. Only an "elite minority" can recognize *dhamma* as its hidden qualities are indiscernible to lesser beings. *Dhamma* is the exclusive preserve of those of pure minds." (2010: 69; see also Gray 1986). In this way, developmentalism, though part of European historicism, was not simply a European import, but something endemic to the region's cosmology.

Peter Vandergeet (1993) points out that such hierarchies were essential to the moral order of pre-modern Siam's feudal system as well, but that they were transformed during the state's modernization period. During the shift away from the feudal system, "[M]oral codes were universalized (within the bounds of universal citizenship), and the resultant hierarchies of differential knowledge of these codes were temporalized" (1993: 143). That is, elites were able to maintain the pre-modern moral and social order through the new developmental temporality of nation, which when "led by officials progressed through time from natural, animal-like state to a civilized state. Just as Europeans were ahead of Thais, officials were ahead of peasants" (*ibid*).

This hierarchy also reflected a different definition of rights. As historian Thanet Aphornsuvan (1998) argues, the word right, *sitthi*, was essentially linked to a concept of "right to rule." *Sitthi* has meant, for much of its history, a privilege of authority.

Although he points out that throughout the 20th century (though starting much earlier), the concept of right had spread more deeply to the masses, even as late as the 1970s. "In the 1980s, with the coming of political liberalism and economic prosperity, the definition of *sitthi* was finally liberalized to include 'power to perform legally accepted things freely'" (Thanet 1998: 164). This argument accounts both for the differentiation within Thai citizenship and the persistent problematization of notions of rights that I will describe throughout this book.

In the 1960s, the notion of "political developmentalism"—described in detail below—reframed and extended this developmental hierarchy through the period of democratization (Connors 2007). According to Connors, "political developmentalism" was "encased in a pastoral-type rationality that sought to lead people towards forms of self-discipline and practice conducive to stateist-led developmental democracy" (2007: 64). That is, notions of political developmentalism envisioned a population in need of care and intervention to cultivate them into proper subjects of democracy. While the colonial condition created the conditions in which people previously "other" became Thai, the emergent national moral hierarchy, followed by political developmentalism, posited that proper dispositions needed to be developed within the citizenry itself in order for them to progress through the developmental stages along with the state. Such development was not only necessary for modernization but also for the state to become fully democratic.

Citizen designs emerged within this context to manage and produce the improvements necessary for the development of the characteristics proper to these different definitions of membership in the nation. Initially such designs sought to

civilize, then modernize, then democratize, and now moderate the national populace with the aim always, of eventual citizenship. The national development project became central to this effort as successive governments and later non-governmental agencies, imagined the villager as the critical figure in constant need of a makeover and her village as the site of reform. As Geographer Philip Hirsch has argued, the village became a critical "arena of struggle" both between the Thai state and its citizens and between citizens themselves (Hirsch 2002). Hirsch points out that the village in all its conflicting forms represents a critical space of struggle over local and national identities, material resources, and local orders of power. I build on this argument by linking various eras of "citizen design" back to the social problematic surrounding the figure of the villager and the space of the village.

Administration

In contemporary Thailand, villages remain administrative spaces. They are spatially demarcated collections of households governed by a headman. Villagers are registered there as members of particular households. These housing registrations, *tabian ban*, are tied to resident's abilities to receive entitlements and to vote. The housing registration card is often paired with a person "people's card," *bat prachachon,* to demonstrate residence and citizenship. The fact that the administrative village is a product of a particular set of historical processes is essentially lost in public discourse. The village and its villagers are now seen as the "primordial" units of Thai life. The appearance of this kind of trope in everyday media, helps reify the notion of the village as a basis for development strategies and as a meaningful site of governmental

intervention, yet it belies the complex history of the village that has not simply been eroded in the modern era, but rather has been actively created, designed, manipulated, and transformed as an administrative unit since the end of the 19th century.

In an effort to consolidate rule over the new state, King Chulalongkorn's Administrative reforms transformed Siamese territory. These reforms sought to consolidate Siamese power by creating administrative districts in distantly held principalities. By dividing up the territory for administration in new ways, Chulalongkorn enhanced ties between Bangkok and the provinces that had previously been held fairly loosely (Tej 1977). The construction of new administrative districts throughout the territory was important to the constitution of the Thai state, not just because it expanded and consolidated the monarchy's rule, but also because it inscribed the village as a central node of administration, laying the groundwork for the emergence of the "village" as both an administrative unit and an ideological construct. Moreover, the creation of administrative villages was accompanied by new efforts to unsettle local identities and to modernize, settle, and rationalize the inhabitants of the kingdom's more tenuously held regions (Vandergeest 1996).[19]

The village administrative project began in the late 1890s. The reforms transformed the traditional relationships between the kingdom and the hinterlands, previously divided into inner and outer provinces and more loosely held tributary states. These reforms were constructed to ensure the sovereignty of the Siamese rulers, to

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[19] During this section and the section on "authenticity" I draw extensively from Peter Vandergeest's excellent article, *Real Villages? National Narratives of Rural Development* (1996). I borrow and build on his categories, "modernization" and "authenticity," because they are extremely helpful as categories of citizen design that explain particular moments in the history of the village and particular formulations of villagers rooted in those histories.

ensure that they maintained power in the face of colonial contractions on the kingdom's borders. Historian Tej Bunnag's (1977) foundational study of these policies shows that this process expanded and strengthened the monarchy by facilitating the collections of new revenue and "staving-off" colonial incursions at the same time. Yet, as Thonchai Winichakul (1994) has convincingly argued, this process was not simply about defending the Siamese territory from the external colonizers. Rather, the administrative reforms and the techniques of surveying and mapping that accompanied them were crucial parts of the constitution of the Thai state itself. He points out that the very creation of the Thai "geo-body" was connected to this kind of expansion of administrative power. Far from protecting a preexisting "Siam", Chulalongkorn's reforms initiated perhaps a century of intense efforts aimed at securing the territory that later became Thailand and creating and propagating "Thai" as the hegemonic national identity (language and culture) above other competing local ethnicities (see also Anderson 1991).

On a more local level, the longstanding social relationships that upheld authority structures—between as masters and serf—changed radically. Prior to the reforms, masters governed over rural areas controlling both slaves and commoners (who owned no land). After these reforms the feudal system that operated through "personal relations" was replaced with state administrators as governors and village heads (Vandergeest 1996: 285). Chulalongkorn's reforms re-territorialized much of the state into the European style segments of territorial administrative divisions: provinces, districts, cities, and villages.

Social Anthropologist Jeremy Kemp (1988, 1989, 1991) argues that this

territorial transformation was initiated to strengthen central control of the territories in

Bangkok and to undermine the control of local authorities. For Kemp, this moment is

when the village comes into being, replacing the old feudal system, which never

resembled the collective notion of village. Kemp points out here that the village as a

specific territorial space was European in origin—an administrative territory defined by

"one village, one headman" did not exist in prior formations in Siam (1989: 13). This is

not to say that "villages" themselves did not exist. As Tej points out, the village was a

feature of local landscapes prior to the administrative reforms. Rather, what changed

were the ways villages were run and administered and the ways that the village was

plugged into the state administrative apparatus. As Tej points out:

> By 1896, when the full potential of the new district and village
> administrations had been perceived it was decided to formalize their
> organization. In a ministerial circular dated 21 September 1896, Prince
> Damrong himself informed the superintended commissioners and
> provincial governors that he considered these levels of the provincial
> administration to be 'the grass roots of the administration. The prince
> urged every superintendent to organize the election of village and
> commune elders and to transform the petty nobility into district officers.
> In the same circular, the optimum sizes for villages, communes, and
> districts were recommended (1977: 111).

The Siamese rulers used these administrative reforms to transform the kingdom

into something that looked like a contemporary nation-state. It also enabled the

monarchs to expand their power, "control the population and generate revenue" (Kemp

1991: 317). Indeed, as Tej argues, the success of the village as a means of collecting

revenue was one of the main reasons that Prince Damrong—chief architect behind the reforms—expanded the system so quickly.[20]

Provinces were reorganized and divided into sub-districts, and villages, which were further divided into households and individuals registered within the households. Vandergeest points out that, in addition to making the remaking the territory of Siam, this new administrative system enabled the creation of a certain kind of knowledge about the village that allowed for state interventions (1996: 285-286). This form of knowledge enabled later Thai state officials, in particular the technocrats under the rule of Field Marshall Sarit Thanarat, to make the village a focus of development policy initiatives (See Thak 2007). By the early 1960s, with the aid of both US development/security money and anthropological fieldworkers, the village had become installed as both a "natural unit" in the Thai countryside and, ideologically, the "primordial" space of the "Thai way of life" (Kemp 1991). Via maps and surveys, the village became a discrete and known entity and "an object of administrative action, that is, of rural development, or of modernization as a national project" (Vandergeest 1996: 286).

Public education campaigns that sought to train villagers in the proper (modern, European) ways of dressing and eating were paired with projects that aimed to transform production in the countryside through mono-cropping, rural electrification projects, and the creation of provincial urban centers (*ibid*). Both the modernization and

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[20] There is a certain irony here, as other authors have noted (Pellegi 2002 and Herzfeld 2002 for example), that in order for the Siamese rulers to maintain control over some portion of the region they had to re-imagine themselves as European rulers propagating Thai as a sort of "crypto-colonial" (Herzfeld 2002) national identity that emerged both in order to stave off colonialism, but also to compete and replace other less "civilized" ethnicities within the territory.

development projects became the primary discursive channels through which state and non-state actors understood the village for perhaps forty years, from the 1950s through roughly the 1980s and the beginning of the Community School and the NGO movements.

As Vandergeest describes it, these projects were tied to a "modernization narrative" that organized both the temporal and spatial dimensions of the nation formulating a rural/past and an urban/present, future. Discursively, the village became the site of tradition while the city and its attendant governmental institutions became the locus of modernity. As he puts it: "The village is depicted in terms of a narrative—an object *to be* [emphasis added] modernized by diffusing modernity from the city and the state to rural areas and the village" (1996:286).

A familiar set of "developmental discourses" (Ferguson 1994) emerges here: the villager as isolated, backwards, superstitious and ignorant, in need of interventions and expertise. In the same moment the village was being constructed as an administrative site, it was also inscribed into a discursive framework that marked villages as spatially "distant" and temporally from the past. Policies that sought to modernize and educate villagers were framed in these spatial and temporal terms— bridging the distance between the village and Bangkok, and bringing the villagers into the present through specific conceptions of modernity and development.

However, even as such efforts at community development were beginning, the "villager" himself remained a stubborn obstacle to his own improvement. According to one community development handbook from 1965, the chief difficulties in implementing such projects are that "the Thai farmer is highly individualistic and wants

to do everything by themselves. Group thinking or working in groups is far from the understanding of Thai people" (Suvitya 1965: 98). At the same time the manual points out that there are "no permanent groups in Thai society" and that communal activities, such as merit making at local temples, do not produce permanent collective forms (*ibid*). Two things are remarkable about this text: First, is the way it contrasts with later romanticized versions of the Thai past (that I describe below). Those versions see Thai villages as primordial communal spaces. Second, is the degree of similarity between these complaints and modern complaints about the residents along the tracks that I describe in Chapters 4 and 5. So, although activists reconsider the notion of communality in the 1980s, these early assessments are potent examples of the way the "problem of the villager" always remains in relation with notions of modernization.[21]

The convergence between the administrative project and modernization discourse had important stakes beyond constructing and administering villages and educating their villagers, it also helped propel a particular notion of space and an aesthetic of citizenship in the city. In Bangkok, the city was subject to a radical spatial transformation that was both architectural and pedagogical. As architectural historian Lawrence Chua describes in his excellent dissertation, the space of the city was transformed through new materials like concrete and an emerging aesthetic rooted in European Fascism's notions of modernity and masculinity. This vision produced a city space meant to discipline and improve the population (2012: 327). Sports and new spaces for sport like public stadiums and boxing rings were built as spaces to promote

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[21]The surveys of village leaders provided in this handbook under the title "The Problem of the Villager" were the inspiration for this chapter's title (Suvitya 1965: 101-102). See Figure 2.1 and 2.2 at the beginning of this chapter.

ideas about national sacrifice, physical education, a martial sprit, and the production of a "healthy labor force," which could all emerge through a new emphasis on physical education (2012: 331).

The backwards villager became an object to be developed and a potential threat to this order because he was not fully "Thai,"—not yet, according to the logic of the period, anyway. As Vandergeest argues, the narrative situated the village in a particular light in relation to the nation state, vis-à-vis discourses of national identity, "Village culture…is incomplete, *not yet* authentically Thai. Villagers are backward because they are superstitious, fatalistic, and locally oriented, and village culture must therefore be rationalized and nationalized [emphasis added]" (1996:288). The village appears remote and subject to the irrationality of local authorities, local gods, and local traditions. The administrative village, framed within the modernization narrative, not only became a space for the enforcement of new modes of power, but also to transform social life and instill a particular vision of the citizen.

This new citizen was to gather his sense of belonging not from local practices, but national ones that emanated from Bangkok. Prime Minister Phibun Songkhram's *rathaniyom* (cultural mandates) created new aesthetic and sumptuary codes for Thais to follow. As Chua points out, "the *rathaniyom*'s real value was in creating opinion and comportment around the city's appearance and its citizens' attire, manners, and speech. Subsequent *rathaniyom* pronounced the language, architectural standards, dress code, daily activities, and consumer habits of the population that had now been defined as 'Thai'" (2012: 40). The mandates show how citizen design was explicitly aesthetic in the 1930s. More over they show that modernization was comprised of lived practices

that attended to "comportment" and habit as much as aesthetics themselves. During this period, to look modern was explicitly part of *being* modern.

Just as the administrative village was wired directly into Bangkok's central government, the modernization narrative, steeped in the language of national identity, sought to rewire the villager's sense of membership from the local towards the national. The state and its national culture became the purveyor of rationality and modernity. The Thai modernizers created policies to disseminate "Thai culture," defined primarily around the "three pillars": Monarchy, Religion, and Nation (Keyes 1987).[22] These policies ranged from the creation of central Thai as the national language (Diller 2002), the creation of national symbols, the expansion of the national education system (Keyes 1991), to the cultural mandates that sought to create uniform styles of dress that downplayed ethnic differences apparent in costume (Chai-anan 2002; Streckfuss 1993, 2001; Chua 2012).

In this sense, Vandergeest's "modernization narrative" is a set of ideas about good and bad citizenship: If the narrative portrayed the citizen as human in the modern, rational, heroic, Buddhist and masculine sense, then the villager was wild, irrational, female, and more animalistic (1996:288). Through the period policies framed within that narrative, the Thai state-maker's actively sought to distribute the sensible—to use Ranciere's terms—creating an aesthetic for the racially homogeneous, modern, Thai citizenry. The administrative and discursive constructions of the village emerged to disseminate a version of citizenship that was closely connected to the newly formulated national aesthetic identity.

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[22] As Keyes points out, this clearly resonates with the British formulation, God, Queen, and Country.

In the 1950s and early 1960s the language of development (*kanpatthana)* itself emerged, echoing these previous themes. With development as a cornerstone of the government's lexicon, economic theories like "the big push" (Rosenstein-Rodan 1943) and "surplus labor" (Lewis 1954: 14) echoed the spatial and temporal logics of "citizen design" already well established in Thailand. During the government of Field Marshall Sarit Thanarat, the state began a program of modernization led by American investment and technocratic interventions by the World Bank. These projects expanded the national highway system, constructed dams, established state owned enterprises, and a new focus on the private sector with the aim of preventing communist incursions into the country. They also enabled the US to establish Thailand as its base of operations in Southeast Asia during its various wars in Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos.

Sarit created the National Economic and Development Board (which later became the National Economic and Social Development Board). This arm of the government became a critical component of state policy making, crafting five-year plans that would not only guide the nation's economic development, but that also set the tone for broader policy orientations. While the NESDB initially framed its work in the language of improvement, as the 1960s and the Cold War progressed, international development assistance and expertise (coming primarily from the US) saw state officials, began to create links between economic development and national security (Thak 2007: 151).

Developing the village became a critical part of the national security project as it was framed not only in terms of modernity and progress, but also in terms of staving off communist expansion in the region (Thak 2007: 167-168). This was particularly the

case in Isan, as it was the poorest region, home to ts own small communist insurgency, and the territory most proximal to Thailand's tenuous borders with its increasingly besieged, fragile neighbors. Three of the US' four bases of operations were located in the Northeast. Thus, the national security effort aligned with the spatio-temporal narrative of developmental citizenship targeted a region that was already seen to be the most distant and culturally backwards according to the preexisting national narrative. As such, the region's villagers themselves found themselves at the forefront of these interventions, and on the borders of increasingly violent US conflicts, which emphasized that the security of the nation and the globe depended on their improvement.[23]

Democracy

Although the modernization narrative constructed a vision of good membership—the global expansion of democracy associated with the Cold War recast that membership in the language of citizenship. *Ponlamuang,* the word that most closely resembles a liberal democratic notion of citizenship as its etymology is tied to the notion of city (*muang*), became more common amidst American military interventions into Southeast Asia, especially from the mid 1960s onward. Ironically, it is also this time that notion of "community" becomes popular as a mechanism of development as well (Reynolds 2009: 291).

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[23] A reading of the NESDB plans reveals a shift in tone over time from overt drives towards modernization through projects like highways and dams, towards projects that accommodate the emerging language of community and self-sufficiency, and as Jonathan Rigg (2010) points out, a shift towards an increased emphasis on participatory development.

This section examines the Thai government's efforts at disciplining its citizenry through the discourses and practices associated with democracy. Michael Kelly Connors calls this practice "democrasubjection" defined as "the potentially oppressive dimension of democracy, the never-succeeding project of subjecting people to new institutional and ideological forms of power in the construction of democratic subjects" (2007: 22). Connors's analysis, which focuses on the period for 1960 onward, differs from the other frameworks I present in this chapter because rather than grappling with notions of the villager, his work describes and analyzes a history of policies that were direct attempts at using villages as sites to design actual citizens via the language of democracy. However, as Connors's analysis indicates, even when the category of citizen was employed by state policy, it was used within the old design problematic, to address the problems of villagers and their limited capacities to participate correctly.

As Connors points out, concerns about the possibilities of citizenship were central to ways in which democracy was paired with disciplines that sought to limit the freedoms entailed in democratic citizenship. This dynamic is most visible in the intellectual foundation of "political developmentalism," which used the same temporally framed logics as modernization (that the poor were in need of trainings, education, and temperance) to diminish the population's dependencies of the old feudal system and the more recent "despotic paternalism" that characterized Sarit's military driven development (Thak 2007).

By describing democracy as a set of disciplinary discourses, Connors highlights the ways that "citizenship is now read as an enabling discursive resource for social control and active internalization of the given normative frame" (2007: 26). More

concretely, Connors shows how democracy and citizenship were involved in a series of policies and practices that sought to both create a citizen with a sense of "good democratic behavior" in the populace *prior* to establishing and enhancing the rights and freedoms of the population. Connors work shows the articulation between discourses of development and democracy by showing how "not yet" emerged directly in relation to discussions of rights and participation.

In order to instill good democratic behavior in the population, state officials implemented a series of programs, trainings, and policies that were designed to literally bring the state from "preliminary democracy" into full democracy (2007:74). Officials had "concerns about people's capacity to be good citizens; complaints about the 'disease' of freedom which threatened the morality of the people were common" (*ibid*). These concerns led to the creation of policies, handbooks, manuals, and administrative projects aimed at instilling good democratic behavior in the citizenry, in order to literally bring the population from a stage in which they were unprepared for democratic participation into a stage in which they were ready for democracy.

Theorists and officials thought that breakdown of paternalism was predicated on the notion that people be able to govern themselves. For example, in the section describing problems of community development in the same community development handbook I described above the authors argue:

> The age-old traditional government of Thailand was absolute monarchy, which had long been firmly established in the value system of the Thai people. The absolute monarchy regime provided the master and servant relationship. This traditional administration, even though it was abolished by the coup d'etat in 1932, still prevails since it has long been evolved into the culture of Thai people….these attitudes create a problem. It takes time to cultivate new attitudes in the people in order to

appreciate democratic government; success also depends upon changed attitudes of government officials in dealing with the people (Suvitya 1965: 97).

As Connors is careful to note, however, notions of self-governance like those in the above handbook were closely tied to nationalist themes like instilling a love of the monarch, nation, and religion. By linking democracy to nationalist themes, like unity and moderation, officials in charge of these democratic trainings sought to contain the spread of the "disease" of freedom.

Instead officials searched for ways to enact policies that would bring the country through the stages of political development. One proposition was a two-stage plan which "focused on self-government at the local level with the democratic minded bureaucracy acting as guardians (*philiang)*, educating people in democratic ways" (2007:74). The second stage would see the *philiang* withdraw and allow a parliamentary system to emerge. NGO activists continue to use this word to describe their relationship with their constituents.

Although there were early stages in which the government produced "citizen's handbooks" it was not until the mid 1960s with a growing threat from the Communist Party of Thailand that the project of "democrasubjection" started to gain momentum. This happened in two different ways: First with the extension of the Community Development Department (CDD), which saw village level leadership as critical to motivating villagers along the development path.[24] Second, the creation of Local

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[24] In stark contrast to the tone of the sufficiency discourse, Connors quotes a statement from a Community Development Department document saying that: "It is advisable to bear in mind that so long as the people are still contented with what they have or what they are, development is unlikely to be started…lack of interest brings about lack of cooperation which hinders all kinds of development programs" (2007: 66). Here it seems villagers are too satisfied with "enough" to promote state projects

Administrative Departments (LADs) that were charged with promoting well-being,

social development, law and order, public safety, population registration, and other aid

programs. In addition to these functions, the LADs worked with the military to

construct the village as a site of local defense by facilitating the creation of "Self

Defense and Development Villages" to prevent communist insurgencies (Connors 2007:

68-69). The CDD and LAD projects demonstrate clear connections between the village

as administrative space and projects of democrasubjection. The village was

fundamental to implementing both of these "citizen design" projects on the ground

through civic groups, development projects, and village surveillance.

In the late 1960s democracy became an explicit discourse of the LADs with the

creation of the "Project to Develop Democratic Citizens." Connors points out that these

groups did little to advance a democratic agenda. Instead, state officials focused on

"delegating minor administrative and public works duties, training in efficient meeting

practices, and the training of village heads to promote the democratic system to

villagers" (2007: 70). However shallow, this moment of participation resonates with

contemporary participatory politics. Beyond this, the "Project to Develop Democratic

Citizens" stands as another important example of the way notions of development

aligned with ideas about citizenship and democracy. The project is an example how

deliberate policies targeted the population for political improvement were conceived

and executed in ways that did not always conform to their original aims. There is also

an important tension here between what constitutes a democratized project and a project

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and that a certain amount of "desiring" (to borrow from Rofel 2007) might be necessary for development
to take place.

that trains people to become democratic—a fundamental critique of Baan Mankong as we will see in Chapter 4.

Connors also details the release of a series of handbooks that discussed notions of rights, the relationship between the government and the people, and necessity of self-governance in order to be a good member of society and avoid falling into the sway of politicians. The handbooks and trainings link democracy, rights, and freedom with the need for the population to be educated and disciplined to understand the way to behave within a democracy that ultimately supported the state and maintained and the preexisting social order. Rights may have been a part of the democratic curriculum, but they were paired with a discourse about training and preparing the population to use their rights in ways that would not threaten national unity or security—preparation and readiness again emerge as critical themes in this literature marking their subjects as occupying the "not yet."

Broadly, Connors describes the conceptualization of citizen that emerged in the 1960s during this moment of democrasubjection in this way:

> It is stated that a good citizen is one who assists the community to express its opinions, helps solve local problems, and sacrifices his/her own interests for the common good by offering labor and mental assistance to develop the community. Furthermore, one must 'keep a look out for circumstances which will threaten national security.' Good citizens then, are ones who carry out moral duties as derived from religious teachings, including duties towards the family. The father is the head of the family while the mother has the duty of housework and of teaching the children to be good citizens. (2007: 80)

There is a great deal to be taken from this passage as it links a number of themes I have addressed throughout this chapter. Connors use of the governmentality framework

highlights the close connection between formulations of government and visions of the citizen. It also shows how citizenship was a method to cultivate morality and responsibilization of the population. The village is linked to the democratic project as a site of civic organization dedicated to securing the nation by improving its villagers. Indeed, much of what constitutes good behavior could be used to describe the notion of the "good villager": mutual aid, sharing, developing the country, all are closely connected to various discourses about rural life. Here, participation is defined by helping one's neighbor (and country) through self-sacrifice, cooperation, and maintaining the security of the state, but not through politics, voting, civic involvement, or critical resistance as might be expected in light of the emphasis on democracy. As I will discuss later in this chapter, the Community School imagined the village as a site for resistance to state power and authority. Yet, that conception of the village also was concerned about the "villagers' " abilities to unite and care for one another. It is revealing then, that visions of participation formulated in this moment extend into the counter-politics of Authenticity arising in a later moment. Although the citizen as a rights bearing subject emerges within this frame, it remains deferred as a work in progress.

Security

As should be clear by now security was a central concern for the Siamese monarchy and the early Thai state builders. Yet, notions of security have changed over time and so too have their relationship to various practices of government and conceptions of village and citizen. In this section I explore changing notions of security

(*kwam mankhong*) and their connection to village level projects and notions of villager and citizen more generally.

To begin, I want return to Chulalongkorn's administrative policies. It is a unique moment because the security of the Siamese authority and the securing of authority and boundaries are coterminous projects. As both Tej and Thongchai's opposing analyses of these indicate, security meant on the one hand forging boundaries with the French and British Colonizers and on the other it meant propagating a sense of authority from Bangkok over the territory and its new divisions. In this foundational moment, the question of security is quite clear: the security of the nation and the sovereign were essentially the same. Indeed, the fact that these projects merge so neatly says a great deal about the mode of power that was operative at this critical moment.

Following the end of the absolute monarchy in 1932, the conceptualization of "national security" became more diffuse. Although the nation's "geo-body" and its attendant national consciousness (Thongchai 1994) had become more firmly instilled in the populace (thanks in large part to both mapping as Thongchai describes and the policies I discussed in the first section), the enforcement and discourse of boundaries never lost its importance. The question of the new Thai state's sovereignty over its territory was commonly invoked in discourses of national sovereignty and independence. These types of discussions were, and remain, common during moments of internal political crisis including in the political upheaval of the first decade of the twenty-first century.[25] Yet, such controversies over borders have less to do with those

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[25] For example, both border skirmishes and nationalist rhetoric erupted over UNESCO's declaration that Khmer era ruins situated on the Thai-Cambodian border fell under Cambodian jurisdiction. In Thailand

outside the borders and more to do with concern with what Thonchai calls the "others within." (2000b).

Beyond cultural policies, another example of the early link between security and citizenship were the series of government sponsored public service programs entitled "The Dialogues of Mr. Man and Mr. Khong" (ed. Thak 1978) that sought to inform the public of the links between the proper performance of Thai-ness and the security of the nation. The program was serialized radio conversation between Mr. Man Chuchat and Mr. Khon RakThai in which the two described government decrees and discussed the importance of following them (ed. Thak 1978: 260-315). The naming of the characters is important here: Man and Khong when combined are Thai for "Security"; Chuchat and Rak Thai mean "uphold the nation" and "Love the Thai," respectively. The dialogue is revealing of a particular moment in the Thai government's discourse of what it is that produces security (*khwam mankong*) for the nation and its people.[26]

In order to understand the relationship between security and citizenship that I am sketching out here, it is helpful to look at an extended excerpt from one of the radio programs. The following dialogue (quoted at length) shows a clear linkage between the modernization discourse, the cultural mandates of the period, aesthetics, techniques of the self, and notions of security as tied to good citizenship. Mr. Man and Mr. Khong begin by discussing why people should dress in a civilized fashion according to a

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this rhetoric was marshaled quite frequently during the on-going national political conflict that began in 2008.

[26] Mankhong is frequently transliterated with a "kh" by scholars (including Thak 1978). However, in the case of the Baan Mankong project the "h" is included by CODI in its English publications. I therefore follow CODI's translations when using that term, except when quoting material from other sources.

government edict, giving up both "Chinese trousers" and other traditional forms of

traditional dress for western styles:

> *Mr. Khong*: What other examples did the Prime Minister give?
>
> *Mr. Man*:   He said some people commented on why we did not improve our mental culture before   going on to such a thing as dresses. The improvement of our style of clothing does not necessarily follow the saying "bright and shining on the outside, but hollow inside." Some people, when they could not find any other aspect to attack, just say that the country is in state of emergency, and it is not the time to concentrate on dresses, and even saying perhaps the Prime Minister had nothing to do or that he had probably gone insane, etc, etc.
>
> *K*:   People who are narrow-minded usually criticize others who devote themselves to the country. If people who read or listen to this kind of comment did not give it some careful thought, they would be misled and believe what others say.
>
> *M*:   But if they read or listen carefully, they would see immediately that those who made that kind of comment did so according to their immediate emotion without weighing the pros and cons and did not see things in a broader perspective and merely mentioned selectively the negative. But those who hope to see our country modernized would clearly see the improvement of our dresses would be of great use.
>
> *K*:   Certainly. The first thing we would see is that our fellow country men dress themselves according to the persuasion of the government it would show the world that the *People* follow the *State*. And this spells unity of the country.
>
> *M*:   Secondly, if the people do as suggested, it would make them get used to following orders. To accept orders is necessary for nation-building and for national defense in times of emergency. If we do not practice to accept orders in normal time, when needed in time of emergency it would be awkward.
>
> *K*:   The third thing about doing as ordered is that it would show to other people that the Thai nation is orderly like a civilized nation. And in the end, we would leave the tradition of dressing ourselves as other civilized people to future generations.
>
> *M*:   The fourth thing is that nobody can deny that they would refuse to see nice things. Who does not want to see beautiful flowers? Who

does not want to see beautifully dressed women? Beautiful things are pleasant to the eyes. They make us happy. It is better than seeing people dressed poorly or seeing a beggar without a nose that would make us cry "hee!" That would make us unhappy and some people would even close their eyes.

K: The fifth thing is that the whole nation is dressed as they are suggested and become orderly, it would be a factor towards the betterment of our minds and this would stimulate improvement in other aspects of our culture. To wear proper dress would show that we do not have barbaric minds as those wild people of Central Africa.

K: The sixth thing is that if our fellow countrymen are well-dressed according to what has been suggested it would be one way to maintain our independence, is that if our fellow country men are well-dressed according to what has been suggested, it would be one way to maintain our independence, among other things.

M: That is quite true. If we dress like savages, foreigners would show contempt towards us. And they would try to help show us how we should dress. They would say that they wanted to introduce "culture" to us. What would the situation be like then? For those who have already been abroad, many were asked whether the Thai people have anything to wear, whether they wore shirts, whether they had beautiful silk, whether they had electricity, trams. This is evidence to show that o be well0dressed and to have decent houses are measures of national progress. If we answer that some or many things that they asked were not available in our country, they would say immediately that our country is still jungle, and why don't we hire civilized people to help?

K: This is the way colonies are obtained. Cultural deficiencies have resulted in colonization of many countries. This should be a good lesson for us.

M: You must understand that to safeguard our country's independence, we cannot only rely on strong military or the ability to fight. We have to also depend on other things, such as having a good economy. We must protect against interference with our occupations, and the danger of others taking over our jobs, This is called "silent attack." If we allow this to happen, we would starve and lose the economic war even before the real war occurs. Surely no Thai would like this to happen.

K: And the fact that we do not have good culture would serve as an excuse for them to introduce culture to us. So, besides having good economy we must have good culture.

M: Our country must not be filthy either. We must help to prevent this. We must solve the problem of sanitation and epidemics. We live in the community of nations. If we frequently have epidemics, they would take it as an unfavorable aspect and would try to destroy the source of diseases in our country for the happiness of other nations. This is also another raison d'être for colonization.
("Dialogues of Mr. Man and Mr. Khong, September 14, 1941, from Thak 1978)

This dialogue draws together a number of themes I have been pursuing throughout this chapter. Perhaps most obviously, the tone of the passage demonstrates the complex machinations of sovereignty in an "uncolonized" state in the middle of the 20th century. There is a tremendous concern related to the general positioning of the nation's culture, relative to other "modern" states. Though other scholars (e.g. Streckfuss 1995, 2000, 2010; Thongchai 1994; Pellegi 2002, 2007; Herzfeld 2007; Harrison 2010) have noted this before, this passage is striking for the care and concern for creating an aesthetic for the Thai populace that replicates the norms of bourgeois modernity.

My interest in this passage does not lie here, however. Rather, I think this dialogue offers a critical window into a triangulation between the project of creating a particular type of citizen (with certain dispositions and aesthetics), discourses surrounding modernity and progress, and notions of security. At this historical juncture, the question of national security is not an incidental one, as the Japanese occupation of Thailand occurred only three months after this dialogue was aired. Yet, in spite of Japanese encroachment, the passage shows more concern for enemies within than it does with outside threats. Indeed, the majority of the first part of the dialogue is devoted

to encouraging unity *inside* the state. Mr. Man and Mr. Khong argue that beyond

simply demonstrating modernity, if the population follows the edict regarding dress

they will show obedience to the state and show their unity as a nation. This concern

over unity echoes the general problem facing the government of forging a national

population where, strictly speaking, none existed. This dialogue demonstrates that the

project of creating a population was no small task. It demanded both carving out space

within European notions of modernity and resignifying them as Thai, then convincing

the population that such aesthetic and cultural practices were essential to state security

and national progress and their own personal health and well-being.

Beyond obedience to the state, the dialogue also links security and civilization.

Thongchai has written about the discourse of *siwiali* (civilization) pointing out that in

Siam the term had important spatial undertones that distinguished "forest, village, city,

to Europe each of which represented varying levels or degrees of *siwiali*" (2000a: 529).

Here the term is also notable because the use of civilization is tied directly to the project

of security. From the perspective of the state, "civilization" is not just a superior

category of living because of its connection to modernity or because it is morally more

upright than pre-existing behaviors, but because only adopting the path of civilization

will allow the nation to maintain its independence and prevent colonization or foreign

invasion. In this formulation, savagery and dissent must be controlled or quashed lest

Thailand fall victim to European colonizers. Yet, civilization, even though it always

seems to take the form of European modernity, is ultimately always framed as distinctly

Thai. This recalls Vandergeest's formulation of the "modernization narrative," which

not only sought to modernize, but also to secure the state against dissenters and colonizers.

As Thongchai points out, the village is critical to the spatial stakes of *siwiali.* The village was an intermediary step between the forest towards the city and modernity. In the dialogue, Mr. Man feels that if people do not change their dress the country will be thought of as "jungle." Geographer Philip Stott (1991) argues that in the Thai elite conceptualization of nature, the *muang*—the city—was the home of civilization whereas the *pa*—forest— was wild and untamed. The city was considered rational, safe, ordered, and masculine, the forest is thought to be wild, mystical, untamed, dangerous, and feminine. Moreover as the above dialogue explicitly points out, the village is a whitening space that helps to distinguish agricultural Thais from barbaric "central Africans." In this sense the village was conceived as a mediating, pedagogical space. The village is neither forest nor city. The village is precisely the space of "not yet," the space in which becoming is always on the horizon via development and training. The village can be understood as an intervention into the forest, becoming a site of policy, education, and tutelage which Thai officials might transform the population from savage to civilized securing the nation from within and without.[27]

By the middle of the 20th the village would take on a more overt role as security site. Both Connors (2007) and Anthropologist Katherine Bowie (1997) have written

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[27] Thongchai (2000:546) discusses a famous didactic play written in 1916 entitled *ponlamuangdi*—The Good Citizen—that tells the story of a boy (named Jungle) whose father dies in the jungle. The boy moves to the city after his father's death, changes his name to *muang* and becomes a police officer in order to serve the nation and protect order. Thongchai points out that when the boy arrives in the city people call him *dek boran*—ancient child. This points out that *siwilai* has both spatial and temporal dimensions. The play was later turned into a textbook for elementary school children entitled *From Mr. Jungle to Mr. City*.

about the ways in which villages became overt spaces of security and surveillance.

Recalling Connors' description of the Local Administrative Departments that sought to

create "self-defense villages" that linked the military with local administrators and

village officials in the name of organizing local defense groups and promoting

development. Connors' cites statistics that show that by 1978 there were over 175,000

villagers involved in these local defense projects. By 1994, the LADs claimed to work

with over 9,850,736 members (2007: 69).[28]

The apex of the village defense project seems to be the mobilization of the

Village Scout movement documented by Katherine Bowie in her book *Rituals of*

National Loyalty. Her detailed study shows how villages and villagers became central

parts of the state security apparatus via complex and taxing initiation rituals into local

"Village Scout" troops—that sought to develop villages, foster unity, and to keep track

of the growing communist movements in the countryside. As Bowie points out, these

development and security often coincided, with village beautification projects timed to

intersect with activities and demonstrations by dissident organizations. The most

shocking role of the Village Scouts took place in the October 6th, 1976 coup, as

members assisted the military in throwing out the three year-old student-led

government, physically assaulting and killing students activists.

As will become clear in the next chapter, the question of security is at the heart

of the Baan Mankong project, yet at present, it takes a vastly different form. There has

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[28] Connors' numbers come directly out of official report, but in my experience these numbers can be quite slippery. Throughout Baan Mankong, I saw how numbers were extremely important for getting recognition from government departments and how often times the numbers of participants involved were not always reflective of the active participants, but included people who expected to be involved or those who had no intention in joining activities, but might have wanted to accrue benefits should they materialize.

been a transformation in the discourse of security, shifting from notions of securing the state, to one that seeks to secure individuals lives within the state as a means of promoting unity and progress. Yet, the relationship between the production of aesthetic forms and notions of security remains strong. In spite of this new bio-political approach to the security question, it will become clear that problems of national security, national membership, and national unity remain intertwined.

Authenticity

Vandergeest's analysis of the modernization/administrative project is careful to show that the policies seeking to administer, modernize, and develop villages were not accepted wholesale. In fact, these policies have entailed considerable resistance from groups in the north and northeast, including the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT), from communities displaced by national parks (Pye 1999) and other development projects (Missingham 2005, Somchai 2006), and also from Muslims in the south. Many of these movements also show the way critical transformations in the nation's politics continue to emerge beyond Bangkok (Somchai 2006: 84; Streckfuss 2012). Indeed, it was these resistance movements, particularly those that sprang up in the Northeast—Isan—and coalesced around the NGO movement in the 1980s and 1990s, that gave rise to an alternative narrative about "rural authenticity" (Vandergeest 1996: 288), a narrative that became central to the counter movements that pushed back against state incursions and large-scale development projects that viewed the village as development's raw inputs.

In Vandergeest's account, the "authenticity narrative," argues that the village no longer needs instruction in national culture because it is seen as the spiritual home of the nation. As Vandergeest puts it, "In the counter-narrative [the authenticity narrative], the primary symbols of national continuity are found in the cultural characteristics of the village. Authors of the counter-narrative generally oppose or ignore territorial definitions of the village and instead define the village as a community with continuity through time. That is, the village is conceptualized as a set of interpersonal relations and cultural practices, not as an inhabited territory defined by its borders" (1996: 289). In the authenticity narrative, villagers, their traditional wisdom and their subsistence livelihoods are understood to be the organic "roots" of a present that has been corrupted by modernity and capitalism.

It was this formulation of the village as the primordial foundation of Thai-ness that grew out of the work from the group of Thai scholars and social activists known as the "Community School." This influential group of thinkers laid the groundwork for the ideas that were central to the NGO movements of the 1980s and 1990s and later to the formulation of the social practices associated with Baan Mankong. The authenticity narrative served as a counterweight to the modernization narrative. Its proponents sought to resist both the administrative reaches of the state as it began taxing locals and removing resources from the provinces and the modernizers, who considered the backwardness of local culture and rural life to be impediments to national development.

If early state modernizers saw the villagers as backwards and in desperate need of rational order, the proponents of the Community School saw the village as a once ideal space that had its own logic prior to the incursion of the state or the market. As

such, the village (and villager) was either endangered or was already extinct by the time the largely middle class NGO movements and intellectuals associated with the Community School had arrived. That logic contradicted the interpretations of village life like those found in the community development handbook I discussed above. Instead of seeing villagers as inherently individualistic, proponents of authenticity saw the village as a space of communality now lost to time. In this way, those formulating notions of "authenticity" were interested in redeeming both village culture and villagers themselves. These ideas were given voice most strongly by Community School founder Chatthip Nartsupha and the thinkers and activists that collaborated with him (see Nartsupha 1991; Reynolds 2009).

Chatthip's study, *The Thai Village Economy in the Past* (1999), sought to demonstrate the distinctive culture, modes of production, and exchange rooted in the unique way of life of Thai village. The work is based on over 200 different interviews and oral histories conducted in the late 1970s and early 1980s. The village Chatthip describes is subsistence, simple, collective, and rooted in mutual aid (quite different from the servile, individualistic, superstitious space described in the handbook). This description was extremely influential in Thailand. Chatthip's work and its progenitors were critical intellectual parts of the root structure of the Thai NGO movement, the World Bank's Social Investment Fund Program implemented after the 1997 market crash (World Bank 2006), and, eventually CODI. Within the work's pages it is possible to see the basis for emerging critiques of development; extractive capitalism; incursions from multinational corporations, foreign governments, and multinational development institutions; and the hegemonic notions of modernity propagated by the state. These

ideas were used by both NGOs and activists to contest state development agencies and to begin the process of forming alternative visions of development as rooted in notions of the "local" and the "traditional." In this way, the authenticity discourse was both a critique of modernization process, but within the scope of the nationalist narrative. The authenticity narrative saw the village as both distinct from modernity (and its proponents) and distinctly Thai.

The village in Chatthip's account exists outside of private property. He argues that there are two conditions that give rise to this form of property holding: First, in the pre-modern era, the region's monarchs were said to be the sole landholders in their realm; it was thus illegal to buy and sell land. Second, once laws that allowed for private property were passed in 1932, the Thai state was weak and, according to Chatthip, "the imposition of the rule of the city and the state over the village community did not destroy the village community. The state merely claimed the right of land ownership, superseding the claim of the village community in order to legitimate the state's demand for corvee and tax" (1999: 13). Apart from the logic of both private property, the village's autonomy gives rise to Chatthips account of village life.

There are many who dispute this version of history (Kemp 1991, Bowie 1992, Vandergeest 1996), because it neglected the strong impact of the pre-modern state on the functioning of the village, the ways in which villagers themselves were locked into uneven relationships with masters as slaves, and, the fact that many villages didn't function as collective spaces at all but rather through highly individualized networks of kinship and reciprocity. My point here is not to consider the account's historical accuracy, but rather to consider the alternate landscape of village life it proposes as part

of a larger discursive framework seeking to document and understand the village as a

means of proposing a vision of citizenship.[29]

In Chatthip's history of the village, he posits a clear division between the village

and the state marking the interiority of the village and its villagers as distinct from the

exteriority of the state bureaucrats, its system of labor, its taxes, and its shifting political

economy. In this way, the interiority of the village, including its modes of production

and remain coherent, stable, and intact even as radical political change swept through

the territory bringing about the end of absolute monarchy and the rise of Thailand as a

nation-state. Moreover, the villagers themselves appear similarly uniform in their way

of relating to the outside world. For example, although Chatthip points out that the

villagers were made available for corvee labor, he pays scant attention to what this

might have meant to villagers themselves. Instead, he focuses his attention on the

abundance of naturally existing food sources, modes of subsistence production, and

reciprocal labor that existed in the accounts of the villagers he spoke with.

In a fairly typical passage Chatthip blends contemporary narratives with

historical frameworks to demonstrate that most villagers lives were geared around local

concerns and particularly the acquisition of food:

> "Villagers have the phrase *ha kin* "seeking to eat" or *ha yu ha kin*
> "seeking to live and eat"; the implication is that villagers are satisfied if
> they have food. When the are not busy, village males will ask one
> another, "tomorrow shall we go look for wild animals to eat," while
> females talk about weaving or going in search of food. In both cases, the
> subject is seeking food for subsistence. Many elders paint a clear picture
> of subsistence production in past times: "for eating, not selling"; "for

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[29] According to Craig Reynolds' (2001) review of the book's translation, Chatthip was responsible for educating "several generations" of Thai economic historians and civil servants. Although Chatthip is often considered to be more of an anarchist, his legacy and its use by nationalist culturalists marks the study as critical to both mainstream and alternative visions of development in Thailand.

food, don't know where to sell" or "cannot just idle about, must seek to eat and live". The official records and writings from the fifth reign [1853-1910] reflect the image of a village subsistence economy. For instance, it is stated "people buy and sell only a very little" or products which are made are rarely sold". One villager described this state of affairs with the words, "in the beginning things had no price'" (1999: 17).

In this passage it is possible to see the way that Chatthip merges the villager of the past with the present. Here he links a contemporary (for the time) description, to a description of the way of life in the provinces that takes place well over one hundred years before the interview was conducted for this project. He presents a temporal landscape that echoes the temporality of the modernization discourse; this villager is a uniform stand-in for the ones from the mid-nineteenth century. Forces outside the village, like the transformation of the state from absolute monarchy to nation-state or the successive coups that have occurred across Thai political history, were beyond the interests of his informants or beyond the scope of his interviews.

These narratives tell of a simple and good life. They are quite familiar to me. On my own trips to rural areas I was often told, "We don't have a lot of money, but we have a lot to eat." This "telling" of subsistence life is critical to animating the moral capital of the "village way of life" (*witichiwit muban*) as it shows villagers as cooperative, good hearted, and moderate in their desires. It also offers works as a critique of the frivolity of consumer culture and the norms of contemporary urban life— or, in my case, the consumer excesses of my home in the United States.

The narratives present a beautiful description of life outside of the state, close to nature, and beyond the reach of the market. In this telling, villagers are often satiated

with full stomachs and full hearts and in need of little else than what they already have. This way of being in the world appears as primordial and pure. Yet, the telling draws its power not from the pastoral nature of the landscape it describes, but from a dramatic irony already at play, as the listener knows that this world has always already been corrupted. Indeed, the identification of this kind of rural purity would not be possible were it not the case that the village described has already ceased to exist. Both listener and teller of this tale of authenticity already know that the authentic has long since disappeared, having succumbed to the excesses of consumer capitalism, the temptations of modernity, and the recklessness of the state.

This is a critical tension in the authenticity narrative: On the one hand, the villager of the present must be like the villager of the past in order for contemporary village life to stand-in for the village of one hundred years ago. The villager must be the holder of ancient wisdom and not yet corrupted by the state or market for his moral capital to remain intact. On the other hand, the village itself already has to have been corrupted by consumer desires and the power of the state if the narrative is to be of any importance. While past is conflated with the present to explain the cultural way of life of the village and its unique economy, the present needs to obliterate the village of the past in order to explain why rural and urban villagers are impoverished. In short, they drink too much, behave violently, engage in wage labor, migrate wantonly, squat illegally, sell their votes, and buy motorcycles and TVs. According to the authenticity narrative, these behaviors are all very unlike the villager of the past.

This tension is also important as a means of justifying intervention. Without these changes in village life, it is impossible to account for the changes in the villagers

themselves. If the residents of the village are seen to have been bound up in relations with the state (however shifting and ambiguous) or involved, at least partially, in the market, then the transformation from past to present appears agentive and not imposed. To be clear, the Community School had many forms some more radical than others. In many cases however, these scholars were reacting to real transformations and dislocations in the nation's political economy. Increased urban migration, new reliance on debt, an expansion of the sex industry, and the desire for new commodities were concerns that arose alongside broader political economic transformations. These social changes were seen as causing the end of the culture of subsistence that Chatthip had described in his book. As members of the Community School saw it, capitalism disturbed the uniform coherence of the idyllic village, transforming it into a fractured, globalized, highly incoherent landscape of consumer desires.

It should also be noted that as distinct as this notion of "village" and "community" are, they weren't wholly "Thai." Rather, as Chatthip's (1991) review of key figures in the community school demonstrates, many of these ideas emerged from 1960s Catholicism, specifically the Second Vatican Council which opened up the provision of services and financial aid to organizations that worked directly with the poor. In 1974, for example, the Federation of Asian Bishops stated that it would become the "Church of the Poor," which signaled a shift from acting on behalf of the poor to learning from them. As Chatthip points out, this initiated a critical rethinking of western frameworks of legal, theological, and social history (1991: 128). Craig Reynolds highlights a Gandhian influence in his genealogy of community. In particular he points to Gandhi's "Statement on the Village" as a second source for the intellectual roots of

the Community School. Gandhi argued that the village should act as a "complete republic" which was largely self-sufficient and resisted interference from the State (2009: 297). Finally, global turns towards Buddhist ideas as a source of small-scale development are also essential to the authenticity framework (Schumacher 1973). This idea remains critical to contemporary activist visions of citizenship and progress as NGOs and activists often push the idea of the village or community strengthening itself in order to fend off the state. As Reynolds points out, these multiple uses of community demonstrate its function as both a site of government and a mode of resistance (2009: 299-302).

While the disciplines associated with the administrative village and its modernization narrative were tied to modernity, capitalism, hygiene, nationalism, rationality, and Buddhism, the practices associated with the "authentic village" and the Community School were rooted in communal culture, "kind heartedness, brother/sisterhood, generosity, mutual-help, not taking advantage of others, un-ambitiousness, non-violence, self reliance, and honesty" (1991: 132). The Community School's critique wasn't simply a set of ideas about how "villagers" should behave, but also a significant intervention into the ways that development experts, state officials, and NGOs regarded the village. The village, from this perspective, was a system that contained its own kind of logic that outside experts need to understand and reorient themselves to work within the villeage and to not attempt to modernize it or use it as a resource for capitalist development. The expert needed to become like the ethnographer or, more likely, the Gramscian "grassroots intellectual," living and learning among the

people in order to document their problems and mobilize them towards appropriate solutions—and, in some cases, political action.

In this conception, the role of the development expert was to emphasize and enhance self-sufficient economic networks between poor communities and to consider possible appropriate technological solutions for villager problems. Beyond these economic enhancements, NGO activists were to begin the process of consciousness-raising because, as Chatthip puts it, "although communal culture still exists, it may appear only in the form of rituals and practices in everyday life rather than as a conscious set of ideas. The villagers, have in a sense, forgotten why they behave in the way that they do. Reconstruction of consciousness will clarify this and enable the villagers to join forces in their struggles" (1991: 139). The NGO activist was supposed to help the villager regain a sense of the past, how village life operated, and how they must transform their own consciousness in order to align themselves with this conception of the village of the past.

Here the discourse of authenticity, though offering a check on development experts, enabled other sorts of intervention into the lives of the poor. Development here takes the form of marking a particular subject's readiness to participate in village level decision making processes and as a marker of their political consciousness. According to NGO activists I spoke with, signals that a particular person's political consciousness was ready was when they demonstrated the desire to sacrifice self for the community, their willingness to put the needs of others before their own personal goals, their ability to see the "big picture," and their awareness of differences in economic class. Notions

of development as physical improvement did not disappear but they often were subordinated to personal improvements and political consciousness-raising.

The "politics of knowledge" associated with this kind of development are important. In the most modest capacity, the NGO operates as a facilitator—often cast in the language of the *philiang* (guardian)—helping the villagers to come to consensus about solutions to their problems. Yet, even this formulation is deeply embedded in a particular set of charged power relations between NGO and "villager." Consider key community school figure, Apichat Thongyu's point that development is "the passing on of this wonderful communal culture, so that villagers search for development solutions by themselves. There is no need to surrender to modern culture and rupture the wonderful pattern of our model society—an action that will create vagueness in the true values of life and degrade them" (From Chatthip 1991: 123). The villagers are to find solutions themselves. Their guide is a constructed version of the past that has been formulated largely by the NGO movement. The NGO worker is the arbiter of this vision and the villager needs the NGO in order to find the correct version of villager-ness. Paradoxically, the villager is again cast in the role of "not yet" but this time he is not yet even a villager.

There is a secondary role of the NGO activist, which is also important to the politics of knowledge between villager and NGO. The NGO is to act as a kind of translator for the outside world. In this point Chatthip is specifically political, pointing out that the NGO activist is a node of contact between rural communities and the larger political economic context within which local struggles take place. He argues the "problems of the village also originate from outside of the village" thus villagers must

form alliances across classes. For Chatthip this helps villagers to contextualize the struggles taking place in their villages and to see the "exploitation that the state and capitalism have imposed upon him" (1991:140). The emergence of the authenticity discourse itself was political. Thai NGOs and the activists worked with them have long been aware of the politics of development and have been active in formulating a counter-politics, although as will become clear, this counter-politics does not always emerge from the "bottom up," which is often its own source of contention.

Yet, for all of these complexities, the Community School, the NGO movement it was associated, and especially the rural and urban activists connected with these movements have used these conceptualizations of the village to important ends. The 1990s were perhaps a culmination for this school of thought. The NGO movement, along with poor activists, actively organized and demonstrated against the government making particular headway in issues surrounding displacement, urban poverty, alternative forms of agriculture, and struggles with mega-projects, dams in particular. These movements helped to crystallize a new set of pro-poor activists and to help train numerous citizens in the tools of democracy and spread a new language of rights. During the 1990s, urban activists successfully slowed the rate of evictions on state land and began the process of negotiating for title—some in the form of long-term rentals on state land like in Khon Kaen. Rural activists were successful in mobilizing thousands of poor citizens struggling with agricultural debt and forced the government to change its process for building dams. As both Bruce Missingham's (2005) ethnography of the "Assembly of the Poor" and Somchai Phatharathananunth's (2006) study of the "Isan Small-Scale Farmers Assembly" show, the grassroots organizing strategies that grew

out of the Community School and the NGO movement had significant impacts on the expansion of democracy during the latter part of the 1990s and early part of the 2000s. It was these provincially based movements that pushed the democratic agenda forward even after the state's formal transition to democracy took place in 1992.[30]

One of the most important results of this organizing was the inscription of the "language of community" into the 1997 constitution. The word community is mentioned at least four times in the draft of that constitution. Each time it is mentioned, the community is given specific rights: the right to information, the right to refuse a development project, the right to protect local culture and wisdom, and the right to organize as a "traditional" community were all included in that landmark draft (Kline 1998; see also Kuhonta 2008)

This had important, but unanticipated effects. One of the most important of these was that the complications of the language of the village and the community were written into law. Villagers understood as communally owned and villagers understood as communally oriented now became subject to various forms of communally held rights. This posed significant opportunities for residents who could organize themselves. However, as will become clear throughout much of the rest of this dissertation, communal organization and distributions of communal rights has been deeply problematic. The ambiguous history of village and community as told by the Community School helps account for some of these problems.

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[30] This period saw the beginning of massive, multi-day encampments by grassroots activists from Isan. These "villages of the poor" linked the moral capital of the villager to the broader category of "the poor." This was an important accomplishment. One NGO told me that prior to these movements many poor people saw their poverty as their karma. This explanation is rare now.

Just as the modernization discourse wound its ways into villages through the administrative project, the authenticity discourse moved from the corners of the NGO movement to the mainstream via broader state-run projects. Both the 8th and especially the 9th NESDB plans rely heavily on the language of community and communality in their efforts to revamp development policy. For example, the 9th NESDB report sets a goal to "Empower communities so that local people will increasingly share responsibility in local development and problem alleviation" (NESDB 2002: 50).

It goes on to point out that this will occur by:

Promoting the formation of community organizations and civil society,
using key facilitators from all sectors of society. Forums should be held
to create common understanding and to enhance joint learning processes;
so local people will be able to continuously engage in joint activities.
Community learning processes should be diversified enabling local
people to obtain basic education that is in line with their own potential,
local wisdom, and culture. (*ibid)*

Through these changes, community organizing, cooperation, sharing, and collective learning, became mainstream parts of Thailand's state development philosophy. NGO theory became the basis of state policy as transforming community (and it social life) into a key technology of development. As the state began to mobilize this new version of community, the imperative to train and make the villager ready only becomes more important. Although many in the Community School hoped that their activism would produce autonomous villages and villagers, the underlying methodology of the Community School became a central part of state policy, thus deepening the political tensions internal to the production of authentic villagers. Indeed, the tension is

most palpable around the question of temporal advancement—when might these villagers become authentic enough to gain their autonomy from their guardians?

Sufficiency

Although the notion of Sufficiency Economy arose out of Thailand's rapid economic expansion and collapse, its deeper roots are both within the authenticity framework I discussed in the previous section, a history of rural Buddhist "development monks," and recent turns towards communalism within reformist Buddhist communities.

Nevertheless, the rapid growth and implosion of the Thai economy in 1997 was one of the key factors that shifted the authenticity framework out of the realm of counter-politics firmly into the mainstream lexicon of the Thai state. The rise of democracy and the civil society movements throughout the 1990s spread ideas about authenticity and the effects of capitalism on traditional ways of life. When the market collapsed, what was once a counter-discourse that critiqued modernization and the market (and their links to the state) became a part of the mainstream via the rise of King Bhumibol's theory of "Sufficiency Economy."

In Thai "Sufficiency Economy", *Setagit Por Piang*, literally translates as "economics enough only"—emphasizing the fact that there is an economy of excess and there might be an economy based around the idea of "enough."[31] This notion was put

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[31] I translate the phrase literally as "enough only" because written in this way it demonstrates the way in which the grammatical construction itself exerts a kind of discipline. That is to say, the "sufficiency economy" idea hinges on a sense in which excess needs to be tamed—enough, only. Though I don't want to emphasize this point too much, it seems apropos given the fact that very often projects of Sufficiency

forth in the King's annual birthday speech following the 1997 Asian Markets crisis. In

the wake of the economic collapse, "sufficiency" emerged as a Buddhist critique of the

consumer modernization that had exploded alongside the country's impressive

economic transformation.

The philosophy hinges on the concept of "enough." The underlying critique in

the Sufficiency theory was that the Thai populace's untoward desires drove the

economic collapse with consumer excesses replacing the nation's moderate Buddhist

roots. In this sense, the country had abandoned Buddhism for consumer capitalism,

which was driven not by an understanding of temperance and moderation, but steeped

in desire, lust, greed, and excess.[32]

As King Bhumipol put it:

Being a tiger is not important. What is important is to have enough to
eat and to live; and to have an economy, which provides enough to eat
and live…If we can change back to a self-sufficient economy, not
completely, even not as much as half, perhaps just a quarter we can
survive…But people who like the modern economy may not agree. It is
like walking backwards into a *khlong*.[33] We have to live carefully and we
have to go back to do things which are not complicated and which do not
use elaborate expensive equipment. We need to move backwards in
order to move forwards. If we don't do this, the solution to this crisis will
be difficult. (King Bhumipol Adulyadej quoted in Pasuk and Baker
2002: 439)

King Bhumipol's words proved potent beyond the historical moment. The

meteoric rise and subsequent crash of the Thai economy exacerbated rural dispossession

leading to rapid urban migration. The fallout of the economic collapse also led to a

exert their force strongest in places in which it is the latter construction which is more common in
everyday life than the former.

[32] Others including Lisa Roefel (2007) and Alan Tran (2012) have pointed out how the expansion of late
capitalist economies resulted in an emergent set of consumer desire producing forms of longing and
anxiety.

[33] A *Khlong* is a canal. This can be taken to mean something akin to "swimming against the stream."

rethinking of the nation's economic path with a number of ministries, including the

NESDB, adopting the language and theory of the "Sufficiency Economy" into their

policy making strategies. For the purposes of this discussion there are two notable

features of the above passage: First, the basis for the sufficiency proposal it is possible

to hear the echoes of Chatthip's informants—"enough to eat and to live." This

demonstrates broad resonance of the language Authenticity. It, again, shows how

widely that language moved from the counter-narrative directly into the heart of the

mainstream.[34]

Second, the shifting temporality of the statement suggests that it is necessary to

"move backwards in order to move forwards," situating the hinterlands, the village, and

the villager at the center of the "new theory," as it is called, but in the same temporal

position as other visions of development. This reaffirms the binds facing those

considered villagers that were evident in all the other citizen designs. They must

perform a role in which they can never get quite right. According to this theory, neither

the poor citizen nor the villager is as disconnected or self- sufficient as they should be. I

will explore this bind more at the end of this chapter and extensively in the next.

Another link between the NGO movement and the Community School notion of

authenticity and the "sufficiency economy" is that sufficiency is understood not only in

light of individual sufficiency, but also in light of the self-sufficiency of the Thai state

in relation to external trade relations. Again, the sufficiency framework, like the

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[34]The 9th plan begins by defining the theory and emphasizing its moral dimension: "A balanced approach [to development] combining patience, perseverance, diligence, wisdom, and prudence is indispensable to cope appropriately with critical challenges arising from extensive and rapid socio-economic, environmental, and cultural change occurring as a result of globalization" (NESDB 2002: i).

administrative, authenticity, and security frameworks, is tied to the enhancement of the uniqueness of Thai identity and Thai independence from external influences. Just as the modernization discourse cloaked notions of modern rationality in terms of the propagation of the Thai identity, the sufficiency discourse nestles itself in alongside the "localist" critiques of globalization (Hewison 2000). Modernization (and certainly its administrative project) formulated themselves in reference to the maintenance of territorial boundaries. Sufficiency speaks not to the collapsing of territorial boundaries so much as the collapsing of economic sovereignty associated with Thailand's close relationship with the United States during the Cold War and, more recently, the diffusion of Thai-ness (Kaisian 2001; see also Klima 2002) that occurred alongside economic globalization and the expansion of consumer culture, the Export Oriented economic growth model, and the relationship between economic interconnectedness and the collapse of the nation's financial markets.

Hewison (2000: 286), points out that the links between the Community School and the royal theory of "sufficiency" are bound by notions of localism that were popular in the post-crash moment. His argument demonstrates the links between the ways that individuals, communities, and the nation were bound together in a shared pedagogy of sufficiency. Just as the Thai state was taking on new IMF loans to manage the financial crisis, debts were understood to be the primary reason for rural poverty. The solution proposed by critics of globalization was that the Thai state needed to de-link itself from the global economy and rural areas in particular needed to cut ties with urban centers and become self-sufficient. On an individual level, temperance, moderation, savings, and a number of other disciplines based around notions of local industry and

"integrated," organic agriculture were proposed to manage both the social and economic aspects of the crisis.

Hewison argues that, "The market, consumerism, materialism, urbanism, and industrialism are seen as interconnected outcomes of rampant capitalist development and injurious to rural communities. 'Modern agriculture' is identified as having destroyed the assumed abundance of the past…Rural malaise and the economic crisis derive from the rural population's false and created need for consumer goods" (2000:286). Given this formula, the answers to the crisis that emerged were rooted in notions of temperance, moderation, self-sufficiency, and discipline—targeted most potently at "villagers."

These solutions to the expansion of the capitalist market also have their roots in a history of development in the Northeast led by so-called "development monks"— *phrasong nak phatthana* (Somboon 1988)— who sought to fill gaps left vacant by the state's modernization agenda and contested the adverse effects of that agenda by proposing alternatives rooted in small scale development practices. Starting in the 1950s, and intensifying in the 1970s, Buddhist monks began working on development issues through throughout the Northeast, emphasizing development through local initiatives and by addressing the effects of "consumerism and the dependence of villagers on the market economy" (2006:17). In some cases, this work combined this material work with spiritual reform by addressing *apayamukha*—a Buddhist "cause of ruin"—that these monks saw as a both a cause of underdevelopment and a hindrance to future development. These causes of ruin were rooted excess passions like debauchery, gambling, drinking, and "bad company" (Somboon 1988: 41). These "development

monks" were used to both contest with the state and, occasionally, to advance its agenda.

Understanding sufficiency's critique of excess desire critical explaining the discourse's uneven effects in practice. The idea has strong links with notions of "self-sufficiency" and with notions of sustainability. Home-based production and integrated agricultural models—which seek to integrate various agricultural products in the same farm—are prototypical sufficiency projects. However, its programmatic operates more broadly than these small-scale projects suggest, working as an affective critique of the consumer excess unleashed by capitalism. Rather than targeting specific emotional states, sufficiency often attempts to interrupt capitalist excess through the language of "enough"—*por*. I argue that, in this way, the discourse targets the population for affective reform and training common elsewhere in late capitalist contexts (c.f. Rudnyckyj 2010).

This emphasis on moderation is also tied to contemporary reformist Buddhist movements like the controversial Santi Asoke movement. This sect of Buddhism is strictly vegetarian, ordains female monks, and operates a number of communal village centers, which combine small-scale production with communal living. Juliana Essen (2004) argues that the centers and their emphasis on Buddhist values achieved through small-scale development constitutes its own version of development. The group's sufficiency also echoes the group's slogan as well: "Consume Little, Work Hard, and Give the Rest to Society."

Yet, the Asoke movement is not simply an apolitical religious movement. Rather, its members are active critics of the nation's development path and its political

economy. The most prominent member of the Asoke movement is the former Governor

of Bangkok, prominent leader in the 1992 democracy movements, and current leader of

the Anti-Thaksin PAD, Chamlong Srimuang. Chamlong's association with the sect and

his past as an anti-leftist military leader, later pro-democracy activist, and contemporary

role as a leader in the PAD marks the emphasis on moderation as its own sort of critique

of the body politic. Duncan McCargo argues that although Chamlong's political

platform, which linked the Asoke critique of development with notions of Thai-ness,

posed no serious challenge to Thailand's economic model, it nevertheless was an

inspiration for the King's sufficiency speech (2004: 164). Srimuang's role in the anti-

democratic PAD with its critique of the democratic impulses of the masses marks these

disjunctures as important.

The point here is not that the King's model has been implemented whole-cloth

or that it has radically transformed Thailand's development path. Rather, the ideas that

inform the Sufficiency Economy model both predate the speech and have become

ubiquitous as a mode of government and model of citizenship. Drawing from Nikolas

Rose (1999), Soren Ivarsson and Lotte Isager (2010) argue that that Sufficiency

Economy functions as "etho-politics," which "seeks to align the prevailing cultural

emphases on autonomy and self-realization with the demand that all citizens accept

their duties, obligations and responsibilities to their communities" (2010: 236). Yet,

they point out that this form of self-disciplining has high political stakes, especially in

the wake of the 2006 coup where the discourse came to represent a "demonic

intertwining of pastoral power and disciplinary power" (2010: 234).

As such, sufficiency as a citizen design works like authenticity but with a twist: It seeks to discipline and reorient the villager towards his life in the village while justifying the inequalities of the present. However, beyond simply reaffirming the burdens and temporalities of developmental citizenship, sufficiency attempts to enact them through a series of projects that target different groups differently. As I show in the next section contemporary sufficiency targets the wealthy in light, low impact ways, while creating new barriers for poor actors attempting to gain access to material improvements, to participate in consumer capitalism, and to demonstrate their political legitimacy as members of the nation. Nevertheless, as I show in subsequent chapters, the sufficiency critique as an effort to produce a new form of society has been taken up by residents along the tracks who engage in sufficiency projects both as a means of demonstrating their belonging and participating in an effort to make the city more sustainable.

The Politics of Moderation

Sufficiency is essential to the Baan Mankong project a number of ways. For example, savings groups, micro credit, community gardens, and livelihood associations all emerge as development strategies that have a sufficiency bent, teaching participants to lend wisely and borrow moderately, to grow their own food, and to work together with others instead of competing. These projects are sufficiency projects not just because they are small-scale projects, but also because they have collectivist orientations and promote living moderately. Moderation—*khwamporpiang*—also becomes its own criteria for gauging a community's readiness for rights and

development money. In many ways, sufficiency has become the metric for whether or

not a person has the readiness for the "right to have rights."

Sufficiency is invoked broadly in Thai society, but the split in the ways it is used

as a mode of development and as a site of pedagogy for middle and upper class Thais is

revealing of the bifurcations within Thai citizenship that I have been discussing in this

chapter. For example, shoppers found no apparent irony in the "Sufficiency Photo

Exhibition" that was displayed for a time in the fall of 2008 in Siam Paragon, a mall

that also hosts, among other things, a number of stores selling extremely high-end

stereo equipment, a wide variety of *haute couture* shops, and a Lamborghini dealership.

For viewers of the exhibition there was no apparent dissonance between the photos and

their setting. Many felt it was not strange at all to see the images of happy, cooperative

villagers (mostly from provincial Thailand) playing in the water, harvesting rice, and

waving flags, displayed adjacent to goods and services that are completely out of reach

to the vast majority of Thai society. This contradiction is far from inert as the photos

replicated the idealized notion of the village and the hierarchical value of the pedagogy.

They seemed to say that villagers remain happy as long as they can understand

sufficiency. The contradiction is an essential part of the effects of the project because it

enables the production of an uneven force on poor citizens while imbuing rich

consumers with the moral capital embedded in talk of sufficiency.

Another example of this type of contradiction was in the "MOSO"—moderation society—campaign of 2009 and 2010.[35] The MOSO project was formulated in the face of the renewed prospect of borrowing from the IMF due to both the ongoing political struggle in Bangkok and the growing global financial crisis. In taking out 80 billion Baht from the IMF the Abhisit government recalled the images of debt servitude that were evoked in the years that preceded the Thaksin government. In short, many Thais did not happily accept these loans. This became a common talking-point in the Red Shirt's ongoing comparisons between the Abhisit government and the Thaskin administration. The government broadcast a series of public service announcements to promote "moderation" as a way of ending both political conflict and the economic crisis. Although in English the word moderation differs slightly from "sufficiency," in Thai, the concept of moderation also hinges on the key word *por,* "enough." The campaign aimed to inform the public of ways in which they could be happy with what they had and was targeted particularly towards young people through the use of celebrities, websites, and fashion magazines. Advertisements for it were also plastered to the side of the Bangkok Skytrain for a time.

In the September 2009 issue of *Sudsapda* magazine, a Thai magazine sold alongside Thai language versions of Cosmo and Vogue, the MOSO campaign was featured prominently. The issue featured Prime Minister Abhisit and a cadre of celebrities expounding the benefits of moderation while being photographed in the latest fashions by high-end global designers. In one photo, the Prime Minister is

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[35] MOSO refers back to the slang terms, HI-SO and LO-SO. These terms refer to High Society and Low Society respectively. See Sophorntavy 2009 for an excellent discussion of Hi-So, Lo-So and the Thai Middle Class.

photographed next to the iconic words: "Sufficiency, enough to live, enough to eat" (*Sudsapda,* September 1, 2009). In a later interview he says, "It doesn't take a lot of things to make me happy. When I am working I am already happy. I am doing what I love to do. I am doing what I need to be doing. When I am not working, which isn't often, it doesn't take much to make me happy, I like to be with my family and loved ones, listen to music, or read a book" (*ibid).*

Similar to the photo exhibition, the contradiction here is productive. The juxtaposition between the words and the image of the Prime Minister wearing a nicely tailored Boss suit shows that moderation can be brought into alignment with nearly any lifestyle. The notion of moderation is somewhat inert on its own. After all, anyone or anything can be done in moderation. It only becomes significant when read in light of the disproportionate gap in wealth and power that underlies the image of a controversial, Oxford educated, Prime Minister espousing moderation while swaddled in the soft cloth of his tailored suit. In this way the contradictions make "enough" possible for everyone without ever undoing any existing power relations—beyond letting those power relations lie—moderation obscures them in a moralizing didacticism: What is enough for the rich, might be extravagant for the poor, but certainly the poor must know enough too. This is what marks the sufficiency discourse as different from Authenticity. Although it poses as a critique of the capitalist economy, it rarely challenges the market or the social hierarchy already embedded in capitalist Thailand. Indeed, as much as sufficiency is targeted at poor citizens, the wealthy have been able to mobilize it for their own purposes, usually advancing a massive consumer economy.

By pairing high-end consumption with this kind of moralizing on moderation, the image endows wealthy consumers with all the moral capital associated with the sufficiency discourse. Indeed this is the underlying "citizen design" of the sufficiency discourse. While rural areas and poor communities work hard to tend gardens, raise fish in ponds, use less fertilizer, and save collectively, the middle class and wealthy urbanites espouse moderation without disrupting the general contours of the social order. This is related to what anthropologist Andrew Walker in his 2006 New Mandala weblog entry called "Sufficiency Democracy." This is the idea that: "Not only are rural people to be shielded (or excluded) from full and active participation in the national economy but their full and active participation in electoral democracy has been pushed aside in favour of Bangkok's enlightened national leadership. Sufficiency democracy, like sufficiency economy, amounts to keeping rural aspirations firmly in their place."

As will become clear in the next chapters, the urban poor and their aspirations do not fit especially well into the sufficiency discourse either. They inhabit a world deeply enmeshed in the contradictions of capitalism. They cannot remove themselves from the consumer economy nor can they perform good villager-ness appropriately, lacking land to farm and streams to fish. In this formulation the urban poor and their aspirations (durable rights, financial stability, and economic opportunity) are out of place as they signal a desire for inclusion that exceeds the current order and is, therefore, out of step with the notion of "enough."

In order to understand this bind, it is necessary to consider the centrality of debt and credit to urban life and the problem debt and credit pose to the sufficiency discourse. A broad critique of debt was a central feature of the post-crash conversation

about the source of the 1997 fiscal implosion. The government's management of the crisis through the assumption of IMF loans was seen as yoking state sovereignty to international financial institutions. On the local level, the financial crisis spun itself out into the provinces where farmers were already badly leveraged into mono-cropping rice for export and green revolution-style agricultural improvement. Many lost their land and were forced to migrate to urban areas like Khon Kaen's Railway tracks. Given this broad picture, the urban poor and their problematic relationship with land and debt made them the paradigmatic example of the crisis of excess. These villagers in the city were evidence of too much consumer exuberance "trespassing" on land and building "slums" after taking on too much unmanageable debt. People working in the informal credit market are ubiquitous in Thailand's poor communities. My informants identify debt collectors by their full-faced motorcycle helmets (*muakkanawk,* "helmet" and slang for "debt collector"). Residents disapprove of these forms of borrowing, but see them as an inescapable part of being poor, as most people lack access to formal credit markets and are perpetually short on cash.

On the other hand, good debt is equally hard to access. Official mortgages and credit cards became a symbol of a kind of financial citizenship that the poor could not access. As an advertisement for the Kassikorn Bank Visa card proclaimed: "If you have this card, you have rights!" The linkage posed in this advertisement is not an incidental one. The ability to acquire credit, take-on debt, and wield it appropriately does offer significant advantages in the broader marketplace. In this way, these models of financial citizenship conflict with notions of citizenship at the heart of the sufficiency design. As

will become clear later, this set of contradictions forms both an intellectual foundation within Baan Mankong and structures a number of conflicts and critiques of the policy.

Conclusion

The image of the citizen that emerges from the frameworks I examine in this chapter is docile, rational, Buddhist, homogenous, subordinate to the state and the monarch, moderate in his desires, nationalistic, and on his/her way to becoming racially Thai by learning the disciplines of Thai-ness. Where democratic language is used, it is to describe methods of participation and self-rule that support the state and its development project. The citizen is rational and modern, but always in ways that reinforce changing conceptions of Thai-ness. Citizens are vigilant for threats to the state and they are ready and able to report traitors and dissidents. Politics and disagreement are anathemas to this notion of citizen, though such practices have been essential to the imaginaries of resistance movements. Yet, even in the places in which notions of resistance have blossomed, they are always paired with ideas about discipline, responsibility, moderation, and Thai authenticity which link them back to broader normative conceptions of good citizenship.

The villager is in the middle of these frameworks but "not yet" internal to any of them. Thus, those considered villagers (the rural and urban poor, ethnically non-Thai, and spatially distant from Bangkok) are betwixt and between designs and discourses thus requiring interventions to prepare them for citizenship. Villagers have emerged from the wild and dangerous forest but have left the village for the city. Such subjects

are no longer wild, but are now trespassers—villagers out of place, but still "not yet" ready for citizenship.

Chapter 3:

Nation and Community Along the Tracks

*Where Marx himself had fallen under the spell of the discourse of progress, identifying revolutions as "locomotives of world history," Benjamin countered: "Perhaps, it is totally different. Perhaps revolutions are the reaching of humanity traveling in this train for the emergency brake." (*Buck-Morss 1991: 92*)*

Nearly ten kilometers south of Khon Kaen City, small clusters of houses begin to appear along the sides of the train tracks. Almost imperceptibly, these homes, mostly small shacks, become ever denser as the train reaches the heart of the city. This growing density is imperceptible because it occurs alongside the city itself, until the area around the tracks and the city merge into one urban expanse. Yet, as the rest of the city's structures grow both vertically and horizontally, the houses surrounding the tracks become more numerous and more closely packed together.

From the perspective of the train, all of this happens quickly. As the train speeds through the countryside, the surroundings transform into a distinctly urban space. Following a familiar developmental script, rural rice fields give way to concrete and an increasingly dense urban core. The train ride seems to tell both the history of Khon Kaen city—this place—and of the city itself, as the trip narrates the movement from agrarian past to urban future. The city's order and productive density bespeak a claim to capitalist modernity. Yet, the urban also appears to be an inexorable juggernaut, encroaching and eradicating the lives and spaces of the rural. These dual narratives work to produce a stark divide between rural and urban that produces a vision of vulnerable rural villages and villagers. Yet, as Mary Beth Mills points out, this narrative

obfuscates more than it reveals; this space was built by the labor of those intent on

moving between these physical and ideological spaces (2001a; 2001b; 2012).[36]

As the train moves past the southern edge of the city, the buildings grow taller,

with four skyscrapers appearing on the horizon marking the city center. The tallest is

Khon Kaen's monument to the city's pre-1997's economic optimism (Figure 3.1). It is a

30-story, unfinished skeleton of a building-to-be. This provincial cousin of Bangkok's

many "ghost structures" (*Wall Street Journal*, July 27, 2007) has cast its shadow over

downtown Khon Kaen since the height of the nation's economic expansion and

collapse. It is a spectral reminder of the capricious nature of the global economy and the

vicissitudes of global connections and disconnections (Ferguson 1999: 234-236).

Along the Railway tracks, the houses remain staunchly low-rise. Most only

appear as a blurry patchwork of rusted tin roofs visible from above as the train rushes

past. Occasionally, a two-story home pokes above the rest. These houses are not only

below the city's other buildings, but in many cases, lower than the tracks themselves.

Because the space was not backfilled during their construction, the houses are

vulnerable to potential rail accidents and, much more commonly, floods during the

rainy season.

Backyards become visible through the passing train window, revealing a table

and chairs, drying laundry, or maybe some fighting roosters pecking about underneath

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[36] The juxtaposition presented here resonates the complex interrelationship between modernity and modernism as presented by Marshall Berman (1983), which highlights the dislocations of modernity alongside the programmatic nature of modernization. However, I do not propose that there is something called modernity. Rather, I follow others within anthropology who have emphasized its production through discourses of development (Ferguson 1999), relationships with ethnic minorities (Jonsson 2004), and shifting political economies rooted oppositions between the traditional and the modern (Brenner 1998).

woven bamboo cages. On either side of the tracks people sit in the shade, chat with

neighbors, or gather herbs and greens that grow alongside the rail line. In other places,

zones of small industry become apparent to the senses: the smells of glues and motoroil,

the sounds of saws and grinding metal, and the flying sparks of arc welders. Here

ideologies of rural and the urban life abut, destabilizing each other in a narrow corridor

of land.

The city's train station is airy and open, however it lacks the grandeur of the 19th

century Railway palaces, exemplars of modernity's most the mythic qualities (Buck-

Morss 1991: 111). As Buck-Morss argues, those temples of steel and glass captured the

imagination of Walter Benjamin who saw in them both the possibilities and dread of

progress. Designed by an Italian architect at the turn of the century, Bangkok's Neo-

Renaissance style Hua Lampong station evokes these feelings. Khon Kaen's central

station, on the other hand, speaks in a register of bureaucratic regularity and provincial

efficiency. The station's orderly ticket windows and open platform testify to the rational

power of the state, efficiently moving its population and resources to and fro—although

the train's inevitably late arrival undermines these architectural ambitions.

As the train leaves the station heading north, houses quickly return to the sides

of the tracks, enveloping both sides of the train, stacked 3 and 4 deep in places. Out the

windows to the west, small houses abut a massive new shopping mall—Central Plaza

Khon Kaen. This is a far less modest structure than the city's Railway station. It speaks

in the architectural register of the spectacular, serving as a new monument to Khon

Kaen's continuing aspirations at this uncertain moment in the national and global

consumer economy. The mall stands five stories tall. Its massive rear façade provides a

formidable grey backdrop to the small, tin-roofed homes that line the tracks behind it. While its front façade is constructed out of woven steel frames meant to mimic the woven rice baskets still common sites at the northeastern dinner table, the back of the building lacks any of these overtures to "local culture." Instead it is a tribute to the city's global aspirations with signs for Starbucks, Dunkin Donuts, and Boots Cosmetics (figure 3.2).

During the construction of the mall, I spent a great deal of time staring at the building from the window of the United Communities network office, which sits on the east side of the tracks next to a drainage canal. The residents of the five designated settlements that lie in this section of the city—the Friends Community, T5, and the "*Phatthana Sithi* Community" (Zones 1-3)—were uncertain as to how the mall might affect them. Many, especially those in the Friends Community, which lies directly behind the mall, feared that its impending completion would lead directly to their eviction. This hasn't happened, but the mall reaffirmed the value of this centrally located land. Traffic now chokes the access road to the community and many residents now wonder not if, but when, an industrious, well-capitalized local developer will convince the Railway to agree to allow him to turn the community into a parking lot.

At this point on the train ride, the housing along the tracks reaches maximum density as the train crosses Khon Kaen city's second major intersection next to where the *Mittrapap* Friendship highway, crosses the proposed "East-West Corridor."

Figure 3.1: A view of downtown Khon Kaen from top of Central Plaza. The rail line runs through the center of the image. The downtown skyline is visible behind it.

Figure 3.2: The "woven" façade of Khon Kaen Central Plaza is meant to replicate the woven sticky rice baskets endemic to Northeastern Thailand.

The latter highway project is a flagship of the Asian Development Bank (ADB) in the Greater Mekong Subregion. The highway when finished will link Burma, Thailand, Laos, and Vietnam, allowing for the easy movement of goods all the way across mainland Southeast Asia from the Burmese port city of Mawlamyine with the Vietnamese port at Da Nang. When connected to existing routes from Southern China to Thailand, planned ones to India, and a regionally connected high-speed rail line, this intersection becomes a spatial manifestation of an emerging dream of an interconnected Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN). Khon Kaen is geographically central to this vision. This intersection is the midpoint on the 800km east to west journey from each coast.

While the East-West corridor speaks of economies to come, the *Mittrapap* highway is a remnant of what Anthropologist Alan Klima has called the "military gift economy" (2002: 7). Linking Bangkok with the Lao border, the *Mittrapap* Highway was a gift from the United States government to bring development to the region while facilitating the movement of troops and military equipment during its Southeast Asian war. After the war, the road enabled the movement of natural resources, goods, and labor during Thailand's economic boom. This intersection, with its past firmly rooted in that "military gift economy" and its future predicated on an economically integrated, liberalizing, Southeast Asia, is the crossroads of these changing modes of global production.

Ironically, the space wedged between the tracks and these highways is where the densest of the Khon Kaen's railway communities abuts the city's last piece of vacant

Railway land. That land is hotly contested between neighboring communities, local businesses, and Khon Kaen's dueling networks (See Chapter 6). Indeed, such contestations reveal that the homes along the tracks are as much a part of these changing modes of economy as the highways and the railine itself. In this chapter I explore both, showing how these changing modes of production have produced the spaces for settlement and set the terms of contestation occurring over those settlements today.

For the attentive passenger, the trip along the tracks reveals something else: the aspirations of the residents that call the space home. Piles of bricks, tiles, dirt, corrugated aluminum, and empty concrete sacks are material signs of the labors to recreate this space as something new. Signs announcing community boundaries, groups meeting, large construction equipment, as well as the countless businesses, shops, and small industries situated in the spaces along the tracks, demonstrate that it is not only the state and the region that have visions of the future, but also the people who call this narrow strip of land home.

This rail trip, then, functions as an introduction to the relationship between the macro-level and micro-level spatial analysis this chapter provides. Functioning like a blurry Benjaminian montage, the rail trip I describe above brings both the histories and the imagined futures of Thai state and its people into relief against the rapidly changing local, national, and global economic landscapes. From the its beginnings as a collection of villages, its present emergence as a center of regional growth to its future as an international crossroads, the State Railway has, for much of its existence, tied Khon Khon's fate to these changing economic conditions. Indeed, the railway created the

city, not the other way around. These rapidly transforming political economies have in turn structured opportunities and vulnerabilities that brought the residents to the city to build their lives along the tracks. The close connection between these spaces and the fluctuations of economy marks them as sites of both promise and precariousness. I describe the creation of the Railway spaces through three eras:

First, I describe the birth and construction of the Thai Railway system. I show that it was not simply a transportation project, but also a project of government embedded in the Siamese monarchy's visions of progress, security, nationalism, and mobility (some of which I discussed in the previous chapter). The early Siamese monarchs saw the rail network as essential to three goals: securing the nation by asserting Siam as a modern state equal in status to the colonizers moving in on its borders; extending central administration into the provinces; and mobilizing the population by moving them about the territory in the aim of creating nationhood and prosperity. As this chapter argues, the Railway project was successful in producing certain kinds of security and prosperity, but paradoxically was implicated in the expansions of new forms of insecurity and poverty stemming from the uneven economic growth that was part and parcel of rail driven "progress."

Second, I show how the Railway's routes became the pathways along which Thailand's political and economic power coalesced. These routes modernized Siam's mandala by inscribing Bangkok at the center of a new political economy, a modern creation, which nevertheless bears the traces of Stanley Tambiah (1977) notion of "Galactic Polity." Throughout the period of Siamese/Thai political and economic expansion, the railway lines asserted Bangkok's authority over other cities in the region

by routing goods and people away from the hinterlands through the capital at their

center. Yet the tracks themselves produced new cities, like Khon Kaen.

Just as the tracks were critical to producing these new cities, so too were the

spaces directly around the tracks as spaces for new urban migrants as they settled there

seeking to work either directly for the Railway authority or in the ancillary sectors

associated with the railway induced urbanization. These settlers along the tracks helped

establish and expand the cities that dotted the Railway's map. And while Bangkok

emerged unrivaled as Thailand's center (thanks in part to the success of the Railway),

these new urban centers are cultivating politics beyond the boundaries of the capital.[37]

Finally, I turn a closer eye on how the spaces directly surrounding the tracks

became zones of settlement. Lacking any housing policy in the provinces, these spaces

became what political scientist Helen Chiu's (1985) study of Thai housing policy calls

"de facto public housing." This role of de facto housing was closely connected to the

state centered political economy of the era as new residents saw state land as reliably

vacant, associated with royal sovereignty, safe from eviction, and frequently managed

through local forms of patronage conducted by state bureaucrats. After the 1997

economic collapse this spatial regime changed. The State Railway of Thailand became

the target of increasing pressure to privatize in order to fix its debt problem.

"Community" emerged from the wreckage of the post-crash economy as a mode of

politics and a new technology of development to administer the spaces along the tracks.

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[37] Lefebvre's (1991) insights are important throughout this chapter. I draw inspiration from his notion that space itself is a social product and that as a social product its production is deeply embedded in particular modes of political economy, especially capitalism. Moreover, space was not simply wrapped up in macro-economic shifts, but bound to the everyday experiences of hegemony (1991:5; See also Hart 2000, 2004; Harvey 2006; 2010).

Railway Progress, Railway Government

Few projects evoke the macro-level fantasies of territorial mastery and the micro-imaginaries of human transformation the way that the railroads did. Throughout the 19th and early 20th centuries globally, railways were a key part of the imaginary of a regularized, efficient modern state tied to subjects prepared to both make that modernity and be disciplined by it. Even, perhaps especially, where territories were dominated by colonial powers, the railway was envisioned as both a technology of government and social improvement, allowing for the deployment of new forms of territorial control and the implementation of programs of government and improvement upon a population now able to move through unified colonial space. As historian Gyan Prakash points out in the Indian case, "The health and vigor of the empire was now sought in transforming the territory with technics, in instilling values of rationality, precision, calculability, speed, and productivity in the population," (1999: 168). For the British, the railway was an essential part of the production of both a new governable space and population in India (see also Aguiar 2011).

Railways are intimately bound up in these colonial and national fantasies, yet close inspections of the forms of social life they produced reveals their limitations as a mechanism of improvement. As anthropologist Laura Bear points out, "Railways were mesmerizing because they appeared to materialize individual liberty and social progress, but ultimately this promise wasn't realized in India or elsewhere" (2007: 4). Bear argues that railways never lived up to their promises of progress, order, movement, and freedom, but were constitutive of other processes, like reshaping economies,

expanding bureaucratic power, and re-instantiating older social hierarchies and inequalities.

As will become clear in the case of Thailand, the railway was an important mechanism for creating a national territory and national economy. Underpinning each of these productions were rationalites of government, development, and improvement achieved through technological unification. Similar to Bear's description, the Thai railway was billed as a mechanism of national progress helping the population come to know each other, but it did so through the same internally variegated order that I described in the previous chapter. The railway did not merely mirror this order so much as enable its production. The economic transformations initiated by the Railway followed (and produced) the spatio-temporal order that positioned Isan (the northeast) as distant, troubled, and in need of development—Keyes' Northeastern problem (1967). The region appeared backwards and cut off from the center, thus seeming to demand both integration and intervention through technology in order to open the region and its people to improve them.

As outright symbols of progress, railways have fallen on hard times. Although a revived interest in high-speed rail projects might rehabilitate the technology and the optics of state- and region-craft associated with it, in Thailand, the aging tracks and rail stock, frequent disruptions in service, and increasingly common derailments show that railways are no longer the icons of progress like those invoked and feared by Marx and Benjamin. Rather, the nation's railway now sits at the center of a "historical problem" in which the railways become increasingly obsolete and unprofitable demanding both heavy subsidy and investment. Yet, the magnitude of the technological investment

when combined with diminishing numbers of passengers, only leads to further deterioration. States unable to make the required to improve the system *seem* bound to seek private investment (See "SRT Master Plan" 1993).[38]

The changing fate of the railway accompanied a transformation in notions of progress in general. As notions of state-driven development garnered challenges from numerous sides (both left and right), notions of development shifted towards producing market-based economies on the one hand and participatory, small-scale development on the other. This chapter follows this trajectory both economically and politically, tracking notions of development. Moving from the Royal Railway of Thailand towards CODI, the Baan Mankong project, and Khon Kaen's emergent community networks, and local networks is an analytical effort to draw an increasingly narrow focus along the tracks while highlighting how these changes in ideas produced new kinds of spaces. By juxtaposing the history of the railway with the emergence of the Baan Mankong project, I bring questions of progress, security, development, and the limits of modernity as constitutative of an abiding vision of the good life into new relief. This chapter, in addition to posing a set of specific arguments about space, the SRT, and the railway communities that grew up there, also traces the contours of in these changing ideas of "development" and "progress" and the economic, social, and spatial conditions and effects related to them.

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[38] This "historical problem" reflects the underlying issues facing railways amidst liberalization. I contextualize this logic more deeply within Thailand's liberalizing economy later in this chapter.

The Routes of Prosperity (1890-1935)

> *We are convinced that, to a very large and important degree, the material progress and prosperity of a people usually depends upon its means of transport. When there are good means of transport, people can travel easily and quickly over long distances. The population will be in enlarged. Commerce, the foundation of the country's wealth will prosper. We have therefore been diligently striving to build a railroad befitting the strength of Our country.*
> --King Chulalongkorn, March 9, 1892 (quoted in Holm 1977: 61-62).

King Chulalongkorn's remarks (above) at the "sod turning ceremony" for the Royal Railway of Thailand marked the beginning of a new era for the Siamese Monarchy (Figure 3.3). This era saw the expansion of the railway and the establishment of the state's contemporary borders. It also ushered in end of the absolute monarchy and creation of the Thai state. The railway figures in all of these stories. In particular, the railway played an important role in constructing and assuring that Bangkok would be able to assert its status as the state's capital both economically and politically.

As I pointed out in the previous chapter, the Siamese monarchy, faced with colonial encroachment on both its eastern, western, and southern borders, needed to consolidate their rule in order to maintain sovereignty over the territory, thus, extending the power of the state into the provinces became crucial. As historian David Frederick Holm discusses, the uplands regions of Mainland Southeast Asia were sparsely populated in contrast with the lowlands areas being home to the largest population density. Prior to the railway, travel overland was accomplished through networks of trails and on the various navigable river tributaries. Holm points out that in spite of this difficulty there was trade in goods between upland urban centers like Chiang Mai,

Luang Prabang, and Yunan in southern China. The picture Holm paints of the Kingdom outside of Bangkok was that it was only loosely tied to the capital, via local feudal lords and military conquest. Yet, he points out that regional small towns and cities clearly had some commercial relationships even amidst the difficulty of overland travel (1977: 17-19). The provincial administrative reforms successfully reconfigured the Siamese territory by assuring that these relationships were redirected through the capital in Bangkok and not through adjacent colonial cities like Saigon, Annam, or Rangoon. This new configuration of administrative power could only have occurred through the extension of rail lines that facilitated the movement of goods and administrative officials throughout the territory, forging closer ties between regional and Bangkok-based authorities.[39]

Beyond forging actual ties across the territory, the railway project transformed the region's economy routing the entire Siamese economy through Bangkok. Historian Ichiro Kakizaki argues that the Railway was central to the Thai state's economic growth both pre- and post-World War II. For example, by 1935 Bangkok dominated both the import and the export market for all products moving into and out of northern Thailand. As Ichiro puts it:

> It is unlikely that Bangkok's trade dominance would have eventuated if land transport to Saigon and Annam had been improved because that between Bangkok and the Northeast was quite poor. As France improved the navigation on the Mekong in the 1900s, trade with Saigon increased. If French plans to construct a railway to substitute transportation on the Mekong had gone ahead it is doubtful whether Bangkok would have retained this region as a hinterland. (Kakizaki 2005: 221-222)

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[39] This process had already begun by the middle of the 19th century with the monarchy signing the Bowering Treaty, which forged uneven trade deals with the British and abolished commercial monopolies (except on Opium). Holm argues that the Bowering treaty laid the groundwork for the conversion of Siam into an "informal colony" (1977: 27).
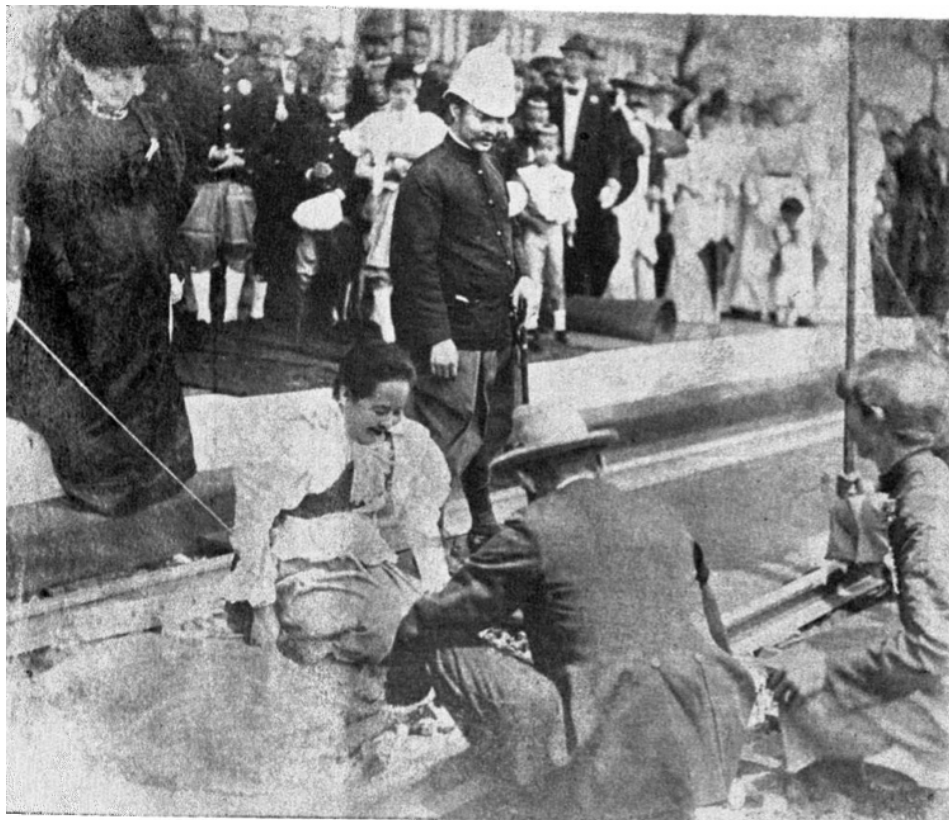
Figure 3.3: King Chulalongkorn and Queen Saovabha attend the bolt fixing ceremony
for the Bangkok-Auytaya line 1897. Source: Royal State Railway of Thailand 50th
Anniversary Book (1947)

The Railway tracks became the network through which the nation's economy and its political order would develop. In addition to positioning Bangkok to become the region's urban and commercial powerhouse, the Siamese monarchs used the railway to physically extend its reach into its then distant hinterlands. Moreover, the Railway was critical to preventing French incursions into the Northeast, whose population was ethnically much closer to the population on the right bank of the Mekong in the Lao speaking parts of French Indochina. The implication of Kakizaki's analysis is that the development of the railway network was not simply part of a fantasy of an interconnected kingdom, but the lynchpin that allowed the Siamese monarchs to extend their administrative control, to economically integrate (and dominate) the rest of the territory, and to keep foreign powers at arm's length. This history of the State Railway marks the provisional nature of Siamese hegemony, demonstrating the importance of rail technology in deepening its tenuous dominance by forging close political and economic links between Bangkok and the rest of the region.

The Northeast was Thailand's first region to be opened to rail travel. In 1900, 10 years after the first sod was turned on the project, King Chulalongkorn traveled by train from Bangkok to Khorat. This area was already beset by incursions from the French starting in 1893 that eventually resulted in the 1907 demarcation of the borders along the Mekong with French Indochina—the French occupying the river's right banks, with the Siamese dominating the left.

In the speech he made before the trip, Chulalongkorn remarked:

I hope that this railway line…will have the same effect on the
development of the activity and industry of my people as railways had in

other countries. I also hope that more frequent intercourse between them will strengthen their love for each other and for their country and thus encourage their king to the extension of railways to other parts of the Siam. (quoted in Holm 1977: 98-99).

Here the railway is envisioned as more than a means of economic growth and administrative power. It is imagined as a vehicle of nation-making and technology of government central to improving the population. Chulalongkorn's speech shows how the rail system was conceived of as a mechanism forging the oblique ties of nationhood on the ground while also pushing the Siamese population into lives of "activity and industry," presumably taking them out of the lassitude fostered by subsistence agriculture on the new Siamese frontier. The railway was intended not only to route the economy through Bangkok, but also as a way of making people recognize themselves as part of the same nation (see Anderson 1991), which was centered in that capital and governed by new norms promoted by the monarchs and ministers housed there.[40]

This vision of extending the national brotherhood through the railway was also part of a *realpolitik* that was deeply attuned to the dual threats of separatism and colonial domination. At least initially these threats, and for the monarchs, the frightening implications of the relationship between them, were key drivers in rail expansion. The threat of separatism in particular, came to fruition not two years after the railway made its initial in roads into the Northeast with "millenarian revolts" springing up across the Northeast (Keyes 1977). Anthropologist Charles Keyes

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[40] This quote echoes the relationship between progress and nation-building that Walter Benjamin, researching his unfinished *Arcades Project*, found in the language of Saint-Simonian Michel Chevalier, "One can compare the zeal and enthusiasm which civilized nations today give to the construction of railroads with that which occurred some centuries ago with the erection of churches…Indeed, it can be demonstrated that the word religion comes from *religare* [to bind together]…the railroads have more affinity than one would have thought with the spirit of religion. There has never existed an instrument with so much power for…uniting peoples separated form one another." (quoted in Buck-Morss 1991: 91).

describes the causes of these "holy man"-led revolts as being tied to poverty, dissatisfaction with the emerging administrative system, and, what Keyes calls, "ideological" differences, which saw the people of Isan as "stupid" and "ignorant." Keyes argues that these differences inspired the next 30 years of nationalist- based education in the region (1977: 300).   Moreover, these encounters can also be said to be foundational in the creation of a new discourse of space and time that imagined the dissident and disaffected residents of the Northeast as temporally backwards and in need of a nationalist development and civilizing projects if they were to catch up.

Alongside these decisions, the newly formed Royal Railways Department had extensive debates about track gauges, which, Holm points out, were representative of concerns over creating a multi-polar economy that linked provincial capitals with other regional powers like Moulmien in Burma or Saigon in Vietnam. The early political economy of the Thai state demonstrates the way the rail project sat at the nexus of these pressures on the Siamese monarchs on the one hand deeply concerned with the potential for internal insurrection from dissident and ethnically distinct provinces and on the other trying to develop protective ties with foreign powers while simultaneously trying to maintaining their distance from the French on the left bank of the Mekong river (1977: 45).

The Royal Railway was largely successful in accomplishing these political and economic goals. By 1935, with the railway well established in both the North and Northeast, rice exports began to increase rapidly. Similarly in the Northeast rail travel stimulated increased paddy production and settlement throughout the region. By the late 1930s, following the reach of the railline to Khon Kaen, the city had become a center

for rice milling (Pasuk and Baker 2002: 23). Beyond the immediate reaches of the tracks, the train helped expand livestock production and labor. As Pasuk and Baker point out, the rail network, led to the rise of itinerant merchants and an increase in migratory labor to Bangkok (*ibid*).

The rail network also transformed the actual spatial/temporal landscape of the kingdom. Prior to the construction of the railway it took 11 days to get from Khon Kaen to Bangkok, by 1932 it took just two. The time to reach the nation's second largest city, Chiang Mai, was cut from a staggering 42 days in 1900 to 1.5 in 1932 (Kazikaki 2005: 156). These space-timetransformations underscored the importance of the railway as a nation-builder, helping to create a sense of "homogeneous national temporality" (Anderson 1991), which eased commercial transport while quite literally drawing the regions closer to the administrative center in Bangkok.[41][42]

In this way, the rail network updated the old Galactic Polity's center-focused arrangement of power. Tambiah argues that many Southeast Asian kingdoms were spatially arranged in "center oriented Galactic schemes" which conceived of the territory as a "variable space, control over which diminished as royal power radiated from a center" (1977: 74-75). That center composed the heart of a "mandalic arrangement" with the king at the center and an outer circle of provinces controlled by princes or governors, which were again surrounded by tributary polities that were more

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[41] Wolfgang Schivelbush's *Railway Journey* a beautiful discussion of the Railway's "space-time annihilation" in Europe (1977: 33-44).

[42] Even as Anderson helps to identify nations as conceived of as "sociological organisms moving calendrically through homogeneous, empty time" (1991" 26) the Thai case also recalls Homi Bhaba's insight that subalterns and minorities often "speak betwixt and between times and places" (1994: 226). The Thai Railway case shows how homogeneous temporalities emerge adjacent to and amidst existing heterogeneous spatio-temporal landscapes. Beyond this the case demonstrates that the effort to partake in that homogeneity is often were much of that fracturing takes place.

independent still (*ibid*). The railway both re-enacted this arrangement spatially and transformed it by enabling the Siamese monarchs to overcome the effects of distance on their power. By linking the capital to its provinces in such an efficient manner administration, labor, and capital were literally routed through Bangkok. The linear branches of the rail network took the place of the rings of power in the previous arrangement. Through the train tracks, Bangkok's dominance became etched into the territory (see Figure 3.4).

This space-time compression reinforced emerging spatio-temporal discourses and flows of labor and capital (see also Schivelbusch 1977). Bangkok became unquestionably central, while spinning the hinterlands out—spatially and temporally— from the capital. During this early period, roadways were intentionally underdeveloped because the royal government were concerned about potential challenges to the railway that might be associated with increasing automobile traffic, which was unprofitable to the state (Kazikaki 2005:120). In Khon Kaen, for example, the railway arrived in 1933 while there were still only gravel roads linking it to the next largest city, Nakhon Ratchasima until 1960 (Somrudee 1991: 175). The Siamese state makers created a transportation system with roads used only as feeders, leading to water and railway transport lines.

Until the end of the first period of the Royal Railway's expansion around 1930, Siamese monarchical preference train travel over road travel primed the cities on the rail route to become economic centers. Indeed, as Kazikaki's analysis demonstrates, the entire railline emerged as the privileged routes of early Siam's prosperity. Yet, this space-time compression was only afforded to the areas adjacent to the tracks. The

underdevelopment of roadways meant that trips from places off the rail lines were still

arduous and time consuming. This had the effect of reinforcing the notion of distant

hinterland still disconnected from the center, even as the center was simultaneously

moving closer to the hinterlands.

The spaces through which the train traveled also changed dramatically. These

transformations occurred at both macro and micro scales: New cities popped up along

their lines, which became new outposts of economic activity and settlement and the

spaces surrounding the tracks themselves also transformed. The Khon Kaen

municipality was founded in 1935, two years after the rail line arrived. The city

remained the northeastern most terminus of the network from 1933 until 1941

(Somrudee 1991: 176).

The town expanded in direct relationship to the railway (from the 1962 city

plan):

> In the town of Khon Kaen…the people's livelihood is similar to that of a
> large village settlement. The majority of its inhabitants are farmers,
> whose fields are nearby the town. The railway, which passes by the town
> and has daily transport for both passengers and goods brings to town a
> few transport-related economic activities. Hence, the likelihood of the
> people in town is higher than that of its surrounding villages. (from
> *Phang Changwat Khon Kaen 2525* (1962), quoted in Somrudee 1991:
> 177).

The city's plan was designed around the train tracks. The streets were named with

spatial reference to the rail line—Front Street (*thannon na muang)*, Center Street

(*thannon klang muang*), and Rear Street (*thannon lang muang*) were all named with

respect to their relation with one another and to the rail station. Government buildings,

rice mills, the courthouse, commercial banks, hotels and saw mills were all built in close proximity to the rail line.

What Somrudee doesn't mention is that much of this land was under the control of the Railway authority. Given the railway's strategic importance, the Royal Railway of Thailand (and later the State Railway of Thailand) was a privileged organization. Even after the department was brought under the broader purview of the Ministry of Transportation it maintained direct control over its large landholdings. The Railway's authority over the land allowed for the easy movement of construction equipment and labor. It gave them the right to clear the land, build and maintain the tracks, and use local lumber resources to fire the steam-powered locomotives. Later the zone around the tracks became a special public safety area left vacant for at least forty meters on either side of the tracks to prevent accidents.

Ultimately the land remained under the jurisdiction of the SRT authority and not the cities through which the tracks passed. In this way, the rail-line became a seam of special government in the urban fabric subject to alternate authorities and different sets of regulations emerging from the Railway authority and not local provincial or municipal authorities. This special governmental status when combined with the land's proximity to forms of labor in the center of the city made it especially attractive to urban migrants who began to flood the city during the next fifty years.
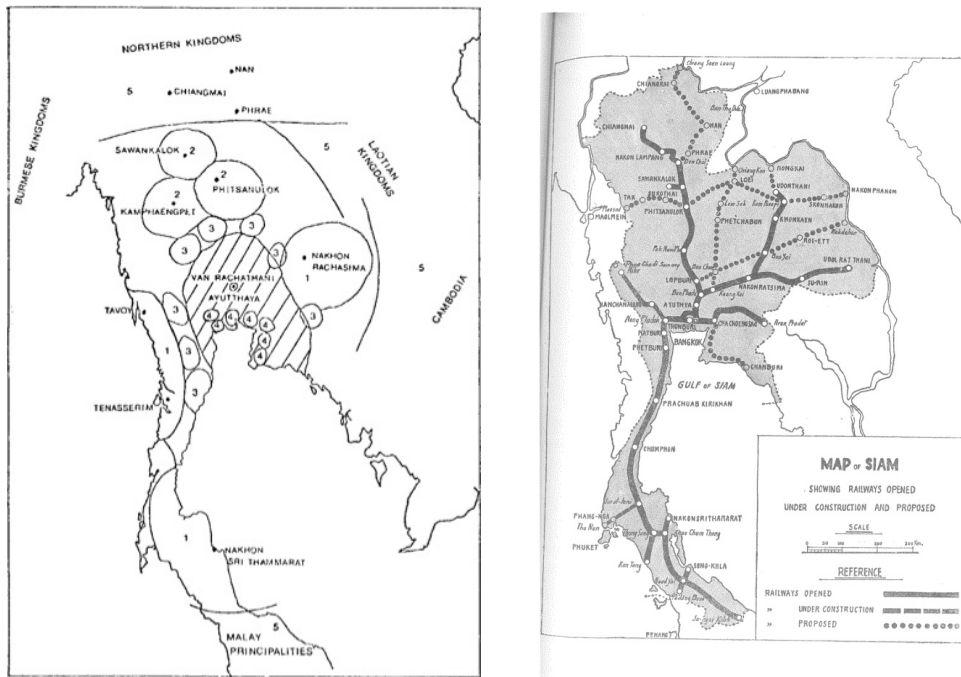
Figure 3.4: Left: Stanley Tambiah's representation of the mandalic form of the pre-modern Siamese "Galactic Polity." Right: The Railway's Bangkok focused, modernized mandala. Sources: Tambiah (1977: 77), State Railway of Thailand 50th Anniversary (1947).

Boom and Bust (1950-1997)

In 1951 the Royal State Railway of Thailand became the State Railway of Thailand. This was a subtle change but it signified a broad shift in the nascent Thai state. The new agency maintained its dominion over its vast land holdings—vestages of the distribution of land under the absolute system—while also gaining some bureaucratic autonomy. Emerging from a period of Japanese occupation during World War II, the Thai state began rebuilding its infrastructure, and in particular, its rail lines. However, in the 1960s, the state's interest in transport shifted from the rail heavy strategy that dominated the first half of the 20th century to an increasing investment in the country's highway system. With the help of the US government cold war investment, the state began constructing a large highway system that would become the focus of the nation's transportation strategy for the next 30 years. Yet, even that highway system was conditioned by the early rail project as many of the nation's major highways essentially parallel the rail lines.

Throughout the middle of the 20th century the railway and its profits expanded alongside the nation's cold war induced economic growth. By the late 1950s and early 1960s under the leadership of the Field Marshall Sarit Thanarat, Thailand began crafting a series of economic development plans that sought to chart the nation's economic growth. These plans, written in the developmentalist language of the time, were also potent efforts at continuing to secure the state. Shifts in the infrastructure plan from railway development to road development were tied to new security efforts, "Roads were designed to provide access for government officials and workers in

'insecure areas.' When the government decided which regions would receive development funding, priority was given to areas that seemed to pose security problems" (Thak 2007: 155). The close relationship between state security and economic development was evident in the new transport routes and the extensive efforts targeted at the Northeast, which continued to be seen as a dissident region and home to a large number of communist party supporters located on fragile borders. The region also received special attention as it became the launching point for US operations in Southeast Asia and was home to three US military bases. Securing the Northeast and improving its transportation system was an imperative that took on both important national and international significance.

Even as the nation's infrastructure development turned towards expanding its road system, the 1950s and 1960s were times of rebuilding and expansion for the railway. US investment and the escalating conflicts in Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia had important effects for the growth and expansion of the Thai economy. Historian of the Thai rail system, Richard Ramaer, points out that between 1950 and 1964 the amount of goods trafficked doubled from 2,070,000 tons annually, to 4, 216,000 tons. Both freight and passenger traffic continued to grow more than 70 percent during the 1960s (2009: 107).

During the 1970s regional urbanization began to increase with, according to the ministry of the interior, the Northeast's cities having some of the highest population growth rates in the country (Kermel- Torrès 2004: 50). In Khon Kaen, for example, the city grew from an (official) population of 19,591 in 1960 to a population of 115,515 in 1983 (Somrudee 1991: 180). Given the nature of the housing registration system, which

counted people according to their official home registration site, it is reasonable to assume that the actual number is almost certainly larger.

This growth took place along the national skeletal frame of the rail network. Though by the 1980s, road traffic had increased, the road system basically paralleled the "tree-shaped" transport network (Kakizaki 2005: 134). In this sense, the initial goals of the railway's founders had come to fruition. Though the SRT had become increasingly debt-laden, it had accomplished its initial goals of linking the "nation" and allowing for the movement of the population and the state's administrative bodies more easily. Moreover, the network established a path dependency, ordering of the national economy through Bangkok, which became unrivaled as the nation's economic and political core.

By the 1980s, the State Railway of Thailand's fortunes began to change. With the road system becoming more established—Ramaer documents an increase of over 2,300 km of roads and highways in the five years between 1960 and 1965—the financial situation for the SRT had become more difficult (Ramaer 2009: 107). With a well-established highway system it became more difficult for the SRT to continue to gain a share of the transportation traffic. The SRT attempted to turn the situation around by modernizing its cars—moving from steam power to diesel—but that was enough to turn the tide in its favor. Even as the nation's GDP grew on average 7.25% per year between the 1970s and 1990s (higher at the later half of that period), the Railway's share of passengers and freight began to decline in comparison with steadily increasing road and air traffic *(SRT Master Plan* 1993).

By the beginning of the 1990s the SRT had fallen deeply into what it, following the World Bank, called "the Historic Railway Problem." This "problem," as the SRT master plan defined it, was as follows: Railways, being at the vanguard of nation building, occupied privileged positions among state-run enterprises. With the expansion of trucking and buses the rail network began to lose its monopoly and, in turn, lose money. According to the authors of the 1993 State Railway of Thailand master plan, the Railway was not able to adapt either its cost structure or its labor structure to help improve its financial situation. "Railways which were once large money-makers are now put at a distinct competitive disadvantage, by having to offer services at rates less than cost (*SRT Master Plan* 1993: 3). With no money to invest in their services and little room to change their operating structure, the railway, the authors argue, begins its "cycle of doom"—a term the SRT report borrowed from a 1990 assessment of need to reposition railways created by sn international consulting—in which services are cut, and maintenance is deferred, leading to worse service and decrepit equipment. The SRT report argues that this convergence causes the railway to become dependent on state subsidies in order to stay in operation while simultaneously sliding further into debt. In short, the picture presented by the 1993 master plan is grim leaving few options but to privatize, resonating with the commonsense (neoliberal) logic of the time.

According to the authors of the master plan, the financial situation seemed to require some level of institutional privatization, though just how much is never made completely clear in that document. Indeed, the way in which the plan is worded echoes the gingerly worded *Seventh National Economic and Social Development Plan 1992-1996*, which argues that new forms of public private partnerships should increase with

regards to state owned enterprises (NESDB 1992: 7, 14, 65-74). Both there and in the *Railway Master Plan* the signals of a move towards liberalization are found throughout: decreasing tariffs, balancing books, market based pricing, and greater accountability, all subtle bywords for this change. The degree to which these plans are peppered with these catchphrases demonstrates that the age of centralized, state driven development was very much in question. Yet, and this is critical in the Thai case, the report does not enunciate what is to become of the massive bureaucracy behind the state-enterprise system, nor does it suggest how management deal with the very powerful union of railway workers.

The SRT's land holdings—the agency's patrimony from its days as an arm of the monarchy—thus moved to the fore. Curiously they are mentioned only briefly in the 1993 report. While the bulk of the report is devoted to finding a balance between privatization and the desire to maintain some amount of state control over rail service, the agency's real estate should be dealt with completely separately from other services (1993:45). No mention is made of the extensive settlement along the tracks. The real estate is only mentioned as an asset and as something to be wary of so as not to include it in broader analysis of whether the railroad's services are profitable or not.

This description of the Railway's real estate is curious but productive. It is curious because, as I will discuss in greater detail in the following section, the land was already extensively settled. It is productive because it allows the land to appear as though it is simply a vacant asset. By not addressing the settlement issue the 1993 Master Plan avoids the question of what to do with the people who live on the land, allowing the land to appear as an available solution that will at once, balance the

agency's books while maintaining state control over the service. This balance was appealing because it managed to appeal to nationalists who felt that the state should not lose control over this historically important enterprise, to the large and powerful railway workers union who have fought privatization as well, and, finally, to the large bureaucracy in charge of the Railway, wary of losing its power. The crucial effect of the report is that the land becomes revalued by categorizing it as vacant. By ignoring the existence of the settlements the land is simply seen as an asset owned by the Railway, and as a ready solution to the agency's growing budget problems.

Railway Driven Urbanization

On a local level the train was a critical engine of provincial urbanization. Though there were older population centers throughout Isan, the rail line bolstered emerging urban centers like Khon Kaen. Throughout the Northeast during much of the first part of the 20th century a system of informal land claims known as *jap jong* was prominent. Local officials encouraged this system of settlement, enabling informal land claims through cultivation (Lohmann 1993: 181; Kamala 1997: 199; Pasuk and Baker 2002: 84). Although this system has been documented in rural areas, according to older residents along the tracks, small *jap jong* settlements popped up all over the municipality as well. In particular, such settlements were common near ponds, lakes, and wetlands where people had access to water. As the city grew, however, it was these *jap jong* settlements that were the most vulnerable. The areas with the weakest claims to the land were pushed out by private developments forcing their residents to find new places to build homes. This oral history of the city is marked by a logic of

appropriation, settlement, eviction, displacement, and resettlement in which migrants would settle an area and later be evicted when land values of a particular area increased.

For residents of displaced settlements around the city as well as new residents, the spaces surrounding the train tracks became a solution to this problem. The forty meters on either side of the tracks was state-owned and, at least early on, reliably vacant due to the Railway's public safety policy. Prior to the 1970s there was no national housing policy, and there were no public housing programs for low-income citizens until the 1980s. Even then the majority of these projects were in Bangkok. Indeed, as Political Scientist Helen Chiu's (1985) study of Thai housing policy argues that squatting and eviction like I describe above were so common during the 1950s onward that they constituted a "de facto" policy during this period of rapid growth. Considering there was no provincial housing policy until the passage of both the Baan Mankong and Baan Ua Athorn policies under the Thaksin government, squatting in and around the city and especially along the tracks in Khon Kaen was a critical practice among new urban migrants attempting to navigate the nation's rapidly changing socio-economic terrain. Moreover, the very common practice of local officials collecting rent mark the settlements founded during this period as an ambiguous, but quasi-official form of public housing policy.

According to my informants, railway laborers settled Khon Kaen's oldest railway communities. These laborers, who cut and carried wood to feed the train's steam-powered engines, settled near the tracks without much interference from the agency. By 1969, however the SRT had switched over to diesel as part of its modernization initiative and those jobs ceased to exist. Some of these laborers who had

initially settled in another area of the city, relocated to a decommissioned part of the

tracks and founded the city's oldest formal railway community. Early on, residents lived

in this zone, known in Thai as the *tong chang*, or "elephant stomach" due to its

triangular shape where the rail cars used to turn around. As former workers, they lived

there at the largesse of the local Railway authority.

Other parts of the tracks were settled in similar ways. Residents and whole

communities that had been displaced from other parts of Khon Kaen moved to the

tracks. These internally displaced citizens were joined by gradual individual land

occupations by individuals and families. In some cases, new migrants would purchase

land rights from farmers who had agricultural leases along the tracks. Along other parts

of the tracks, people simply moved in and built a small hut or shack under the cover of

darkness.

As one informant described:

> During the day you'd gather whatever materials you needed—
> eucalyptus, vinyl signs, old zinc for your roof—to build a temporary
> house (*ban chua khrao*). Once it got dark and there would be no more
> officials from the SRT in the area, you'd build (*klang khun mai mi
> jaonati rotfai kor sang ban dai*). In the morning, what could they do
> (*thorn chao khao ja tham arai*)? Sometimes it took them weeks to know
> you were there, sometimes they'd know right away and they might try to
> evict you (*bang khrang khao mai ruu dangtae lai wan, bang krhang
> khao ru lae payayam lairu*). You could also pay-off an official or maybe
> one would come around periodically and collect 'rent' (*bang khrang mi
> jaonati long mai kep kha chao*). This was the case along most of the
> tracks (*ni khu ruang nai tuk chumchon nai rimtang rotfai*). But once
> communities started to expand the officials couldn't do anything (*wela
> chumchon kaiyai jaonati mai dai tham array*)."

Although evictions were possible during this period, the practice of bribes kept

such realities at bay. I encountered similar narratives among most residents I

interviewed. Difficult living conditions and roughshod housing were the norm during this time. The area around the tracks was prone to flooding. Much of Khon Kaen was comprised of wetlands. The city was backfilled as it was constructed, leaving the unfilled area around the tracks lower than the area surrounding it. Additionally, because the residents built the settlements around the tracks themselves, they lacked connections to the official drainage system and flooded frequently. A friend fondly recalled the area around his house being completely flooded and jumping from "stone to stone like a frog" on his way to school. As time passed, however, these conditions improved but the area became marked by dense permanent housing and fixed settlements.

The city's transition from semi-rural to urban was frequently described with a hint of nostalgia (as my informant did above). Many spoke about the way the city was surrounded by forests, how it used to be cooler and shadier, and at night it was quiet. Yet, in spite of the difficult conditions, the informal systems of rent collection (both by legitimate lease holders and by bureaucrats), the implied or willful ignorance of settlement by local bureaucrats, the rapid pace of settlement, the plentiful land along the tracks, and the limited pressure on the Railway to do anything else with the land, this period is recalled as more secure than the current era. The state-centered nature of the economy at this earlier moment marked this kind of settlement on the land as a rather safe alternative to settling elsewhere in the city. Nevertheless, this kind of settlement still was "de-facto" public housing and not official public housing. So although the state did not have any real interest in evictions, they were still a possibility.

There were some limited efforts to secure more meaningful rights, however. The community settled in the "elephant's stomach" managed to gain a rental agreement with the local Railway authority and did so for nearly 12 years. This was the first agreement of this kind, setting the standard for the battles over occupancy that would come. Rental rights were always the normative terms of negotiation between the Railway and the residents along the tracks, not land ownership. The "elephant's stomach" community locally negotiated its lease and consistently paid rent, thinking that the money was going to the central Railway office. However, the payments were simply pocketed by a local official. When the central Railway office found out about this arrangement, they canceled the agreement.

Though this example is the largest example of this kind of land fraud, stories like this are common on a smaller scale. Small bribes and patronage were essential to the survival of the railway communities in the early days. These bribes resonate with the notions of *kin muang* bureaucratic administration and of citizenship embedded in the practice of *jap jong* land occupation. At the heart of each practice is the notion that all of the land is the king's and that improving the land gives one rights to it, just as administering it gives one the right to extract rent from settlers. This was a common practice of land settlement in rural Thailand's frontier order. In these earlier stories, bribes and patronage were not corruptions of that system, but rather endemic to it, reflecting the normal order rather than a perversion of it. In contemporary accounts of these arrangements, there is no small amount of indignation or irony apparent in the narrative, for example calling bribes "rent." That irony, however, is a contemporary critique of the old order. It has emerged and resonates in the current moment

particularly strongly because of the widespread feeling that those rents were not honored as part of deeper claims to the land.

These stories also highlight the degree to which the SRT land operated under its own regime of legal conditions within the municipality. Though the communities along the tracks are located within the municipality of Khon Kaen and its adjacent sub-districts, there was little local government officials could officially do on the Railway land. Due to the peculiarities of the Railway history that I outlined previously, and the way in which state agencies—in particular those that were inaugurated under the auspices of the early monarchy—are both service providers and land owners, the municipalities and districts through which the train passes have no authority over the land around the tracks. The paradox here is that the spatial arrangement that made the land available for settlement also marked it as a special zone within the city that fell outside the municipality's authority therefore giving it limited influence over the Railway's land-use decisions. The Khon Kaen city government had no ability to arrange rental agreements or to sanction new construction of infrastructure or sanitation projects along the tracks.

Until the late 1990s, residents along the tracks lacked access to city services like electricity, water, and sanitation. The ability to receive city services was contingent on having a permanent house registration number (*tabian ban taworn*). Without a housing registration number it was not possible to attend school, receive any state services, and, more recently, receive government health care benefits. Before the communities became organized, the Khon Kaen municipality did not give out temporary registration numbers and, because the homes along the tracks were considered illegal, they were ineligible

for permanent numbers. Water was frequently purchased from local merchants and electricity was arranged via links from other private citizens who charged for their usage—a practice that continues in many of newer settlements. City officials did, from time to time, move goods to residents—particularly as they became more established as official administrative "communities" towards the end of the1980s. But this kind of aid, like the rental agreements and land sales of the period, was unofficial. Even still, early projects did have some effect—paving roads in more central communities and, in some cases, creating drainage ditches that directed sewage into adjacent canals.[43]

NGO activists began working in the Railway settlements and poor urban communities throughout Khon Kaen city in 1994. One NGO described the "discovery" of the settlements along the tracks as something of a surprise, realizing, for the first time, that there were slums outside of Bangkok. Of course the communities were hardly new, however from the end of receiving either NGO attention or becoming sites of opposition, their discovery was a turning point. The encounter with Khon Kaen's growing urban poverty led to a transition in strategy among some NGOs who shifted from working primarily on rural development projects towards a sustained engagement with urban communities throughout Thailand. Beyond Bangkok, the idea of urban development was essentially unaddressed, thus this move away from rural work implied the transference of norms, expertise, and organizing practices from rural settings to urban ones with people facing very different conditions.[44]

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[43] Bello et al. describe a similar dynamic in Bangkok with evictions in the center of the city leading to the peripheralization of poverty and limited access to urban services (1998: 109; cf. Calderia 2000; Murphy 2004; Holston 2008).

[44] In this context, NGO did not necessarily refer to a particular organization, but more frequently an "independent development expert," *nak pattana issara*, that worked on behalf of an international

At first this engagement was tentative. "We'd go maybe once or twice a month, just to go and talk," one activist told me. "We'd try to get people to sit and talk about their problems and to begin organizing themselves. We went to the city, but they said they couldn't do anything because the Railway owned the land. Eventually though, they'd give a little money for a project or some equipment or construction materials, and the community would supply the labor. " The municipality also provided residents with some medical attention and helped some children attend school, both of which had not been possible because most of the homes lacked any housing registrations.

During this period, NGOs and communities focused mostly on small-scale development projects. They had been successful in preventing evictions and negotiating temporary housing registrations, which made it possible for some settlements to be officially recognized within the municipality. However the main focus of NGO work was dedicated to creating new kinds of community savings and vocational organizations. In 1996, development funding from a Danish grant was used to improve infrastructure throughout the city's poor communities. Along the tracks, roads were constructed and a playground was built. This Danish grant also helped fund some community savings groups and provided budgets for the nascent community organizations and NGOs involved in running these projects. However, there were no discussions of rental rights during this time.

This history gives the contours of the situation inside the spaces along the tracks from the Railway's modernizing period through the time immediately before the

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organization on a larger grant. In Thai, the word "NGO" is used to refer to both independent organizations and the activists/agents that work in their name.

economic collapse. What my informants describe is not so much the classic land invasions described in Latin America (see Paley 2001; Auyero 2001; Goldstein 2004; Murphy 2004), but rather a gradual accretion of homes along the tracks. The residents populating the communities were internally displaced urban residents and new urban migrants arriving from the small villages surrounding Khon Kaen, its adjacent provinces, and even Laos. Reflecting prevailing practices of settlement and citizenship, land claims were organized very locally and negotiated either between residents or between "enterprising" officials who collected "rents" without delivering them to the Railway authority. By 1997 the tracks were largely settled with 7 formally recognized communities, but probably home to countless other disorganized settlements. And though these communities had begun the process of political organizing, their efforts had, by and large, not been directed towards land rights. With the onset of the Asian Market crash all of this would change.

From Crisis to Community

The space around the tracks transformed in direct relation to the 1997 economic crash in three important ways: First, the collapse increased migration to Khon Kaen. Rural areas had already amassed heavy debt burdens during the run up to the economic collapse. After the collapse, the Thai baht lost nearly 20% of its value overnight and the economy contracted. In 1998, the economy shrank by 11% (see Pasuk and Baker 1998). This devaluation extracted a heavy toll on both the rural and urban poor. The train tracks, once again, provided space for destitute migrants coming from the countryside. At least anecdotally, my informants reported an increase in settlement during this period

and I frequently met residents who claimed this as the time they moved to Khon Kaen. New migrants purchased "rights" from previous settlers or made claims along the tracks deeper into the peripheries of the city and in adjacent distracts.

Second, the economic crisis increased pressure on the SRT to privatize. Although Thailand had been pushed to privatize its state-run enterprises before, the crisis gave international lenders a means to finally pressure the state to enact these plans. As part of the IMF's loan package, Thailand's state-run enterprises came under greater scrutiny both by these international lending agencies and the government itself. In short, fixing the Railway's longstanding financial problems became an international priority and therefore it became a state priority. These new priorities were not simply emergent within the government, but rather part of an international programmatic led by international development banks rooted in the logic of Structural Adjustments, which, by this point was a globally established paradigm of moving state-centered economies like Thailand's towards deeper economic and social liberalization (Bello et al. 1998). Such efforts have been described by Naomi Klein (2008) as part of a "shock doctrine" in which economic, political, and natural disasters are used as a pretext for international agencies to make structural economic transformations to deepen and expand capitalist markets. Thailand's post-crash turn towards privatization was explicitly part of this effort to transform the fundamentals of the economy in the wake of the disaster.

This pressure not only exerted itself on the SRT officials but throughout the spaces along the tracks. The Railway responded to calls to privitize by thinking about how to correct its financial books within the constraints of a large bureaucracy and powerful union. This led them to begin searching for commercial renters to take over

the spaces along the tracks and develop them commercial property with paying tenants. With the push to privatize, talk of evicting the residents became more common.

Alongside and resulting from both of these processes (increased settlement and efforts to privatize), there was an increase in community level activism. In this section, I argue that the process of formulating demands for long-term rights created new definitions of "community" as both a means of contesting with the SRT and governing the space along the tracks (Figure 3.5).

Third, the economic crisis in Thailand produced a new response from the World Bank to attend to the "social" aspects of economic structural adjustment. Having learned from its experiences with structural adjustment in Latin America and Africa in the 1970s and 1980s, the Bank provided Social Investment Funds (SIFs) soften the effects of the pulling back on state industries and social services (See Siamwalla and Srawooth 2002). Julia Elyachar argues that such programs were a result of a turn towards "antidevelopment" within the Bank, which led to a shift away from state-centered modernization towards partnerships with NGOs. In Thailand, this proved to be a major victory for the NGO sector who persuaded the Bank to distribute its post crash fund through the nation's NGO network instead of the state. This network sought to build on emerging discourses of "social capital" and "community" as mechanisms of fund disbursement (World Bank Assessment 2006).

Figure 3.5: Blueprints showing contemporary settlement patterns along the tracks in

Khon Kaen. The railline is the solid line running through the center of each image.

Source: Community Organizations Development Institute

Elyachar says (in her case of Egypt) that through such practices, "[Y]esterday's cultural practice becomes something to be admired and perhaps even taught to recalcitrant, downsized public sector workers and their children" (2002: 500). In Thailand, notions of social capital built explicitly on the culturalist assumptions and activists I described in the previous chapter, drawing explicitly on the views of many of the Thai scholars I described in that chapter (World Bank Assessment 2006: 3). So, as the economic collapse progressed new practices of development emerged steeped in the language of sufficiency and an imaginary of authentically Thai forms of community.

Though small-scale projects had begun along the tracks before the 1997 market crash, local activism and demonstrations did not become common until the SRT began to search for commercial renters to develop the land along the tracks. Activists and residents point, in particular, to a single day in late 1997 when the local network of residents protested in front of Khon Kaen's train station in order to prevent the Railway from opening the land for private rental. As one of the early leaders of the local network put it, this mobilization, more than the previous two years of small-scale savings groups and meetings helped to "wake up" (*tun tua*) the communities to the possibility of eviction. The move towards privatization also deepened residents' sense of themselves as trespassers. Now acutely aware of their spatial transgressions, they become conscious of their status as subjects out of place.

The protests also had important political effects. Following the demonstration, the then Mayor of Khon Kaen, Arjan Siripol, issued temporary housing registrations *tabian baan chuakhra)* to residents along the tracks. He also began allowing resident's children to attend schools without complete documentation. These transformations gave

residents the ability to install temporary electric and water meters, which enabled

official connections to city services in many of the communities, albeit at higher rates

than permanent meters. Although it remained impossible for local officials to give the

residents more stable rights or even to effectively push the SRT to rent the land, local

politicians did advocate on the behalf of these communities. It also made the

communities legitimate targets of new local projects like public health projects and

educational centers. These documents also proved to be an important step towards

securing citizenship for many residents along the tracks. The second effect that these

registration numbers had was to expand the official population of the city. This allowed

local politicians to claim more funds from the central government.[45]

Beyond raising consciousnesses of residents and city officials, the

announcement of the Railway's intent to privatize and rent its land ushered in a new

spatial era. These new land management policies underscored the effects of the

economic crash on the ground. The SRT's decision to rent the land (and not sell it

outright) demonstrated how the land came to be seen as a continuing asset to offset the

cost of running the state industry in its traditional fashion. To accomplish this, the

Railway had to transform its attitude towards the land, which was previously one of

benign neglect, towards one of capitalist ownership. The move to rent the land signaled

a massive spatial re-signification, re-imagining the Railway's land not as the patrimony

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[45] Temporary Housing Registration numbers allowed residents access to "temporary" water and electricity meters. Although these meters now hooked residents into the official water and power grid, they do so at a much higher rate than permanent meters. They also enabled residents to form "communities" within the municipality. Such communities can be targets of government policy, but don't have any effect on the relative tenure security of the residents.

of the nation, but as capital itself, broken into individual parcels that might rented for various prices.

For residents this amounted to both a transformation in how they related to the space and also their own membership within both city and state. Instead of living in a de facto form of public housing loosely governed through the collection of unofficial rents by local officials, the residents were now seen explicitly as trespassers living on private property. In this way, the crash, and response to it, created new spatial and political conditions that, in part, led to the formulation of a new sense of citizenship in which residents began formulating their claims to rights to the land.

Rights claims did not emerge within either an individualized or permanent framework. Rather, they were framed through the notion of community leases. Such leases affirmed the rights of residents to occupy the land but not own it. The lease framework resulting from these early protests also re-imagined the space as a collective community, even though this was an essentially new way of thinking about the settlements. Residents may have invoked the notion of community to describe their spatial arrangement before, and in fact the city regarded some of these spaces as communities, but in neither case did the weight of community come to bear as a means of distributing rights to one's individual housing. Such a shift echoes Andrew Walker's description of how making community legible has become an essential practice for poor citizens to become, in his words, "eligible" for government support (2012: 183). In effect, the shift in the Railway's land policy, the burgeoning local network, and new national and global trends towards collective transformed community into an administrative technology used to governing the space and its residents. The loose sense

of affiliation that the residents had, which organizinged the moral capital essential to the early protests against eviction took on a legal dimension through the lease agreements. Communal rights emerged as an idea born out of politics, but they were quickly transformed into a mode policing. Thus, the protests transformed both the residents and their spaces while creating new frameworks the precluded individual ownership and individual rights.

A final outcome of the 1997 protest was the formation of the United Communities Network. At the time, the UC network encompassed the 13 established railway communities—some officially recognized by the municipality and some unofficially recognized. There were also 9 other communities that were members located in other areas of Khon Kaen Municipality facing similar tenure issues. New leaders emerged within Khon Kaen, Paw Singto, Mae Horm, Paw Thi, Paw Raengkai and a host of other resident/activists began an intense period of collaboration and negotiation with one another, national and international agencies, and the SRT. Moreover, some of these leaders, Paw Singto, Mae Horm, and Paw Ti in particular, became engaged in global networks of slum activists traveling to Denmark, Brazil, Kenya, and beyond to share their experiences as organizers in Khon Kaen.

The protests expanded the influence of local NGOs who had been trying to organize community groups for more projects. Although they had been administering grants from the Danish agency DANCED since 1996, after the protest these groups received money from the World Bank SIF grants and, later, the Japanese Miyazawa loan program. Both of these loans were used to start projects to offset the effects of the

economic crisis. Community leaders, in collaboration with the NGO activists, administered and managed these projects.

The World Bank money and the Japanese grant began the disputes between leaders and activists that led to the splitting of the UC network. The grants were designated to help build social capital through community organizations like the savings groups that residents and NGOs had already organized. After the money had been approved, questions arose over who would administer these grants and towards what end. These questions laid the groundwork for the eventual divergences between local residents in the Khon Kaen networks, within the community of NGOs and activists that had been involved in the communities, and between these activists and the state agency that also made claims to running these programs.

These projects aligned with a post-economic crash shift in the state's language of development associated with the *Eighth National Economic and Social Development Plan (1997-2001)*. There the government proposed a shift from "growth orientation to people-centered development" (NESDB 1997: iv). This reorientation was to take place through the establishment of "good governance," and "the reform of development administration" (*ibid)*.   Development policy would place a new emphasis on "stakeholder participation" and new forms of "efficiency" and "integration." Whereas the economic growth model of state-driven modernization drove the construction of the Railway, the new developmental model was undergirded by notions of well-being, good governance, efficiency, and participation.

In the area of housing policy, the state took up the language and practices of "self-help" housing that the World Bank had been pushing for since the mid 1980s

(Chiu 1985; Giles 2003). By moving away from constructing large, state-run housing projects, Thai housing policy redirected itself towards private sector partnerships, participatory slum upgrading, and "rent-to-own" projects (Giles 2003: 239-240). As Giles (2003) points out this shift towards "market-oriented" strategies was new alignment with international recommendations, which until the mid 1980s and 1990s, the National Housing Authority was reluctant to do. These new projects sought to build new forms of private property and "enable" (to use Giles' word) homeowners to improve their situation themselves. This was part of a larger shift in Thai land management which saw a massive increase in titling efforts during the 1980s (Larsson 2012).

Although many of these policies were cast in the emerging development language of participation, livability, and "person-centered-ness" and they emerged at a moment of economic contraction and austerity. This has been identified by Nikolas Rose as the turn towards "government through freedom" (1999a: 273). Yet, the political conjuncture also recalls anthropologist Evelina Dagnino's (2003) observation that, in Latin America, the moment of political integration of civil society took place just as the state began to contract, forcing civil society organizations into the role of service providers. It was this "perverse confluence," as she calls it, in which both struggles for rights and new forms of development emerged simultaneously that I take up in the next chapter to explain and explore the effects of the Baan Mankong project (Figure 3.6).

Figure 3.6: Khon Kaen Railway community boundaries as of 2009. Source: CODI

Community As Technology

The spatially organized arc of this chapter has demonstrated a shift in Thailand's technologies of government from the territorial mode of government associated with the development of the rail network towards an increasingly social mode of government tied to community. In the case of the former, the Railway network stitched together Siamese/Thai territory deepening and redirecting the economy through Bangkok. Community emerged orthogonally from the "successes" of those projects. Indeed, the monarch and later state-builder's abilities to control the territory and create, through no small amount of force, a governable national territory and a roaring economy that created the conditions for the settlement of Railway's land and the vulnerabilities therein. At the ends of these successes, the economic collapse and the changing political economy of late-capitalist development drove the residents of the settlements and their allies in the state and non-state sectors to form communities.

Although I describe the broader implications of this shift in detail in the following chapters, here I want to conclude by highlighting two aspects of the growth of community along the tracks: First, community arose out of a long spatial trajectory rooted in shifting political economies. Though the tracks had been settled for close to fifty years, notions of "community" as a collective form of government were *emergent* from the 1990s onward. This new language enabled residents to mobilize collectively using politics to deal with the social transformations related to Thailand's rapid economic growth and collapse. It was those collective mobilizations that enabled the production of temporary housing licenses, applications for new grant money, and the construction of better infrastructure. Yet, these notions of community were both a

method of contesting with the state and, increasingly a means of governing the residents along the tracks. This conjuncture is most clearly visible in the way such political contestations transformed into struggles over collectively organized lease agreements. The framework of community was central to both the politics that led to the frameworks of lease agreements and to their implementation. At this point of inflection, community transformed and became a means of governing the Railway spaces themselves, while filling gaps in the distribution of state services. This convergence is precisely what enabled the language and practice of community to become a method through which residents could make themselves visible as political subjects and a way for them to begin negotiating for rights and services.

Second, community was redesigned as an intervention into a very old problematic—as a means of training the unruly poor flooding into the nation's cities in the practices of cooperation, participation, and sufficiency. This notion of community fit into a broader shift in development language itself with the ascendency of Thailand's NGO sector and notions of "civil society," "social capital," and "participation" at the World Bank. It was from this stew that the Baan Mankong project was born. It drew together personnel from Thailand's NGO sector and its activist sector to address these problems through participatory design and the production of "strong communities."

The broad macro-economic story here echoes and deepens some recent insights into contemporary urbanization. Mike Davis (2006) argues that Structural Adjustments positioned cities as new zones of vulnerability and neglect. Indeed, my research demonstrates that Structural Adjustment in Thailand did lead to an increase in poverty and urban migration. This situation paired with emerging trends towards participatory

urbanism and questions of livability (Evans 2003) and sustainability in cities (Kusno 2011; McDonough, Isenhour, and Checker 2011). So, although forms of urban insecurity have expanded they produced new techniques and technologies for intervening in these new sites of vulnerability. Moreover, as the kinds of mobilizations I describe above show, this migration and urbanization did not only create an unmoored planet of slums—though the physical results of the process the expansion of zones of urban neglect— it also fostered new forms of coalitions, which in turn articulated new forms of rights (See also Holston 2008; Harvey 2010). In short, the spaces along the tracks became sites of politics. While those rights became entangled in the Baan Mankong project, it is worth noting that such claims of rights did not occur in an organized fashion under the previous state-centered economic regime. Residents created a de facto form of public housing along the tracks, but no one framed that practice in terms of rights.

My claim here is not that liberalization and structural adjustment were politically progressive, but rather that the spatial transformation associated with liberalization in conjunction with Thailand's deepening democracy, produced community as technology of government and a new venue of political struggle.

Chapter 4:

Architects of Citizenship

In the previous chapter I described how the Siamese/Thai state's changing

political economies lead to the creation of both the SRT's rail network and the spaces of

community along the train tracks. In particular, I demonstrated how the rail system

itself was a project of government designed to transform the state and its population. I

also showed how the project initiated new conditions of possibility of settlement and

urbanization in provincial Thailand. I also demonstrated how, through that system and

its relationship to global modes of economy, community emerged as a means of both

politics and policing as activists and residents began working together to struggle

against the railway and to improve the settlements along the tracks.

In this chapter, I explore the Baan Mankong project as a new effort at governing

the poor that grew out of these conditions and the broader rationalities of government

rooted in citizen design that I described in chapter 2. Although the project extends this

old history, I also show how Baan Mankong transforms those discourses through new

practices, the creation of new kinds of experts—new "architects of citizenship"— and

new participatory venues. Though these venues were conceived of through ideas about

developing (and policing) citizenship, I also show how they became sites of politics, as

residents used them to spark debates about the distribution of resources and about

proper political subjectivities. As I show below, the project has not been implemented

in a uniform way in Khon Kaen. Rather, it spawned two different versions, rooted in

visions of "development first" or "rights first" notions of becoming citizens. Such

differences reflect how different trajectories of contestation produced different citizen designs, which enabled different possibilities for politics to emerge.

Before I describe the Baan Mankong policy, its mechanisms, and these differences in its implementation and their effects along the tracks, I want to interrupt the narrative description of community to show its temporal politics in action. This move towards an ethnographic mode of description highlights the pressures and binds facing residents as they are pushed to transform, not "live as before" and "become ready" for rights. I show this through three different scenes from the project as it was implemented along the track, each in their own way evoking the question of readiness among the "villagers."

Readying the Villagers

November 12th, 2008: Paw Rangkai is a community leader in the NGO affiliated, Khon Kaen Slum Revival Network (KKSR). He is a former engineer, a resident of the *Phatthana Sithi* community, and national slum activist. He, Ko, an NGO activist from Khon Kaen, and I, are discussing the moment when Paw Rangkai decided to begin struggling for property rights with the State Railway when the issue of becoming ready comes up again:

> **Ko**: The work of making a group is extremely important (*ngan tham klum samkan mak*). If you analyze incorrectly you'll have a big problem (*Tha wikhraw mai tuk ja mi panha yai*). Suppose you have a lot of money and you think about what you are going to use it for, like before we spoke about the weaving group [where money was apportioned for an activity that was inappropriately framed, like weaving groups among people who don't know how to weave]. When the government has money they use it and they give it to people and they spend it. But what happens if the money runs out?

Paw Raengkai: Then the money doesn't come again (*kaw ngun mai ma eek*). You need to look for quality (*tong ha khunaphap korn*).

K: This is really important for the villagers (*Ni samkan samrap chaoban*). You need to analyze what is important to the villagers (*tong wikhraw arai khu samkan samrap chaoban*). For example, maybe it is just a group that gives people a little extra money to help people go to school—maybe a couple hundred baht per year or a thousand baht per year. Some NGOs just give money to people (*NGO bang klum hai tae ngun*). Some groups help the middle class only (*bang klum chua tae khon chan klang*). NGOs need to think about what is right for the people they are working with (NGO *thong kit arai khu morsom samrap khon ti ruam klum*).

Eli, have you ever heard the phrase: "*Ot briao wai kin wan*" (refrain from eating the sour, wait and you'll eat the sweet)? You need to be very cool hearted (*jai yen mak*). You need to work like this. You need to wait for people to be ready (*torng hai khao phrorm*). We all want to push people but they aren't ready. When they are ready they will rent (*waela khao phrorm ti ja chao ja chao*).

P. R.: I waited a long time (*phom raw nan mak*). At first I didn't want to rent. I didn't understand (*mai khao jai*). I was just there (*yu choei choei*) and then I changed my heart and I was ready (*laeokaw plean jai prawa phrorm*).

K: I remember you would just come around and you weren't interested but eventually you were. Its like with a mango…it is ready to eat when it is ripe. If we eat it when it is sour its not delicious, but if you wait [it will be delicious]. You need to wait for the villager to be ripe (*tong raw chaoban hai pen suk*). You need to wait for the villager to be ready (*tong raw chaoban mikhwamphrorm*). If we only had two years, if we only had a short budget, it would be six months left and then you'd have to start pushing (*tha mi kae song pi, ngun noi, tong ji khao*).

P. R.: I took five years (*phom raw ha pi*). The first time he came by, I didn't want to hear it (*Khrang raek ti khao ma phom mai sonjai laey*). But eventually… (he smiles).

November 16th, 2008: I am at a community situated just past the northern edge of the

Khon Kaen municipality. The community's leader, Paw Saksi, and his community

committee recently voted to change the settlement's name. It is now called the "Unity in

Development" community. I meet Mae Horm, the leader of the United Communities

network, there at close to dusk. It is the early part of the cold season. The air is cool and

the light is rich. The deep red dirt of the road that runs the length of the community

seems to glow as the sun drops behind us. This road will be the first thing paved over

once the community gets its infrastructure grants. We begin the meeting in a small

community hall (*sala chumchon*) adjacent to a makeshift recycling center, which many

residents use to process goods scavenged during their day. Paw Saksi tells me that both

of these spaces will also be upgraded once they receive money from CODI. Mae Horm

announces the terms of the lease agreement to a group of about 15 people.

> **Mae Horm**: Yesterday, they (the SRT) asked us if one-hundred percent
> of everyone in each community was ready to rent and we said yes! WE
> can RENT NOW!

Everyone knows that this percentage is wildly inaccurate. Everyone laughs at this little

deception and applauds. Mae Horm continues anyway, telling the group the benefits of

renting.

> **Mae Horm**: We all want water, we want electricity, but the problem is
> that they see us as trespassers (*yak mi nam, mi faifa, tae khao hin rao pen
> phubukruk*). So, they won't approve the funds for these projects
> (*prachanan khao mai anumat khrongkan*). The actual problem in the
> water issue, the land issue, the flood issue is that to fix these issues we
> need to rent. We think Baan Mankong will help us to develop and to get
> water, roads, electricity, and a drainage system (*rao kitwa khrongkan
> baan Mankong ja chuay rao phatthana mi nam, mi thanon, mi faifa, mi
> tawrabainam*). The money for these projects has already been approved
> (*ngun anumat laew*). At this week meeting at the Ubon Rat dam, we will
> figure out how to get the money into the communities. This
> infrastructure money exists, but we need to get rights first.
>
> Number 2, we have money to fix houses (*an thi song mi ngun songsaem
> ban*). We have 20,000 baht for each house to fix (*songsaem*) and upgrade
> (*prapbrung*). We don't have the money right now because you'll have to
> report what you'll be building (*rao yang mai mi ngun prawaa rao tong*

jatkan aeng lae raingan arai thi ja sang). We will have to organize this process on our own. We have to build the roads and our houses ourselves. In order to do this we need to create an organizational system to keep documents to learn to inspect and to check each other (*rao tong jat rabop kep aekasan, rien truatsorb, lae dulae ngan puak rao*). This means that no money can go missing and that we can't fight over the money (*nii riakwa kin ngun mai dai, mi ngun hai pai nai mai ruu, mai dai*). If we waste this opportunity by fighting with each other or have disagreements, they may not help us do this again (*tha ra torsu, mi khwam taekyaek, rao ja sia okat khao mai chuai iik*) .

We can all work together do to this, but you'll need to meet with each other, you'll need to meet with the community leaders and the community leaders will have to meet with the city and the architects. But you need to start to understand the process and have a way to report and keep documents yourselves**.**

Khon Kaen is the only city that the SRT is allowing to rent. We've fought to rent a long time and we've said that we can fight for land rights at the same time that we develop the land. We don't want this land to go to others (*rao su ma nan laew raw wa ja su samrap sithi thidin lae phatthana chumchon nai kanadiaokan*). The Baan Mankong project is not just for us to have convenient roads for us to drive our motorcycles on or to have beautiful houses (*khrongkan baan mankong maichai khrongkan sang thanon khi motosai ru mi ban suangam*). It exists so we can develop our selves and our communities (*khrongkan ni chuai rao phatthana tuaeng lae chumchon*).

In Baan Mankong a house is more than a house it is a way to develop our selves (*nai khrongkan baan Mankong ban khu makwa ban ban khu withi patthana tua aeng*). We know our problems (*rao ru panha*). We can fix our own problems and we know how to unite to do this on our own (*rao kae panha dai rao ru mi khwamsamakhi*). If you want to make this work the first thing you have to do is come down and work with us and begin by saving 1bt per day. We need to work together to do this. This is how the Baan Mankong project does more than just give you a house.

She continues, describing the reasons they are eligible for rental, the reason why they need to rent now, the money that will become available to the community once they sign the agreement, and the implications of any further disagreement or stalling on their decision. Before the meeting concludes she adds this:

Mae Horm: Before we start the rental process, you need to ask yourself if you are ready (*tongtham phrorm mai*)? You will need to decide what projects you want to do (*khun ja tong kit ruamkan rao ja tham khrongkan nai*). You will need to decide how you want the roads built (*rao ja sang thanon baep nai*). You will need to work together as a group (*ja tong ruam pen klum*). The whole community needs to decide together (*thang chumchon ja tong tatsinjai duay kan*). The railroad wants Khon Kaen to be the first city where these rental agreements are signed. We have two moths to get read then we will have to sign. You need to get yourself ready (*ja torng sang khwamprorm leay*)!

February 4th, 2009: I am talking to the State Railway of Thailand's (SRT) director of property prior to a meeting between the Railway authority and members of the Khon Kaen's United Communities (UC) Network. As we are waiting for representatives from the community network to arrive, he and I discuss my research and I ask him about the Railway's plans. I ask him about the rental process and how varied the situation is across communities and how many residents don't seem prepared to rent. He tells me the following:

> When we talk about the word "ready" (*phrorm*) there are really many meanings (*mi lai khwammai*). There are people who are really ready (*phrorm jing jing*), there are people who would like to be ready (*mi khwamyak ti ja phrorm*) and might be in a few months, and there are people who say they are ready but don't really want to be ready (*khon ti phutwa phrorm tae mai yak phrorm*).
>
> They have had 8 years to prepare for this and we think it is time for the communities to be ready and to rent. This is their opportunity (*ni khu okat*). Those people that want to rent we are happy to do it (*khon ti yak ja chaw kaw chaw leay*), but the rest will have to realize that there must be a "limit" and this cannot go on forever.

These three vignettes each address the question of what it means for "villagers" to become ready. Read side-by-side, they point to the kinds of transformation at work

within the Baan Mankong project. For residents along the tracks, "staying as before"

(*yu muan derm*), as people often put it, was no longer an option. They had to develop,

but into what? How?

The vignettes point to different formulations of personal transformation—

towards: moderation, governability, communality, struggle, or participation—and how

each became bound up with the production of community as a governable space. In this

chapter, I show how these varying attempts to ready and improve the villager emerged

simultaneously. The Baan Mankong project itself forms one end of a disputed project to

"ready" the villagers for citizenship through community. I also show how the other end

of that dispute produced an NGO based project, which privileged struggles for rights

and practices contentious politics over development. I demonstrate how these different

frameworks for training created the split between Khon Kaen's networks of activists.

As I show, this split produced two different but intertwined paths towards potential

citizenship: a "rights first" approach and a "development first" approach. While I

divide these projects, I am careful to note their interactions and overlaps throughout the

chapter. I argue that both groups emphasize techniques of the self and seek to train the

villager," thus reproducing notions of the villager as a secondary category not yet

prepared for citizenship. Although these approaches diverge, they articulate in the

notion of citizen design, which requires the cultivation of new dispositions within the

residents.

Roots of the Schism

I concluded the previous chapter by laying the groundwork for the split between the city's networks and the growing disputes between residents. Here, I pick up this story by detailing the terms of the split and its outcome in the creation of two different networks: 1) the United Communities (UC) network which, closely allied with CODI, and 2) the Khon Kaen Slum Revival (KKSR) network, which engaged with NGO activists and the Four Region's Slum Network.

Along the tracks, the continued focus on savings and "well-being" proved divisive in light of the growing pressure from the Railway as it moved towards privatization. After the protest at the rail station, the United Communities Network joined with a growing organization of urban activists in Bangkok associated with the Housing Development Foundation (*munithi phatthana thiyuasai*). This group of activists was successful in negotiating with the National Housing Authority (NHA) and the Bangkok Municipal Authority to end evictions in some communities in the capital. These Bangkok-based groups then began turning their attention to communities built on the rail-lines shortly after some of these early successes and after seeing the mobilization in Khon Kaen.

These Bangkok based NGOs began working with local NGO activists in Khon Kaen who had been administering savings groups and helping them to organize communities around issues like rental, which allowed the settlements along the tracks to get urban services like temporary housing registration numbers and temporary water and electricity meters. The approach taken by the activists from the Housing Development Foundation was based on community-wide organizing and resistance through protests and demonstrations, which sought to force the SRT to begin

negotiating with the residents and formulating new forms of lease agreements. These movements were largely successful and, by the end of the decade, they had organized a nation-wide coalition of 61 communities (self-identified) along the tracks that became the "Four Regions Slum Network."

Although the Four Region's group worked closely with officials from the Urban Communities Development Organization (UCDO, CODI's predecessor agency) to fund and organize savings groups, there began to be divergences around this issue. While UCDO's founders believed that creating participatory savings groups were an essential prerequisite for residents to organize and begin "developing their communities and themselves," the NGO activists began to feel more strongly that emphasizing the struggle for rental rights was more important than savings groups. This did not mean that the NGO activists felt that residents were necessarily prepared to administer the community rental agreements on their own or that they did not support savings and participation as a means of self-improvement. Rather, local NGOs conceptualized a process of personal development differently from how UCDO felt it should take place.

While UCDO maintained that participation in savings groups was critical to building trust, (*khwam waijai*) and confidence (*khwam munjai*) inside the communities. NGOs activists, by contrast, felt that the process of struggle itself would galvanize residents and help them to work together. In both cases, these groups agreed that a change in disposition was necessary among the residents. Rather than question whether interventions were necessary, the question was what kind of change and how it would be achieved.

Even as there was shared agreement on the need for some kind of individualized development of the capacities of the residents, the distinction between those who prioritized "development first" and those who prioritized "rights first" formed the foundation of the split that was to occur in the United Communities (UC) Network and between NGO activists and UCDO. The terms of the split demonstrate that what was at stake wasn't simply a methodological dispute but a substantive one over the relationship between citizenship and the practice of politics. The NGOs theorized that good citizens could and should engage in claims making and that, only through making those claims, would these residents begin to see themselves as responsible to each as community members and to the nation as citizens.

UCDO planners felt that the disciplines cultivated through savings—patience, care, communality—would produce the ideal citizen and that "rights first" approaches only created more divisions. For UCDO and their supporters in the UC like Mae Horm and Paw Singtho, participation was conceived of as a learning process designed to "develop people" (*patthana khon*) and produce unity. At this early stage, Mae Horm and Paw Singtho felt that the struggle for rights should not be about rental. Their allies along the tracks, especially in the Friends community, felt that they should have rights to the land outright. That is, they were struggling for ownership, at least this was how Mae Horm characterized the dispute for me.

The NGOs and their allies in the UC, like Paw Raengkai, Paw Ti, and Paw Nokhuk, on the other hand, felt that participation should prioritize negotiations with the Railway for rental. In their telling, Mae Horm, Paw Singtho, and the residents in the Friends communities were not interested in ownership, they simply did not want to pay

rent for the land at all. Nevertheless, the NGO aligned residents acknowledged the importance of notions of personal development but did not think it was a sufficient basis for securing access to the land. As Paw Nokhuk pointed out to me one day: "This is not easy. Over there [pointing towards a community represented by the UC and CODI] they think you can just go down to the Railway and give them your list of communities and they will let you sign leases right away (*khao kit wa ja pai rotfain namsanur lae khao ja anumat hai sen leay*). It is not easy [like that] (*mai chai ruang ngai*). It always involves struggle (*ja tong torsu naenon*)." For these groups, struggle (*kantorsu*) with the SRT and other state agencies was both necessary and would build the strengths of the residents, help them achieve rights through rental and enable them to negotiate with other agencies when the time came. However, the NGO activists were also concerned with what happened after leases were signed. So, this theory of development through struggle extended beyond the signing of leases and, they theorized, would help produce more moderate citizens interested in social justice, environmental sustainability, and communal values over individual consumption.

The second point of contention that emerged between these groups occurred in relation to the World Bank's Social Investment Fund (SIF) grant. According to the project design, the money was to be used to support local savings initiatives with a small portion of the grant money designated for administrative needs. However, as these splits between members of the UC widened, questions emerged about how much money NGO activists could take for their own salaries (ostensibly for administering the projects) and for their own administrative costs like travel and food. These debates about the budget widened the previous divisions by serving as proxies for the growing

sense of dissatisfaction about the relationship between some residents and the NGO

organizers. These conflicts were about the administrative money, but on a deeper level

they were about how much autonomy community leaders had, and what role NGO

activists would play in these struggles.

The complaints surrounding the NGO administrative budget were not simply

questions of misdirected resources, but were also based in growing critiques of the

uneven relationship between the poor and the NGO activists since the 1980s. For some

of the emerging community leaders, the NGO administrative budget was evidence that

NGOs "ate the money" (*kin ngun*) directed for the development of poor communities,

making their living off the poor. With the rise of the Thaksin administration and its new

efforts to curtail the influence of NGO activism this criticism found a very public voice.

Thaksin used the same logic to gather support for his pro-poor initiatives and quasi-

NGOs like CODI. These programs actively sought to recruit activists in state projects

(by redirecting international funding through the state) or diminish their role by labeling

them as anti-development impediments to the nation. Indeed, many activists who had

gained prominence and influence during the 1997 constitutional reform were deeply

critical of Thaksin's policies that paired market liberalization with, what they felt were,

"populist" expansions of the state designed to offer services to placate the poor without

managing the problem of inequality. In this way, the Thaksin administration sought to

drive a wedge between the poor and the activists who worked with them throughout the

pro-poor mobilizations of the 1990s.

As Thaksin put it:

> In the past Thailand never had a strong government that sincerely solved the problems of the poor. If there is no gap between the people and the government then the career-less people who work in these organizations and live of subsidies from overseas are out of a job…Some people finish their education and do nothing but work for these organizations and collect these overseas subsidies…this group of NGOs includes people who want to be famous, who want to enter politics and to stir up other people. (Thaksin Shinawatra 31 March 2003 quoted in Pasuk and Baker 2004: 147.)

These claims of corruption and selfish motivation were, simultaneously, a result of a government that sought to expand the role of services it offered to its citizens (*qua* citizens), a critique of the activists who challenged the authority of the growing state under Thaksin, and a comment on the problematic logic of NGO driven projects and how they conceived of the notion of expert versus recipient of development.

On the one hand activists like Mae Horm, who became the leader of the UC after the split, acknowledged the skills that the NGO organizers brought with them. She cited the way the activists to trained her to speak in public, organize logistics around demonstrations, and to help her fellow residents struggle. She also felt that the NGO activists were adept at pressuring state agencies to agree to meet with poor communities. On the other hand, she became frustrated with the ways that NGOs "made their money" off the problems of the poor while refusing to let them think or speak freely.

As she told me:

> The NGOs force the villagers to think like they do (*khoa hai rao kit baeb khao*). They don't let the villagers think on their own (*khao mai hai chaoban mi okat kit aeng*). If you refuse to use their methods they won't support you or help you (*tha patiset withi kit khong khoa khao mai chuay mai sanapsanun*). They tell groups to split apart (*khao hai klum taekyaek*). They are like the second government (*khao muan rathaban*

chut thi sorng). This isn't every NGO, it's just some people (*ni maichai NGO thuk khon, kae bang khon*).

In Mae Horm's perspective, the division of labor in NGO projects categorized residents as particular kinds of subjects—villagers who couldn't think for themselves seeming to demand organization before they might be able to participate fully. In this way of thinking, the NGOs emerged as experts with the knowledge and skills to provide development to the residents. The most critical residents like Mae Horm felt that this power structure allowed the NGO activists to control residents and disregard their experience and knowledge, simultaneously enabling NGOs to continue to propose projects for residents to participate in and improve themselves. This method, she pointed out, had the effect of building social divisions. This "double standard" (*sorng mathrathan*) mirrored the general ordering of Thai society rooted in developmental notions of citizenship: the NGO was the *philiang* (guardian) and the "villager" was the trainee—once again a not yet citizen. Mae Horm's critical position on the NGOs demonstrates the tenuous position occupied by the residents. Even where politics was being practiced, as in the NGO organizations, the "villagers" were only allowed to do so by subordinating themselves to the activists that organized them.

Development First: UCDO/CODI and Baan Mankong in Theory

Although the activism and disagreements I describe in the case of Khon Kaen were part of the Baan Mankong project, they do not make it up its entirety. Rather, the story I describe above lays out the conditions that shaped the Baan Mankong project's implementation along the tracks in Khon Kaen city and reflects debates that took place

more generally throughout Thailand. However, the roots of the Baan Mankong project are earlier than what I describe above.

In 1990, a coalition of architects and urban activists began working with the NHA to form the Urban Communities Development Organization (which later became CODI). UCDO was created as the National Economic and Social Development Board was rethinking the nation's development model with an increasing emphasis on intervening in the problem of poverty through community and participation. This was especially important at the time because Bangkok's rapid growth (alongside the booming Thai economy) had resulted in a proliferation of poor urban communities. Such communities became especially vulnerable as real estate speculation led land values in Bangkok to skyrocket. Evictions became commonplace as the city grew rapidly. The National Housing Authority (NHA) had attempted to intervene in the problem of housing security through organized relocations. But, according to reports at the time, these relocations often exacerbated the housing problem instead of mitigating it—residents could not pay for their new homes and ended leaving them, establishing new squatter settlements elsewhere in the city (Somsook 2003: 1).

Drawing inspiration from models like the Grameen Bank in Bangladesh and the "Community Mortgage Program" in the Philippines, the National Housing Authority began to consider different models of housing delivery rooted in community organized market mechanisms like these programs. UCDO was founded to manage the first "Urban Poor Development Fund" with 1,250 million Baht (roughly US$ 50 million at the time). The project's initial proponents felt that these other projects demonstrated

that "the urban poor were capable of running their own savings groups and development activities, and taking care of the repayment process" (Somsook 2003: 4).

These approaches also built on the emerging emphasis on alternative forms of participatory development pushed by the World Bank, the National Economic and Social Development Board (NESDB), and the growing Thai NGO movement's interest in "community" and "Thai village life" as alternative development models (see Chapter 2). As Chui (1985) and Giles (2003) demonstrate, for much of the existence of the NHA, international funding sources and trends in housing had little effect on the delivery of public housing projects. Both authors argue that it was not until later (the late 1970s and early 1980s), that the NHA began to think about the "self-help" (Chui 1985) or "market-oriented" (Giles 2003) policies that the World Bank had been prescribing as a solution to Thailand's growing housing problem. These ideas gained more credibility (and force) in the wake of the economic crisis. By 1997, the new language of sufficiency made "community" an explicit target of state development policy appearing throughout the *Eighth National Economic and Social Development Plan (1997-2001)* as a new means of developing Thailand's economy and its people (NESDB 1997). They also expanded Thailand's already rapid push towards private property futher along (Larsson 2012) and mirrored growing logics that private property rights would benefit the poor by unlocking the capital found in the informal market (See De Soto 2000).

The so-called "People's Constitution" (ratified in 1997 and nullified after the military coup of 2006), for example, further pushed notions of community to the fore inscribing particular community rights into law. The 1997 constitution explicitly

mentions community rights in three sections: The right to assemble as a "traditional community" (Section 46); the right to participate in the preservation and exploitation of natural resources (Section 56); and the right to receive information and express their opinions regarding state policies and projects conducted by state agencies that would potentially have an effect on quality of life or health and sanitation (Section 59) (See Kline 1998). Though few communities were successful in mobilizing such rights, their appearance in the document was notable.

The Urban Poor Development Fund paradoxically sought to build on community and produce it at the same time. As the term is defined by Somsook Boonyabancha in her review of the transition from UCDO to CODI, "'communities' is used throughout Thailand to refer to those living in low-income settlements" (2003: 1). Yet, the agency also gave itself the job of producing community. This tension—is community pre-existing or is it produced?—is something that plagues these initiatives. By 2000, the fund, as administered under UCDO, had created 950 savings groups and created more than 100 community networks.

In 2000, CODI was created as a public institution (*ornkan mahachon*) funded by the Japanese Miyazawa grants (described in Chapter 3). CODI shifted its emphasis from simply administering community savings projects towards a building a more comprehensive housing strategy. Cast in the language of the "Livable City" (a term which appears as a goal of the Ninth NESDB Plan), this new project sought to use savings as a basis for community building in the aim of housing and infrastructure improvement. After undertaking several pilot projects, CODI, under the Thaksin administration, began "going to scale" with the problem, expanding the project's

ambitions from select numbers of pilot projects towards a broader integration with municipal governments across the country (Somsook 2005).

In 2003, this effort became the Baan Mankong (Secure Housing) policy. This policy sought to intervene in the housing crisis through participatory savings and urban planning methodologies. It also became a mechanism through which state agencies could begin renting their land to the settlements that had grown up on them. Prior to 2003, the Thai government had no policy of renting its land to informal settlements. Baan Mankong made such rental agreements—like the one being negotiated with the SRT—to become a possibility.

The notion of participation (*kan suan ruam*) is important here. As Andrew Walker puts it *suan ruam* denotes a collective orientation away from personal life (*suan tua*) marking it as a "morally desirable common endeavor" (2012: 172). He argues, (using the northern Thai transcription of *suan huam*) that participatory activites have the moral force of "altruism, and participation in *suan huam* activities is often spoken of as involving some level of sacrifice (*sia sala*). Here there are close parallels with broder Buddhist empahaisis on the moral value of 'selfless giving of gifts'" (Walker 2012: 173). In the Baan Mankong project, participation is similarly defined through qualities of self-improvement, sacrifice, and altruism. Thus, the all of the project's core methods incorporate participatory mechanisms both as a matter of method and in the aim of improving the participants themselves.

Baan Mankong projects take four different forms: On-site upgrading, re-blocking, land sharing, and new community construction. The first two take existing communities and improve them *in situ* by either targeted upgrade projects to

infrastructure and housing or through radical teardown and rebuild projects that create whole new spatial arrangements and housing stock in existing settlements. The second two projects are efforts to produce new communities where old ones exist.

Regardless of the project style, the CODI methodology begins with two processes: community surveys and savings groups. Ostensibly, the community survey is designed to allow community architects to begin working with the residents to gather information for projects. However, it also has the effect of making poverty appear legible and spaces of poverty within the city appear to be known (see Scott 1998, Chapter 5). Echoing Walker, legibility and eligibility are closely linked (2012: 183). Citywide surveys are designed to allow planners to know where pockets of tenure insecurity exist so they can begin conducting site surveys to meet with potential project participants for new community relocation projects. These surveys seek to document the number of households within a community, income levels of residents, and the spatial and site constraints (for onsite renovations). Planners theorize that by participating in the survey processes, the residents of these projects will begin to get to know each other better and begin building communal spirit. Simultaneously, these technical instruments allow seek to make problems of poverty and insecurity visible, quantifiable, and legible to the city. Finally, the survey is the beginning of the extensive process of documentation required of project participants.

Architects play a key role here as community organizers, site surveyors, and creators of plans and schematics. The "community architects" I met at CODI, argue that the survey process is more significant than simply collecting these data points. Sakkarin Sapu and Nattawut Usavagovitwong characterize the community survey period as a

time for architects to learn the "disguised relationships" through interviews, observations, experimentation (2009: 3). This kind of ethnographic approach was important for architects who inevitably found themselves in the middle of complex disputes. Yet, it also had its limitations. Many architects I interviewed said they understood the disputes and their roots, but lacked the tools to manage them. Some recognized that the problems facing residents were rooted in their inability to push the government to make changes in policy, bad economic opportunities, and limited cheap land in cities for settlement to rent. However, armed with technical skills and limited ability to change these structures, many architects described feeling powerless to do anything about it. In some cases, they recognized that project participants were unable to even effectively critique CODI, which they acknowledged exacerbated insecurity.

Moreover, they felt pulled by the technical constraints of architecture itself. As one friend described at a meeting of CODI's architects in Bangkok: "They just talked about how we need to design this or that and we needed better quality designs. I think it is important for the villagers to be the leaders of the process. They need to be the ones who tell us what they want and we do that." Thus, the task of designing and the goals of the participants were sometimes at odds (c.f. Ferguson 1994; Li 2007).

Another issue was that the architects (and CODI as an agency) were relatively powerless in the broader framework of the Thai state. CODI is one part of the Ministry of Social Development and Human Security and lacks power relative to Railway agency. Although the SRT is a part of the Ministry of Transportation, it is the largest state-owned enterprise employing close to thirty thousand people and the single largest landholders in the country. So where CODI—a state agency—was pitted against the

SRT, it was difficult to push them to do anything. The SRT often characterized CODI's responsibility as taking care of the leases and being responsible for managing the disputes between villagers. As such, CODI was positioned as the administrator of the Railway's land managing disputes so that the SRT did not have to do so. As one of CODI's architects pointed out to me, "It is difficult for the state to fight with itself." This was especially the case with the Railway. Most CODI planners and architects were basically fresh out of graduate school and had a difficult time getting these senior government officials to take them seriously.

Architects and CODI Planners had an easier time organizing residents into savings groups, which they argued was the foundation of the community building process. These groups not only prepared people to manage financial pressures associated with the upgrade process (and the insecurities of the capitalist economy), but also served as spaces for communal spirit building. However, in the Baan Mankong project savings groups also seek to help as communities secure low-interest mortgages for collective land purchases, new home construction, or for rent in communities built on land owned by various state agencies, or the Monarchy's Crown Properties Bureau—a corporation that manages royal assets.

However, savings groups serve another function as well, as one CODI architect explained:

> Savings is a way for people to know each other. It doesn't matter
> whether they save a lot or a little, the goal is that people will save and
> work together as a community. They will see each other every week and
> they will know who is saving and who isn't. Then, they can ask if that
> person is having trouble or not. They can go check to see if they are
> having a problem at home or if they are drinking too much…Through

> savings people learn new skills: They learn discipline. They learn to
> order and schedule their time. They learn to check in with each other.

In this way, the savings group formed the core of what came to be seen as a community. Through savings relationships could be forged, new disciplines could be encouraged through light social survailence, and a new ethos of cooperation and unity could produce community strength. CODI used the savings group as a seed to begin forming other groups for community projects.[46]

Other community groups focused on administration, labor, and community welfare. Each of these groups managed different parts of the Baan Mankong project. These groups became the foundation of upgrade projects. Administrative groups were responsible for organizing accounts, attending meetings, creating documents, and inspecting (*truatsorb*) documents and receipts to make sure they were accurate. Inevitably, document creation (see chapter 5) was a complex and difficult process. So, both community members and the architects became essential components in the project's "audit culture," a term I borrow from Marilyn Strathern (2000) to describe the projects emphasis on cultivating accountability, transparency (*khwambrongsai*), and eliminating suspicions of corruption (*khwamtutjarit*). For Strathern, audits are where the "financial and the moral meet," (2000:1). She points out that audits both extend and contribute to the ethos of neoliberalism by creating procedures and mechanisms to enable the production of trust and accountability within emerging systems of government (2000: 4-5).

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[46] These points about the savings group echo Sian Lazar's (2004) and Lamia Karim's (2011) insights about savings groups in Bolivia and Bangladesh, respectively. The emphasis on techniques of the self mirrors Lazar's arguments about the way savings groups become mechanism for creating responsible neoliberal subjects. The point regarding social surveillance echoes Karim's criticisms of the effects of the Grameen Bank on its female participants.

CODI emphasized that transparency was especially important because of the amount of money being managed within the community and the constant suspicions that people were stealing from the grants. The emphasis on documentation also gave CODI staff and associates ample time to intervene in projects that did not reflect their visions of community and good citizenship. Indeed, project administration was so rife with baroque requirements regarding the usage of grant money and other project money that much of the time spent participating was actually spent discussing regulations and changes in regulations.

Once savings groups were formed, Baan Mankong projects began the earliest stages of physical redesigns. This included community design sessions where residents would work with architects to lay out the physical transformations within a new community plan (*phang chumchon*). These physical improvements could be upgrades to housing or infrastructure or completely new construction projects initiated on rented or purchased land. They theory behind these processes was to allow the community to choose designs it felt were appropriate and to build them in ways that were both affordable and aesthetically appealing.

These sessions produced tensions. Residents often found themselves unable to figure out how to represent CODI's implicit value system. They also ended up drawing and planning technically complex systems like drainage and plumbing that required approval from the municipality's engineers. In some cases, they hired outside consultants to do this work, while in others they waited for assistance from CODI architects and engineers who were burdened with many projects. Either way, the process resulted in role confusion and in long delays for residents trying to initiate or

finish projects. This role confusion brought out the tension surrounding meaningful forms of participation. Indeed, jobs that required technical expertise were confused with sites of participatory engagement. Instead of working towards rental, many residents found themselves trying to puzzle out how to get technical drawings for infrastructure projects that would pass the city's approval process.

Once designs were created and residents had amassed enough savings, projects had to be approved by a variety of committees. Communities had to present their plans and documentation to their local network and then to a body called the "city committee" (*kammakanmuang*), which was composed of municipal officials, academics, activists, and residents. The city committee was an important venue because municipal governments had to approve infrastructure changes and distribute project money even though these projects had to be approved by various CODI committees first.

In theory, the city committee was also a space that project participants could bring grievances as well. However this was not always the case, at least in Khon Kaen, as city committee meetings were rare and difficult to arrange. I attended only four meetings during the year and a half I was in Khon Kaen. At each meeting, residents would come with a long agenda of problems related to project implementation— insufficient financial delivery, requests to change approval processes, demands to have technical consultants, or criticisms of the municipality or CODI, problems that simply went unaddressed. Indeed, the meetings were so ineffectual that all of the communities represented by the Khon Kaen Revival Network eventually refused to attend them. Instead they began working through their own distinct approval process that I describe below. Such approval processes are important to understand because although they were

designed using the language of horizontal power and participation, they often worked to the opposite effect.

CODI's model for these approvals was a horizontal one (see Figure 4.1). Communities would work in partnership with networks and these various approval committees—composed of state officials, community representatives, academics and NGOs—to get their projects completed. Yet, the process actually produced a new vertically oriented hierarchy as well. As projects moved from local network approval meetings through the city committee, into the zone (a subdivision of the regional approval board), region, and national level of project approval, they received intense scrutiny that not only slowed projects but critiqued the demands of residents. Although the projects' various approval boards were composed of members from municipal and regional district governments, residents from other communities, CODI affiliated architects, and local academics, they nonetheless exerted considerable pressure on residents to conform with the agency's vision of appropriate development. Moreover, the extensive nature of these approval processes marked them as considerably more hierarchical than CODI imagined them to be. Although projects usually were approved, the layers of approval processes revealed the way communities and networks had to subordinate their interests to the agency's aims as articulated by the leaders of these approval committees.

Common questions residents were asked included: Were the documents correct? How many people in the community actively saving? Did project plans reflect communality and sufficiency principles? In this way, each process was not simply conceived of as a step towards a housing project, but as a "learning process" and a site

of "personal development." As the Baan Mankong project's mantra put it, "the word house means more than a house" (*khamwa ban ku makwa ban*). The house was merely a mechanism for producing personal improvement and communal values.[47]

The presentation of community plans became sites of "personal development" as architects on the CODI approval boards evaluated them to see whether spatial arrangements fostered collective communalism. Such values were inevitably drawn from imagined notions of a unified village, reflected in new communal spaces, the use and accommodation of nature, or by not physically separating lots. For example, in one case, a community plan was rejected because it included individual driveways for each house. In another, a plan was rejected because the homes were oriented outwards allowing residents to come-and-go from their homes without seeing one another. A typical plan includes one or two exits, positioning all of the homes towards one another (see Figures 4.2-4.4).

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[47] In talking with some of CODI's senior project planners they cited Jürgin Habermas' notion of the public sphere as an important theoretical impetus for these approval meetings. Participation, as they conceived of it, entailed the production of spaces in which people could meet and discuss things freely (Habermas 1991). As if to prove some of the critiques of this idea, these meetings were highly structured both by internal power arrangements rooted in CODI's hierarchical committee structures (approval boards, subcommittee boards etc…) or by class (see Fraser 1997). Somewhat counter-intuitively (since some of the most potent criticisms of the notion of the public sphere have come from feminists), gender did not constitute a significant barrier to speech in these settings as CODI frequently recruited women as its primary participants given their role in managing money in the household and a predominant view in Thailand that women were better at cooperating and participating more harmoniously—This echoes both Lazar's (2004) and Karim's (2011) observation of the gendered rationalities of micro credit in other locales. Finally, it is important to point out that my analysis does not necessarily follow Fraser either. Rather, I follow Benjamin Arditi (2009), who problematizes both of these conceptions of the public sphere because they see it as a space to reconcile differences rather than one produced through disagreement.
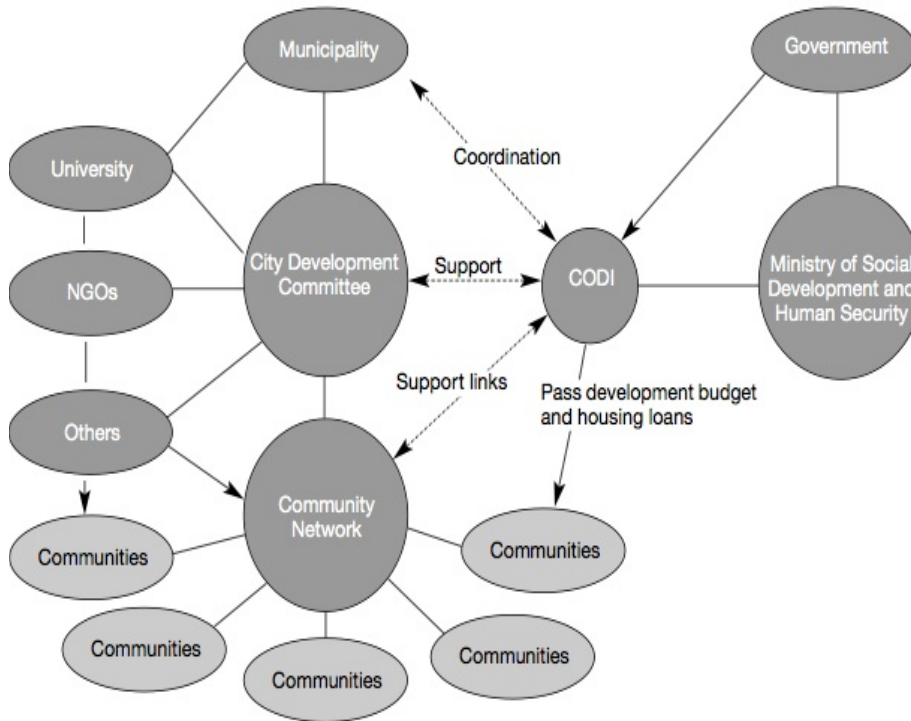
Figure 4.1: CODI Planning model based on horizontal arrangements. Source: "Figure 2", Boonyabancha (2005: 32).

Figure 4.2: CODI Community Plan. Note the single point of entry and exit as well as common green space. Source: CODI

Figure 4.3: Handmade community plans like these are also common

Baan Mankong collective planning techniques. Source: N/A

Figure 4.4: Computer drawn CODI plan incorporating various housing designs

and a single point of entry/exit marked with an arrow. Source: CODI

Discussions about rights were seen as antithetical to these learning processes and personal development because they were destabilizing and disruptive. As CODI's chief architect, Somsook Boonyabancha describes:

> Conflicts exist in the theoretical realm. The concept of 'rights' could get people to kill one another. We must transform the theoretical concept of 'rights' into the empirical realm that is more tangible - having an actual plan and a detailed solution. So we came up with the *Land Sharing* plan. All parties were more or less satisfied with the plan. The people, no doubt, could do this without the architects, but we've more graphic and visual techniques that could assist them in their vision. (from http://www.codi.or.th/housing/CommunityArchSomsook.html Last accessed 3 March 2013).

Struggles for rights are, in this conception, theoretical. They detract from crafting "empirical" solutions to problems in space because they produce conflict. In this formulation, community and conflict are antithetical.

This is a critical insight to the practice of community at work in Baan Mankong projects. Strong communities were seen as whole and unified. Participation was designed to instruct residents in behaving communally and tempering their disagreements for the good of each other and the nation. Political scientist Pavin Chachavalpongpun argues that unity in Thailand has always been a "top-down affair" mobilized in times of crisis (2010: 333). So, in the shadow of the contemporary political situation, such calls for unity have become especially fraught. As Laura Nader (1990), points out, such "harmony ideologies" can have multiple effects, not the least of which is quashing and pathologizing dissent. Although I explore the production and effects of harmony through bureaucratic forms in the next chapter, here I want to simply note how CODI's notion of community coincided with the production of harmony.

One Network Becomes Two

By 2000—once CODI had been established—the apparent divisions growing

within the Khon Kaen's network and the railway communities boiled over around the

influx of money from the SIF project and the Japanese Miyazawa "Economic Revival

Fund." Like the SIF fund, the Miyzawa grant was dedicated to helping the poor in both

cities and rural areas. The NGO activists involved in administering these grants pointed

out that while the SIF money was administered on a community level, the one billion

baht of the Japanese fund, went directly to CODI to organize savings groups and

expand its efforts struggling communities. While NGO activists and community groups

in Khon Kaen had used some of the SIF money to begin to address economic problems

within the communities, these savings groups and vocational organizations remained

very small. They had organized them to provide alternatives to the growing informal

credit market where the standard interest was often more than twenty percent per

month. By way of comparison, these alternative savings groups organized by CODI and

the Japanese grant, charged two or three percent. Yet, NGO activists pointed out that

those groups were not representative of the entire community, only those that chose to

work with CODI. Thus, they felt the new money from the Miyazawa grant should not

go into creating a new organization, but rather should be spread out across existing

savings groups to lower interest payments even further in order to attract new members.

The NGO activists who had been working on a local level with the United

Community Network in Khon Kaen and the national Four Regions network were also

skeptical of the fact that this new grant was not going to be administered directly by

community organizations and NGOs, but was given to the state and administered CODI,

which had recently become an independent public organization breaking off from its previous position as an arm of the National Housing Authority. Moreover, CODI decided that instead of using the existing savings groups—created by the NGO coalition with UCDO—CODI would set up entirely new organizations in the communities through the expanded Baan Mankong project. These new savings groups would charge a lower rate than the older one.

As one of Khon Kaen's NGO activists told me, "What were they thinking would happen? Would creating two groups within the community help build solidarity (*tha mi song klum nai nung chumchon ja sang aekaphap mai*)? You have two groups: This one is charging two baht per month. That group is charging 3 baht per year. Which group is going to survive?" The NGO's instincts proved correct. The decision to set up a whole new process for community organizations and new savings groups laid the groundwork for the split in the Khon Kaen network.

The split between the NGOs and the faction from United Communities (and the administrators at CODI) led by Mae Horm and Paw Singto coalesced around the administration of the Japanese grant, debates about appropriate rental rates, and the theoretical issue of whether it was more important to prioritize the struggle for rights or to create venues for personal development and savings. While the NGO activists and their associated communities felt that the push for rights was central, and that the rates and terms negotiated with the Railway were reasonable, the leaders from United Communities and the administrators at CODI felt that it was more important to build venues for community and personal development.

The result of this division was that the largest and most influential community in the United Communities Network, the Friends community—led by Mae Horm and Paw Singto—pulled out of the Four Regions Network and began working directly with CODI. When the leaders of the United Communities Network stopped working with the NGOs, they brought with them many communities and their supporters—in particular those communities with a large number of residents living closest to the tracks. The division provided an alternative framework for these residents seeking to bide their time against rental (and avoid making payments on their land). It also allowed many residents to wait and see the results of the insecure and contentious NGO-led activism.

Simply put, many residents I spoke with said that they were unsure which network was the correct one to join. Often this had to do with discerning which organization was the most "appropriate" (*morsom*). The use of the word "appropriate" was notable in that it demonstrated the attunement of residents to the moral implications relating to the practice of politics. Indeed, with both networks operating under different visions of the relationship between development, politics, and citizenship, such choices implied different approaches to the practice of politics. For example, some residents said the KKSR's emphasis on contestation was not as appropriate as the UC's focus on participation.

Residents made the decision of which network to join in three different ways: perception, local ties, and strategy. On the level of perception, some residents felt that Mae Horm and Paw Singto from the United Communities were the best leaders as they had been the earliest and most vocal advocates of housing rights in Khon Kaen and were the national representatives on the Four Regions board for some time (before the

split, of course). Additionally, they had worked internationally. Moreover, by siding

with CODI, the UC appeared to have a cloer tie with the state. This version of

participation through cooperation seemed more appropriate to some residents, thus

these ties with the state led them to believe that they might be more secure than were

they to continue to demonstrate and protest.

Second, some residents simply had closer ties with Mae Horm and Paw Singto.

As many communities along the tracks were rooted in personal relationships, those who

were close with the leaders brought groups of residents with them. Finally, and this

probably goes for many of the residents along the tracks, in particular those that weren't

involved in organizing or lived in the twenty meters closest to the rail line, by siding

with Mae Horm, they were able to delay the rental process that would inevitably force

them to pay money to live where they had been living for free or, potentially, force

them from their homes. Siding with the United Communities group allowed these

residents a bit of time and financial space to back out of negotiations and to return to a

less contentious life.

The results for the NGO network and its constituency like Paw Ti, Paw

Raengkai, and Paw Nokhuk were nearly devastating. They had basically been forced

out of the United Communities Network, a network they had helped build, and though

they had close ties to the nationwide Four Regions Network and activists from

Bangkok, their constituency on the local level was now split. Indeed, many discuss this

period as one of pause as they tried to work with local activists to build coalitions

among the remaining residents. This was difficult because those with close ties to the

NGOs were now isolated from what were previously more unified settlements. Though

they regrouped by forming the Khon Kaen Slum Revival Network, they struggled for a few years after the split to gain any following among residents.

The Friends community, for example, split from one large, spatially integrated, municipally recognized community, into four different communities—the Friends community and the diverse *Phatthana Sithi* community (Zones 1-3). While the Friends community continued to have over 200 households, the *Phatthana Sithi* community became comprised of three distinct community administrative zones one of which had only twenty-two households. Zones 2, and later 3, were the only ones to rent from these four settlements. Zone 1 sided with the United Communities network and never signed any lease. This same process was repeated up and down the tracks as previously unified communities (at least spatially), split (and, in some cases, split again) along the lines of strategy, ideological belief, organizational process, and network allegiance. These splits lead to underlying tensions within the rental framework and different practices of development along the tracks that I describe below.

The Rental Framework

Early negotiations between the Four Regions activists (including communities from both networks) and the SRT were successful in securing a basic rental framework for the 61 communities covered in a new Memorandum of Understanding (MOU).[48] The MOU set a standard for all 61 communities covered in the agreement that rentals would be administered on a community-wide basis with rent calculated on the size of

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[48] The composition of this group of 61 communities is intensely contested. As the agreement was signed amidst the networks splitting, some communities were included while others—like the Friends community—were left off entirely.

the community then divided individually by lots measured and administered by

residents. Lease agreements entailed spatial surveys, negotiations among residents, and

shared administrative efforts to make sure the leases were paid on time. Occupancy

agreements were to be signed by the Four Regions Network, the community, the SRT,

and, later CODI. The MOU also laid out 5 basic components of the rental agreement:

1. Rental agreements apply only to land 20m or more from the tracks.
   Land within 20m of the tracks themselves cannot be rented and must
   be cleared of all structures.[49]
2. Land within 40m of the tracks can only be rented through 3-year
   renewable leases. Land 40m and further can be rented through 30-
   year renewable leases.
3. Rental prices are between 7-20bt/square meter/year (price
   determined on whether the land was further or closer to the city
   center). Rental prices are set on the basis of the entire community's
   area, not individual lots.
4. The SRT and the Four Regions Slum Network jointly administer the
   lease agreements.[50]
5. Land and houses cannot be sold or rented to new settlers. Only
   residents listed on the original MOU are to be included in the lease
   agreement.

The conditions negotiated between the Four Regions Slum Network and the

State Railway laid the foundation for all rental negotiations that followed. In addition to

creating a set of standards for residents to begin negotiating with the Railway (and each

other), this agreement had the effect of re-ordering the space along the tracks into new

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[49] As I describe in the next chapter, the twenty meter "no-build" zone was further divided in two. The first ten meters were to be left entirely vacant, while the ten meters further from the tracks could be used for infrastructure projects.

[50] This component of the rental clause was part of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the Four Regions Slum Network and the SRT. The clause meant that the Four Regions Network had been approved to work together with the Railway to administer the lease by checking documents, organizing registration forms, and submitting rental agreements to the SRT board for approval. It remains a point of contention, as it technically privileged the Four Regions Network over other networks that didn't exist at the time the MOU was signed.

spatial zones—twenty meters closest to the tracks, 20m further from the tracks, and beyond forty meters from the tracks.

Another purpose of the agreement was to stabilize and limit the practices of settlement along the tracks by documenting the number of communities included in the MOU, and by creating stable rosters of residents that would be eligible to participate in the occupancy agreements. The agreement also attempted to make the communities both stable and legible by basing these rosters on spatial and demographic surveys that, in theory, allowed the SRT and the state to know who was living in each community. Yet, at their inception these rosters were problematic reflections of the divisions in the housing community as the Friends community (in its new form) was left off the roster of sixty-one communities because its leaders Mae Horm and Paw Singtho refused to participate in the NGO project. In Khon Kaen, at least four other settlements were excluded because they had not yet organized themselves sufficiently to be considered communities. This had effects later as the SRT used the names on this agreement as the foundation of all disputes over boundaries and rental.

The Four Region's Network and CODI were responsible for jointly administering the leases. Although CODI and the Four Regions network often seemed pitted against each other, in the case of lease administration they had to work together. In this way, the Four Regions became an associated part of the Baan Mankong project and its NGOs and community activists became charged with administering that project for CODI. Thus, the activists who previously took up the practice of politics along the tracks to get rental agreements signed became involved in policing the leases at the same time. The agreement also tied the possibility of rights to work with the Four

Regions NGO network and CODI who in turn conditioned participation in a number of ways I describe later in this chapter.[51]

Finally, because the occupancy agreements and the rental collection would take place communally they automatically implied a particular type of membership for the residents predicated on the requirement that they would work together, "unite," and cooperate. This was rooted in the notion of the villager that presented in chapter 2. In this way the occupancy/rental requirements produced community as a mode of government in a way that was fundamentally alien to this space even as it drew on the tropes of the collective villager in a way that made it seem as though that practice was endemic.

The spatial requirements (see Figure 4.5) for the communities were particularly important because they produced new interests within communities that previously might have been more unified in their negotiations. In communities where there were a majority of residents living in homes built further than twenty meters from the tracks, it was easier to convince residents that it was a good idea to rent. In communities where the majority of residents lived within the twenty meters closest to the tracks new coalitions formed that threatened the possibility of rental altogether. In either case, however, rental negotiations required that residents whose homes (in part or in whole) crossed the twenty meter boundary needed to demolish the portion of their homes found to be in violation of the boundaries in order to sign lease agreements. For residents

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[51] I draw this notion of legibility from James Scott (1998) who argues that governance is tied to the state's ability to see. Both Li (2007) and Rose (1999a) argue that such surveys are also technologies of making community and tied to the practice of governmentality. Although I do not problematize the notion here, in Chapter 5, I explore the complexities and blind spots produced by legibility. There, I show how residents and planners manipulated these rosters and how the SRT understood the impossibility of this demand even as it made such efforts a requirement.

living entirely within the first twenty meters, it was necessary to find space to relocate their homes outside these boundaries. The Railway argued that this zoning was for public safety, but it ended up transforming the front twenty meters into a zone of high risk in two senses: First, as a site of potential accidents and second, as the zone in highest risk of eviction. Indeed, for residents whose homes were built in or partially built in the first twenty meters some kind of eviction (or partial demolition of their home) was deemed inevitable.

In theory the spatial regulations allowed the SRT to maintain access to its tracks for maintenance and public safety. From the perspective of the organizers and NGOs who negotiated the lease, a community's compliance with the regulations demonstrated a desire to compromise and a shared sense responsibility among the residents of the tracks. By complying with the SRT's requirements, the residents felt they could demonstrate their interest in helping with the nationalist development project through spatial beautification. Many activists felt that a "strong community" could manage the complex interpersonal politics associated with the new spatial arrangements. Indeed, some supposed that it would inspire new collaborations and accommodations among residents willing to work together as a "community" to allow everyone to rent. Finally, for residents, compliance with these requirements was the clearest sign of development. By demolishing their homes, they were showing that they were indeed not staying as before.

In practice, however, the spatial regulations created new strains and divisions of strategic interest inside of communities. Residents in the back twenty meters could now firmly be committed to re-organizing their land, homes, and communities in the aim of

occupancy. Residents in the front twenty meters needed to be more strategic in their

decisions: On the one hand, some worked hard to get rental agreements signed,

thinking that this effort would result in a spatially reorganized community that would

rearrange houses to accomidate those homes that violated the agreement. This would

allow those residents to continue living along the tracks with safer homes than before.

On the other hand, many decided that they did not need to rent on the basis of the fact

that even in the best possible scenario they would still need to relocate. Thus, many in

the front twenty became passive resisters to the project, not attending meetings or

strategically participating when their interests were met.

Rights Alongside Development: The United Communities Network

Mae Horm and her constituents in the United Communities Network found the

CODI approach both problematic and advantageous. On the one hand, the group

became embedded in the ever expanding CODI approval bureaucracy, so project

approvals were long—lasting six months in the case of the first round of the twenty-

thousand baht housing upgrade grants. The UC communities were also subject to the

tedious meetings, extensive audits of their documents, and unnecessary regulatory

requirements set up by CODI's Khon Kaen offices.[52]

The requirements sought to make projects fair by giving a framework for

making sure project participants were using their twenty thousand baht grant for

necessary requirements and not extra home improvements. For example in the case of

the Housing Upgrade Grants: Residents had to be a part of the savings group to receive

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[52] At the time of this research (2008-2010), this was approximately US$ 600.

them; they had to report both the estimated costs of materials and their final costs; money could not be used for additional labor costs, only materials; projects had to be for necessary repairs (*songsaem*) not to expand the house with extras (*phermterm*). This last requirement was often expressed by contrasting appropriate materials, comparing, for example new corrugated metal for roofs (necessary) with tile (unnecessary).

In spite of these bureaucratic hassles and the fact that the network was unable to sign lease agreements in any of their communities, they did manage to secure both upgrade grants and to conduct several infrastructure projects. This occurred precisely because CODI did not prioritize rental. Ironically, this worked to the benefit of residents who chose not to rent but could still apply for housing upgrade grants provided their paperwork was handed in with proper documentation (see Chapter 5). So, although the improvements were conducted in violation of the railway's policy, CODI's emphasis on development first enabled residents to conduct a few badly needed repairs with their grant money.

Yet, the leaky processes that allowed these upgrades to proceed ended up stalling rental negotiations. Although CODI provided numerous venues for discussing the land issue, it offered limited help to Mae Horm in actually working out the complex disagreements that posed challenges to the lease agreements. CODI officials were often overburdened with projects and could not actually deal with the disagreements at hand. As such, they proposed new "learning processes" to help the network reorganize its internal structure, to allow communities to create "development timelines" for their projects, and to survey their land (several times over). So, even after the United Communities Network began negotiations with the SRT on their own, CODI's

processes stalled rental negotiations. Yet, because participation in the Baan Mankong project was a necessary prerequisite for the possibility of signing a lease such "learning processes" ended up actively working against the rental process.

The bulk of such learning was supposed to take place through community level planning activities but the reality was that it took place in the series of approval meetings that community projects had to pass before being approved. Instead of being an independent network as it had been prior to the Baan Mankong project, the UC became embroiled in a new series of vertically arranged power relations that masqueraded as horizontal ones. By this, I mean that the discursive practice of government cast these approval meetings as learning processes to help improve the residents, but obscured the fact that these meetings were actually sites of power over the distribution of material improvements. So, successive stages of meetings—community, network, city, zone, region, and nation—offered ample space for officials to limit the distribution of goods, reshape the values of residents, and influence the network's efforts at signing leases. Project officials scrutinized project plans and employed various forms of expertise to modify them to fit their models of improvement and good citizenship. These models often were rooted an ideal of a rural village which they re-imagined as collective and spatially integrated. This had the important effect of conditioning the spatial arrangements of communities, guiding project activities, slowing down upgrades, and problematizing the forms of struggle that were necessary for solving the disagreements over space and rental rights along the tracks.

Mae Horm's efforts to rent alongside development were unsuccessful from the perspective of securing long-term tenure security. Moreover, instead of escaping the

kinds of uneven power relationships endemic to her NGO work she found herself and her associates enmeshed in new networks of power. Although the municipality technically was in charge of funding the projects, CODI only released the money to the municipality after projects went through the various approval boards I described above. In this way, CODI's horizontally arranged approval structure was actually a relatively powerful vertically arranged hierarchy. Thus, CODI's technical critiques, learning processes, and personal development were tied to bureaucratic approval processes and the distribution of project money (Figure 4.6).

It is important to note the fact that such uneven processes were enacted through technical knowledge did not escape the eye of all of CODI's staff. As one architect told me, "I think CODI has made this situation worse (*langjak CODI ma satanakan yaekwa derm*). Before, this was NGO work (*Muakorn ni ku ngan NGO*). They knew how to struggle (*Khao rujak withi torsu*). All we know is technical information (*puak rao rujak kae ruang teknik*)."
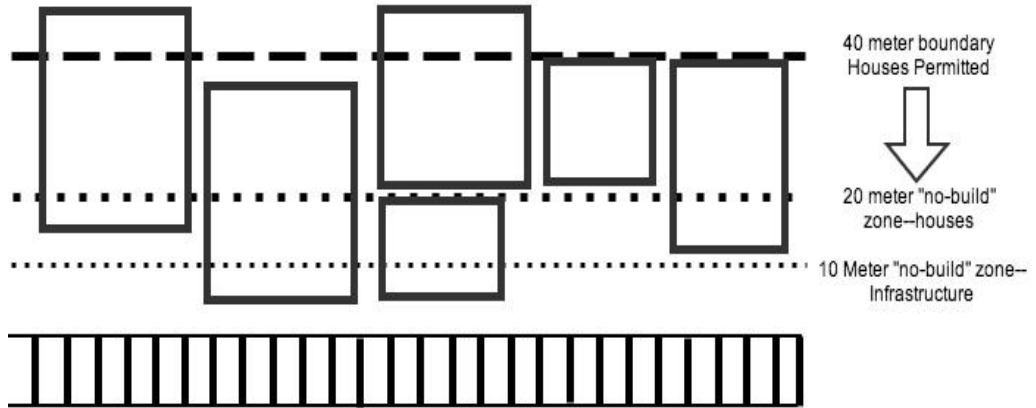
Figure 4.5: The SRT's spatial regulations.

Unitied Communities
Network Diagram
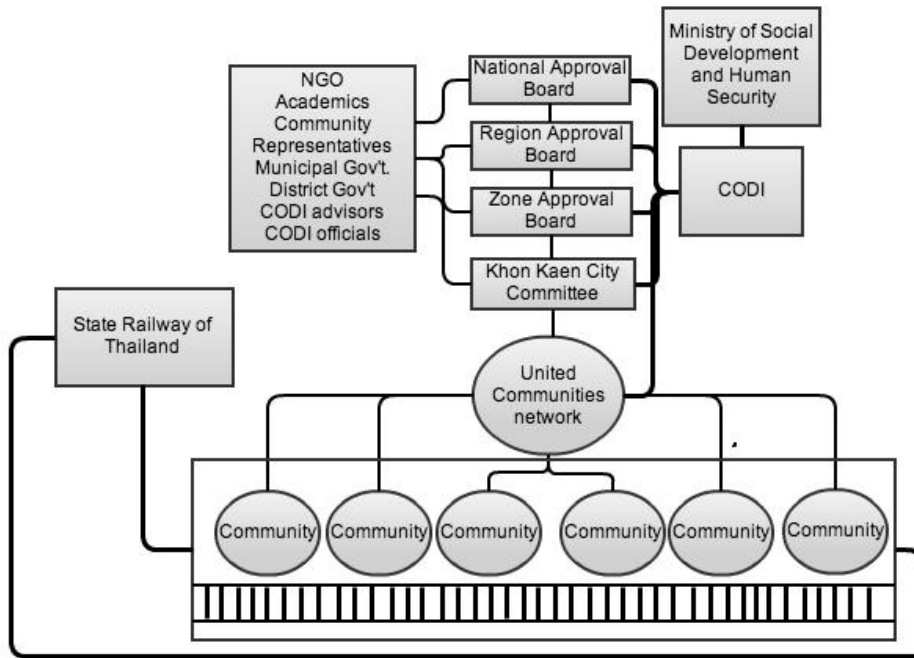
Figure 4.6: Power structures facing the UC network and Khon Kaen railway

communities including the SRT.

Rights First: the Khon Kaen Revival Network and Four Regions Slum Network

For activists in the Khon Kaen Slum Revival Network, the Baan Mankong project was secondary. Indeed, because my initial impulse in conducting this research was to study the implementation of Baan Mankong as a new effort at participatory urbanism, they often pointed out that it was only one activity they were involved in. Because of this, their enactment of the project was much less notable. Activists from the Four Region's Network were skeptical of CODI and their reliance on new community construction projects. They felt that these projects pushed the poor further into debt and facilitated land grabs by the wealthy. Moreover, they argued CODI was too accommodating in their approach to urban contestation. Nevertheless, the Four Region's network continued to draw well over half of its budget from CODI and was involved in implementing the Railway's lease agreements, so, these activists did follow many of the Baan Mankong related procedures even if they focused on struggles for rental. Indeed, the activists set up a more streamlined approval process that ultimately mirrored the CODI process. Additionally, savings was also a critical starting point for communities wishing to join the KKSR. Each community that belonged to the network had to have three savings accounts: a simple savings account, one for rental, and one to pay for network activities.

The network had a clear and successful procedure for securing lease agreements with the SRT but it encountered difficulties after leases had been signed. At the point that leases were signed, the network transitioned from waging a political struggle for visibility to policing the lease agreements and the residents themselves. For example,

many residents questioned the continued practice of communal organization through savings groups after they signed the leases. I attended numerous meetings in which KKSR leaders had to struggle with community leaders and residents to get them to understand that their participation in the Baan Mankong project was a requirement of the SRT's leases, as was such continued communal organization. The accounts became a source of confusion too because residents felt that they no longer needed to save collectively aside from rental after they had secured rights to the land. KKSR leaders had to continually remind these communities that those leases were contingent upon participation in community activities through CODI's project.

It is here that the bind facing residents (participating in either project) emerges most clearly—although residents had secured rights to their land (albeit in the form of a lease agreement), they still needed to remain communal and mobilized. While this communality was clearly articulated through CODI's philosophy, it was more opaque in the NGO rhetoric. There, organizers had to get residents to begin thinking about "cold situations" (*sathanakan yen*) instead of the "hot situations" (*sathanakan rorn*). Rental rights were a "hot situation"—something, activists explained, were easy to mobilize around. Issues like class, education, health, and quality of life were cold situations around which communal mobilization was harder to sustain.

Their dilemma highlighted the question of why activists felt that they needed to continually be organized around issues in the first place. Why was it necessary to continue to mobilize after rental? These questions speak to the dilemma that underlies activist conceptions of "citizen design." In order to gain rental, residents needed to organize and make political demands. After rental, the residents had to continue to act

communally to secure their leases and (at least in theory) continue their personal development. This notion of community served as both a mechanism of producing visibility and forcing the Railway to act, and as a mechanism of governing these communal subjects. After rental, for better and worse, community shifted from a mode of politics to a mechanism of policing. NGOs, accustomed to contesting a state that did not provide services for their citizens, mobilized the poor to help them gain their rights. In doing so, these newly rights- bearing subjects often desired to "be like everyone else" (*pen taotriam kap khon eun*) and wanted to withdraw from contestation. The activists felt that the continued inherent inequalities within Thailand's late-capitalist economy produced poverty and continued to produce exclusions that were best addressed through communal behavior. Moreover, they imagined such practices as perhaps cultivating, what J.K. Gibson-Graham call "post-capitalist subjects and affects." That is, such practices created new subjects attuned to the possibility of participating in a way of life beyond capitalist modes of exchange. But many residents simply were not interested in participating in that project. Moreover, cultivating communalism after rental seemed to reaffirm the old bifurcation that the poor were secondary sorts of subjects, relegated to an alternate communial universe beyond the corruptions of the market, inevitably imagined and organized by NGOs.

For some participants within the KKSR, this dilemma underscored a feeling of the "double standard," that the Red Shirt movement so forcefully came to articulate. In the post-lease period NGOs transitioned from being political organizers and became the arbiters of development and good communality by running trainings, organizing meetings, and continuing in their role as *philiang*, guardians of the residents, who

remained in the role of trainees. Moreover, their victory of rights proved to be a pallid one in the sense that those rights were also communal. Rooted in notions of poverty and the moral capacities of the villager, many residents complained, (especially leaders in successfully renting communities) that they were left to figure out how to make the new practice of communal governance work in ways that other middle and upper class citizens simply did not have to do. Once their moment of politics had passed, they were once again invisible inside their status as collective villagers.

One of my friends, Bunma, a leader in the KKSR, both an active leader in the Four Region's network and a supporter of the Red Shirts, put it the best when we were discussing the SRT's regulation that the residents could not sell their rights:

> People have to be able to sell their rights. If someone wants to sell their rights, the community should buy it, but they can't. What if the lot is worth 250,000 Thai baht? We can't save that much. Even if everyone in the community contributed. This is a problem in every community. The [NGO] network thinks that we should start a fund and the community can save and the Government can help subsidize. I am not so sure that the government will do that.

"It is strange isn't it?" he continued,

> We take care of the land, we spend our personal money on keeping it up, looking after it, and developing it, but the government just wants to take rent for it. They haven't done anything to improve the land. It seems like everything poor people have to do, they have to do it together. It is like the government or NGOs (some NGOs [*NGO bang khon*]) don't want us to be able to raise our level to become individuals [*yok radap pen tua bukkhon*]. Otherwise we would be able to challenge them.

Bunma and the others I became friends with in the KKSR praised the Four Regions activists and frequently pointed out how much they had gained from the NGOs, they also recognized the framework within which these gains were made. Such

limitations were not due to particular individuals within the NGO movement, but rather a broader conception of the capabilities of the residents living along the tracks. The above description highlights the binds emerging from that perception: Residents along the tracks were stuck between the Railway and its regulations and the NGOs and CODI and their trainings. Even once they gained rights to their land they did not move beyond the position of the "not yet" land owner and the "not yet" citizen.

Democratic Double Standards

These differences became acutely visible as the Red Shirt movement gained prominence. While many of the NGOs and some of the residents who worked closely with these activists were skeptical of both the Red and Yellow organizations, some actively derided Thaksin and the Red Shirts and some supported the anti-democratic Yellow Shirts. Indeed, the politics of moderation and communality espoused by many in the Yellow shirted People's Alliance for Democracy had *some* of its roots in the NGO movement itself. Because of this support, these large political issues moved into the background as residents continued their work with their old NGO partners even as many participated in Red Shirt mobilizations on the side.[53]

Those mobilizations and the emerging debates about the political possibilities for poor subjects highlighted the "double standard" apparent in the relationship between the CODI and the NGO projects: while electoral democracy had been suspended on the

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[53] There are interesting comparisons to be made between the rise of civil society as a language for contesting the state (Pasuk 1999) or deepening democracy (Oxhorn 1999, LoGerfo 1997, Pye 1999) and this apparent turn of Thailand's "civil society" leaders against democracy. These turns echo a number of theoretical treatments of civil society which view it as both related to democratic contestation and the production of new forms of domination (see Gramsci 1977).

basis of the incapacities of the poor, participation itself had begun to flourish through efforts like the Baan Mankong project. Indeed, among NGOs the sense was that the poor needed to be mobilized constantly. Yet, participation was not simply a tool of politics, but also a site training, something the poor had to master to be seen as potential autonomous political subjects. So, even as participation blossomed, it did so through the mechanisms I described throughout this chapter—tedious meetings and learning processes that actually made it more difficult for residents to gain the kinds of material improvements and rights they desired. Moreover, these disjunctures highlighted the way that other citizens, on the basis of having more money, were already seen as capable autonomous individuals. In this way, participation and democracy came to be seen as something the poor needed to master prior to gaining an autonomous life—a life enjoyed by wealthier citizens and held in place by increasingly violent, undemocratic forms of government.

Chapter 5:

On the Bureaucratic Production of Harmony

One of the first activities on which I accompanied CODI's community architects was a "community land survey" in the recently renamed "Unity in Development" community. The settlement sits on the outskirts of Khon Kaen city and has been in and out of the city's community activist networks since their founding in the late 1990s. After a meeting I attended there with Mae Horm and their election of a new headman, Paw Saksi, the community had renewed its efforts to rent. The new name was symbolic in this regard, demonstrating the resident's reinvigorated commitment to unify and develop.[54]

CODI's architects, Khit and Frank (a name I gave him early on in my fieldwork) and I spent the day pounding in stakes along the tracks with Paw Saksi and two other members of the community leadership committee. The stakes marked distances of ten and twenty meters from the edges of the rail ties. The twenty-meter stake marked the edge of the State Railway of Thailand (SRT)'s "no-build zone." That zone was subdivided in two: The first ten meters of the "no-build zone" was to be left entirely clear for public safety and track maintenance. The next ten meters marked an area where community infrastructure could be built—a road, garden, or drainage system— but not houses; beyond the first twenty meters, houses were permitted. As we walked along the train tracks, Khit made a hand-drawn plan of the community while Frank unfurled a large tape-measurer allowing a resident to mark the distances by pounding

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[54] The introductory vignette describing the community meeting in Chapter 4 took place in this community.

the stakes into the ground with a large rubber mallet. When the stakes were in place, I sprayed them with a can of bright orange paint (Figure 5.1 and 5.2).

Through this process, the Railway's regulations became visible. All of the houses in the area in the beyond the twenty meter stakes were safe from demolition, while any part of a structure that crossed the twenty meter line would be demolished in order to bring it, and the whole community, into compliance with the spatial regulations dictated by the SRT.

As I walked, Paw Saksi, one of the community's leaders, shared his hopes for the community. He told me that the first thing the community planned to build once the lease was signed was a drainage system to prevent the kinds of recurrent floods that have been common in the community since it was founded more than thirty years ago. After that, he said they planned to pave the dirt road that ran in front of the houses. Once those projects were complete, the residents wanted to build a permanent recycling center where the makeshift one currently sat because many of the residents earned their living by collecting recyclables in the city.

Making these lines visible was the first step towards achieving this vision. With the stakes in place, new spatial perimeters began to appear, bringing with them new possible futures—development and rights, on the one hand, and eviction and demolition, on the other. The stakes also made the regulations real in the sense that these boundaries were no longer a matter of speculation, estimation, or guesswork. The visibility of the lines exerted a force by highlighting which structures would be left alone, which would be modified, and which would be demolished completely.

Figure 5.1: Community land survey. Source: N/A

Figure 5.2: Residents marking regulatory boundaries along the tracks.

Source: N/A

For residents wishing to gain occupancy rights, bringing their houses into compliance with the new boundaries opened up new possibilities of security and legitimacy through an enforceable set of rights rooted in the lease agreement. No longer trespassers, these residents could claim this space for themselves and legally improve it. Yet, the lines also made it clear that those claims to legitimacy were unevenly distributed across space. Thus, legitimacy gained through compliance and cooperation with the SRT's demands came with its costs. For some residents the lines meant security, for others they meant increasingly imminent eviction. This duality underscored the difficulty of reconstituting this space as a unified community once the leases were signed.

Our path, however, was always an approximation of the SRT's regulations. Embankments, drainage ponds, uneven terrain, and uncooperative buildings made it impossible to mark the boundaries as a perfectly straight line. Where a structure blocked our path, we painted a line on it at an approximate distance. Sometimes we'd move the stake in a meter or so, allowing the defiant building (or perhaps its defiant owner) to remain as they were. These slight deviations, rooted in the stubbornness of both physical and social topography, revealed the uncertainty at the core of implementing these new regulations. Nevertheless, by the end of the day we had marked these lines and the Railway's long discussed boundaries could now be seen with the naked eye.

Throughout the "cold season" of 2008 and 2009, I accompanied CODI architects, leaders from the United Communities Network, and community residents from settlements across Khon Kaen as we drew these lines along the length of the tracks. In doing so, community came into focus as a production based on certain

practices tied to notions of social harmony and unified space. Yet, observing this practice revealed that these lines themselves were imaginary. They were visions of unity and legibility that obscured a host of knotty disagreements and complex spatial dilemmas entailed in actually bringing the community into existence.

If such representations failed to capture the conflicts that always threatened to destabilize the production of community, then what were these practices of documentation, surveying, and mapping doing? In this chapter, I argue that this version of community production, rooted the use of bureaucratic forms of representation, sought to represent unity and harmony among residents where, in fact, little could actually be found.

But why represent community in a way that missed the disagreements fundamental to the ongoing conflicts that always threatened to derail the rental negotiations? The answer to this question lies, in part, in a close examination of the relationship between Baan Mankong's bureaucratic practices—surveying, standardization, rationalization, and documentation—and its social practices. Throughout the Baan Mankong project, the production of communities (embodiments of physical and personal development) was encoded in documents, site surveys, spatial plans, and project budgets. These bureaucratic forms represented the creation of unified and harmonious communities. As I argued in the last chapter, project planners theorized that savings groups and community organizations—created by communally-minded, moderate, villagers—became the technical apparatus through which community became a governable (and a governed) space. As this chapter shows, residents not only learned

to master techniques of personal transformation, but also the aesthetics of the bureaucratic forms that represented unity in order to gain access to project money.

Yet, these bureaucratic processes themselves were inevitably partial and bound-up in the messy sociality of the spaces that they sought to order. Thus, community itself, when rendered coherent, harmonious, and legible through these bureaucratic forms, was always incomplete. CODI planners and community residents created ledger sheets and surveyed spaces as part of the project, but at the same time these ledger sheets were altered to represent a clearer picture of "community" on the tracks than what actually existed. Many times community leaders, CODI, or the SRT were aware of these discrepancies and sought to correct them, but other times these officials ignored such conflicts or obscured them to enable material improvements to happen along the tracks in ways that they might not have been able to if a more accurate picture of community had been drawn.

This chapter examines the production of legibility and illegibility and its effects by describing the United Communities network and its efforts to negotiate rental rights and to complete Baan Mankong infrastructure and housing upgrades in its constituent communities. I argue that the very process through which Baan Mankong's planners sought make a new type of community—by documenting residents, ordering space, and rationalizing administrative processes—obscured the existing disagreements between residents rooted in different notions of citizenship (and their different mixtures of politics and policing) and the inherent difficulties caused by the privatization of the Railway's land.

Even though the ordering of community space did not produce more secure rights, the production of legible, bounded communities remained essential to CODI's vision as it enabled the possibility of development. Residents had to be registered to single lots, temporary renters and businesses had to be documented and evicted, and spatial boundaries between communities had to be made clear. Only through these processes could the socially harmonious and spatially unified version of community be created. Moreover, such representations allowed CODI's vision of development to be implemented whether or not a community had rights to the land.[55]

Indeed this was the case for the communities that belonged to the United Communities network. In those communities, the process of rendering unity legible through bureaucratic forms made the community "elligable" (Walker 2012) for upgrade money while obscuring the messy processes of politics and policing going on in the midst of these physical improvements. By disregarding overlapping spatial claims and the complex relationships that had been produced through the history of settlement and the struggles associated with gaining rights to the land, the United Communities network was able to gain access to upgrade money from CODI enabling the physical improvement of some houses and infrastructure. At the same time, the inability of these bureaucratic representations of unity and harmony to address the fundamental conflicts within the settlements marked such achievements as temporary. Indeed, representations

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[55] There is a certain irony here in my usage of Scott's work. Scott points out the danger modernist forms of authoritarian social engineering rooted in practices of simplification. Throughout *Seeing Like a State* he calls for an increased attention to *metis,* or local forms of knowledge, as ways of avoiding the danger posed by the high-modernist social abstraction he describes (1998: 309-341). Baan Mankong's participatory structure deeply relied on *metis.* Yet, as I show local knowledge is always contested and deployed to particular ends. So, even where local knowledge is deployed, it often becomes contested or obscured in the aim of producing governable, legitimized, communities.

of harmony for CODI often left out the forms disagreement that prevented rental from the SRT.

As I show in the next chapter, secure community rights did not flow directly out of harmonious representations. Rather, the communities that signed lease agreements—those in the Khon Kaen Slum Revival Network—did so through *both* bureaucratic techniques and waging disagreement. Thus, the relationship between legibility and illegibility was productive but not sufficient to gain rights. In fact, where communities engaged most deeply in the production of these bureaucratic forms without managing conflicts, no lease agreements were signed.

This is key: For members of the United Communities network the disagreements and their roots were exactly what became invisible through their emphasis on bureaucratic productions of harmonious communities. By obscuring conflicts and deadening dissent, these forms disappeared disagreements at precisely the moment when engaging them became most important—at the point of signing leases with the SRT. This dynamic was particularly powerful for residents living in the twenty meters closest to the tracks, whose homes were always going to be destroyed in order to comply with the Railway's regulations. On numerous occasions, those residents who stood to gain little from signing leases with the SRT, so they often participated in the production of visions of harmony for the sake of the upgrade money while disagreeing when it came to rental. Thus, they were able to improve their homes while "dragging their feet" and forestalling immanent evictions.[56]

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[56] Many of these strategies and tactics are analyzed in James Scott's classic analysis of peasant resistance *Weapons of the Weak* (1985).

Although communities were forced to materialize themselves as whole and united in various bureaucratic embodiments like documents, savings group ledgers, and community plans, in practice the social relationships in the community were shifting, forming, and dissolving around specific practices and outcomes. From the Railway's perspective this combination of forming and dissolving around bureaucratic practices made it seem as though the residents of these communities could not cooperate or manage themselves, when in fact the production of consensus regarding rental was nearly impossible because the rental and upgrade procedures placed various groups of residents at odds with one another. Ultimately then, what was made invisible as harmonious communities appeared were the real vulnerabilities that the Baan Mankong policy aimed to correct.

Bureaucratic (Il)legibilities and (Ir)rationalities

Understandings of the bureaucracy have been essential to studies of the Thai state from the 1960s onward. Geographer Fred Riggs' (1966) study of Thailand as "Bureaucratic Polity" informed notions of the state for close to thirty years. Riggs' study described the functional transformation of the Thai bureaucracy from the period prior to the collapse of the absolute monarchy through the 1932 revolution. Riggs claimed that the end of the absolute monarchy ushered in an era in which the bureaucracy under the various government ministries became important sites of policy implementation at once extended some of the hierarchical rule found in the monarchical system, while simultaneously transforming the government into something that

resembled the structure of a modern nation state. In short, he argued that after the fall of the monarchy, the bureaucracy and the cabinet became important new sites of power.

In practice, as Riggs demonstrates, local authorities had very little power, while most power was invested in the center. As Riggs puts it, "Without external centers of power capable of controlling the bureaucracy, the main arena of political rivalry in Thailand has come to be the cabinet as a ruling committee of effective heads of the ministries with their respective departments, including the armed forces, which form the apex of bureaucratic authority" (1966: 212). Indeed, for Riggs, these ministries were central sites of power and their rigidly structured hierarchies were essential to government across Thailand. Yet, as James Ockey has pointed out, Riggs' study conflated the military and the bureaucracy and focused narrowly on the top-level bureaucrats only (2004: 156). He argues that the focus on the bureaucracy central to early Thai studies failed to capture what was going on within the "polity" itself as new groups emerged to transform the state.

However, as Charles Keyes' (1991) study of village schools describes, bureaucrats and civil servants remained important as local power holders and have been essential to the Thai educational system, which he argues prepares students to maintain subordinate relationship with local administrators and bureaucrats as a practice of good citizenship rooted in Thai-ness. Indeed, following the transition towards democracy at the beginning of the 1990s a great deal of power over budgeting was decentralized towards the local municipality and district level administrators, which produced new power arrangements via changed relationships between local business interests and the state (Arghiros 2001). Such decentralization, as Ockey (2004) argues, has radically

changed the formal bureaucracy divesting power from it and transferring it to the

Bangkok middle class, an emerging class of technocrats, NGO organizers, and new

business elites. Nevertheless, in my experience, bureaucratic procedures, organized

hierarchies, and bureaucratic aesthetics remain essential to everyday politics in

Thailand.

CODI is not the classic Thai bureaucracy. Although many of the officials in

CODI have taken and passed the civil service exams, CODI presents itself as a different

kind of government organization. CODI employees rarely wear the formal military style

uniforms associated with the Thai bureaucracy. The styles of employees range from

middle-class managers—collared golf shirts and slacks—to classic "NGO-wear," like

Ché Guevara t-shirts and sandals, to so-called "indy" style (especially popular among

the agency's architects) with vintage clothing, large retro eyeglasses, and highly styled

hair. CODI's office building in Bangkok also seeks to portray this "government with a

human face" approach as it was built to "modestly represent the image of CODI as a

public organization; friendly and approachable, and to encourage these sense of

personal participation and ownership" (Nithi ed. 2010: 142). The building portrays

these themes via its vast open plaza, informal meeting spaces, and top-hung windows

and irregular wood siding made to "replicate the character or urban poor housing"

(*ibid*).[57] Although Khon Kaen's regional CODI office is built in the classic style of

provincial government buildings and is located in the same compound as the Provincial

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[57] Ironically, this building—a brand new facility—and its modernist slum aesthetic replaced an old, dilapidated office location in a seedy section of downtown Bangkok, that CODI employees used to refer to as "the slum."

Hall, employees regularly gathered collectively in outdoor spaces for casual lunches of sticky rice and fermented fish, staple village faire.

These turns away from the formalities of bureaucratic life echo broader transformations in the practice of government associated with late capitalism. As Nikolas Rose has pointed out, neoliberal governmentality itself seems to avoid heavy-handed bureaucratic interventions in favor of "governing through freedom" (1999a: 72). The sufficiency economy and projects like CODI with their emphasis on personal development and techniques of the self like moderation, sufficiency, and saving, all reflect such a transformation in modes of power (see Ivarsson and Isager 2010). Yet, even Rose argues that governmentality relies on the production of objects of governance through technologies of order and rationality. As he points out, specific technologies must be used to produce community as a "third space" of government. "Boundaries and distinctions have to be emplaced; these spaces have to be visualized, mapped, surveyed, and mobilized" (1999a: 189). Tania Li (2007) argues that such processes are essential to the way that development renders political problems as amenable to technical solutions and are thus, central to understanding development's (anti) political effects. So, in this way, CODI's work is in fact deeply tied to the implementation of bureaucratic procedures and operates through specific bureaucratic forms.

As Max Weber (1968) famously argued, this ordering is essential to the workings of modern bureaucracy. By turning disorder into order, bureaucratic organizations rationalize power moving away from governance through charisma, and towards the production of state systems that are formal, regulated, and rational. Weber argued that rationalization had profound social effects, as it transformed individual

bureaucrats into actors bound by the "iron cage" of reason, governed neither by religious morality nor by the caprice of hierarchical social relations, but by rigid frameworks, procedures, and rules that were frequently distinct from the broader social worlds those bureaucrats occupied.

Paradoxically, however, it is states and their bureaucrats that end up defining what constitutes order and rationality. As historians Philip Corrigan and Derek Sayer's (1985) study of the rise of the English nation-state shows, just as the modern state brought itself into being through its own speech—via laws, edicts, and acts of parliament—it also became embroiled in defining what is rational. As Corrigan and Sayer point out, "They [states] define, in great detail, acceptable forms and images of social activity and individual and collective identity; they regulate, in empirically specifiable ways, much —very much, by the twentieth century—of social life" (1985:3). As Michael Herzfeld has pointed out, bureaucratic order is itself is situated within cultural fields and subject to its own systems of symbols and logics that depart from what might be defined through notions of "western reason" that Weber identifies (1992:16). Taken together, these arguments indicate that the mythos of bureaucratic reason and rationality masks complex, flexible, and situated practices that serve purposes other than making legibility out of the illegible (see also Herzfeld 2005).

And yet, the intention of bureaucrats remains to produce order out of disorder. Anthropologist James Scott's *Seeing Like a State* (1998) argues that this perception only deepened through the merger of bureaucratic rationality and high modernism, which allowed the state to intervene in a whole host of sites and spaces seeking to govern by making what was previously invisible, visible, and illegible, legible. For Scott, this

process was accomplished through mapping, naming, and documenting a whole host of social processes and bringing them into the view of the state—a process he points out fails due to the pervasive "simplifications" state agents rely on. Yet, as Fernando Coronil (2001) argues, Scott's emphasis on forms of legibility not only over-determines the state's ability to make the messiness of social life legible, but also focuses too closely on an all powerful state, forgetting about the influence of the market.

Instead of following Scott's basic insight here—that states attempt to make legible (even if it usually fails)—I deviate to consider the production of legibility as an aesthetic process tied to particular materials, forms, and distributions of sensation that make order appear orderly. This deviation does not negate CODI and the SRT's clear interests in producing legible, harmonious communities, but rather demonstrates that the complex social processes entailed in rendering legible are always in relation to multiple ends. In the case of CODI, the emphasis on legibility enabled interventions, justifying the agency's power to produce sites of government in poor communities and legitimizing its citizen designs. While in the case of the SRT, the aesthetic of legibility was precisely in the aim of enabling the market to correct both the financial problems of the SRT and the "disorder" produced during previous regimes of spatial governance. By sorting the ordered and harmonious communities from the disordered ones, the SRT attempted to justify evictions and make way for the possibility of renting to private businesses. In this case, legibility was precisely in the service of the market.

Moreover, I am not concerned with the "truth-value" of the legible—that is, whether what becomes legible is actually true. Rather, I follow the work of a number of anthropologists who have looked at numbers, documents, and other bureaucratic forms

as methods of governing in their own right (Hull 2003, 2008; Gordillo 2006; Coles 2004; Ghertner 2010). Matthew Hull (2003: 293) has called these forms "graphic artifacts," and pointed out the way that they "are central to bureaucratic practices because they mediate the actions of individuals and the agency of larger groups, including that of the organization as a whole" (2003: 300). As such, "graphic artifacts" are ways in which the state asserts its authority by appearing to make populations legible. Akhil Gupta and Aradhana Sharma (2006) show that, what they call, "governmental idioms" are also something that both NGOs and subaltern populations master for their own ends. Such idioms and artifacts have proliferated under late-capitalism as new agents of government have been created alongside an "audit culture" (Strathern 2000) that prizes good governance and transparency rooted in quantification and documentary forms.

I follow these insights highlighting the way that bureaucratic forms, idioms, and artifacts comprise their own aesthetics. As D. Asher Ghertner has suggested in relationship to Delhi's slum surveys, bureaucratic practices like surveys enact power through aesthetics themselves, "No longer implemented to assess slum space accurately, the survey becomes more of an aesthetic and narrative technique to train slum dwellers to see different types of urban space as either desirable or deplorable based on their outward appearance" (2010: 187). More than this, following Rancèire, aesthetics are not only pedagogical—that is enforced—but essential to the composition of the general order of bodies. Thus, for actors wishing to become visible, like the residents along the tracks in Khon Kaen, the deployment of bureaucratic forms was essential to being seen as responsible, unified, sufficient villagers. As such, accuracy was not necessarily the

point of bureaucratic forms produced by residents, but rather being seen in a particular

way was—in the cases that follow, as unified, harmonious communities.

Attention to this gap between thought and the produced worlds of bureaucratic

practices and forms highlights the uncertainties inherent in the production of

bureaucratic power. Aesthetics repositions legibility as something that emerges in

relation to, by managing, and (occasionally) by producing illegibility. Andrew Mathews

argues that:

> close attention to these mundane practices of collusion and evasion
> radically transforms our understanding of the location and texture of
> official knowledge making and even the project of legibility itself.
> Rather than an official knowledge that arises from the imposition of
> legibility of officials, society and nature, as Scott describes, I suggest
> that official knowledge can also be the relatively fragile product of
> negotiations between officials and their audiences (2008: 486).

It is this kind of mundane collusion rooted in aesthetic forms that I focus on below

because it avoids the temptation to consider Baan Mankong as "deep democracy"

(Appadurai 2002) on the one hand, or simply "democratic technique" (Coles 2004), on

the other. Instead I shift attention to the situated social practices and encounters

entailed in producing community itself, which occasionally reflect democratic impulses

and sometimes are the result of imposed technique. My description of the process of

producing harmonious communities, then, *does not* hone in on inconsistencies to claim

corruption on the part of either bureaucrats or residents, nor to point out that the power

to collude and misrepresent is evenly distributed, but rather to emphasize how

knowledge and the "optics of state" implied in that knowledge are, as Mathews points

out, "fragile negotiations." I begin with these fragile negotiations below.

The Demands of Legibility

The description of the survey that I begin the chapter with was the starting point for the Baan Mankong project and the SRT rental process. The spatial surveys, began in fall of 2008 were complete by the beginning of 2009. These surveys represented a significant first effort for the rest of the communities in the United Communities network. I accompanied local community leaders, Mae Horm, and CODI staff architects on these surveys through January. While most of these surveys were uneventful, following the pattern I described at the beginning of this chapter, they did allow local community leaders involved in Baan Mankong to walk the entire length of the tracks in their various areas. Along the way, these leaders encountered their neighbors. Some knew about the Baan Mankong project and the rental process but were unclear on its details; some knew the details but were unsure of whether they would participate; others seemed to be flatly opposed to the project.

Our encounters with this last group led to contentious debates. In some cases, residents were unfamiliar with the project or feigned ignorance, but in many cases they were directly confrontational. These on-the-spot disagreements revealed the simmering differences within various communities. In many cases, they showed how community leaders who had been deeply involved with the project frequently had a difficult time convincing residents to participate. More than that however, these encounters demonstrated a difference between the end product of the survey—a community rendered harmonious through a unified spatial plan—and a community's actual level of participation in the project.

These differences were at issue when the SRT's Director of Property visited

Khon Kaen in February (following the land surveys) to discuss the terms of rental with

the Baan Mankong representatives from each community in the United Communities

network. The meeting occurred in the shadow of the approval of three communities

from the Khon Kaen Revival network. The day before the meeting, a number of leaders

from the United Communities network met with the representative in the lobby of one

of Khon Kaen's anonymous looking business hotels. There, they sat in the lobby

discussed the meeting that would take place the following day.[58]

The representative from the Railway stressed that the SRT wanted to rent to

everyone, but that the community members needed to sort out the "issues" in each

community—these issues included residents who were listed on the Railway's roster as

active residents along the tracks but had sold their rights to someone else, people using

Railway land for businesses, and people using the Railway land for rentals. The

representative stressed the fact that the official list of residents needed to match the

actual residents living there. People not on the official list of occupants would be

evicted. He stressed to Mae Horm in particular that the network needed to collect the

housing registration cards for each member so that the SRT could cross-check the

residents with that list. The meeting made it clear that the SRT conceived of rental as a

process of stabilizing and ending new settlement. Moreover, where the land was being

used as a business the Railway expected to collect more rent than the reduced rate for

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[58] The vignette from the previous chapter in which I quote the Railway director was from this series of
meetings.

poor communities. In short, the Railway saw its land as an asset first and a form of public housing second.

The Railway had been collecting lists along the tracks since the beginning of the UCs mobilizations in 1997. The most important list however, was one tied to the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) that was signed between the Four Region's Slum Network and the SRT in 2003 (see Chapter 4). At that time the SRT agreed, in principle, that it would rent to the 61 railway communities covered on the MOU. This was not an issue at the time because those 61 communities were the only ones that had been organized and working with the Four Regions network [with the exception of the Friends community which was left off the MOU] and thus, appeared to be (for the sake of the SRT convenience) the only ones along the tracks. Also, because the MOU preceded the creation of the CODI-sponsored national community network, this list, and the Four Regions role in negotiating it, was not a problem.

By 2009, the reported number of communities differed significantly from the number on the MOU. Approximately 230 communities "appeared" along the tracks via CODI's extensive surveys. To complicate this picture further, even among the 61 communities named in the original MOU many split and split again. In Khon Kaen, for example, the number of "communities" grew from 13 to 17 (depending on who is doing the counting). Additionally, CODI had created a community network called *Sahat Orngkan Chumchon* (SAC), which, like the Four Region's network was supposed to become a social movement pressuring public agencies to begin renting their land to

communities.[59] These new networks and ever-expanding numbers of settlements

underscored the fictional quality of the original MOU. Although the list of communities

seemed official, it merely obscured the way in which the settlements along the tracks

both continued to expand and subdivide and that not all could possibly sign leases.

Yet, that fantasy had real effects. As Mathew Hull has argued, there is a

"bureaucratic irony that dependence on written artifacts to secure fixity can result in the

opposite effect" (2008: 585). On the one hand, the legality of the MOU was precisely

the document that enabled residents to begin struggling for leases. The legality of the

MOU presented the terms upon which, as Holston (1991) might point out, the illegal

could become legal. Yet from the Railway's perspective, that standard would always

prove problematic because its attempt to stop time at 2003 was incomplete. Settlement

had continued long after the document was created and the document itself was a result

of a disputed community count. Thus, their reliance on that document only led to further

claims and deeper contestation.

As if to demonstrate this, the following day's meeting, held at CODI's Khon

Kaen office, began with reference to the 2003 MOU and the ledgers that recorded

residents at that time. The Railway's representative began this way:

> The reason I came here today was to speak with the different
> communities that have wanted to rent. Today, we have all the
> communities gathered that are in the original list that the Four Regions
> gathered (*wanni rao mi tuk chumchon ti yu nai raichu ti salam si pak
> kep*). I came today to report that the policy of the SRT is to solve the

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[59] *Sahat Orngkan Chumchon* is a nation-wide network of poor communities created by participants in the Baan Mankong project and sponsored by CODI. The network provided an alternative to the Four Region's Slum network, but has, as of yet, been unable to establish itself as a meaningful activist network because of its ambiguously close relationship with CODI. Outside of CODI sponsored events like the annual World Habitat Day activities, this was the only time anyone from the network in Bangkok came to Khon Kaen.

problem of the communities built on the Railway land quickly (*wanni phom mai raignan wa naiobai kanrotfai ku kaekhai panha chumchon rotfai tae tong rip kae*). We aren't going to address whether or not you are in this network or that network (*rao mai sonjai wa yu kap khruakhia ni khruakhai nan*). We are going to use the ledger that we surveyed in 2003 (*rao ja chai raichu ti rao samruat nai phi 2546*). That ledger is going to be central because we have had it for a long time and we haven't addressed it. Since that time we've had people come from the outside and things have grown little by little, so we need to address that.

He continued, pointing out that the Railway's policy was not to rent to "trespassers" (*phubukruk)*, but, because of CODI and the Baan Mankong, the SRT changed its policy, allowing communities to rent. Rental, he said, was to be organized communally, calculated as one "space"(*phunti*) and divided by the occupants themselves. The opportunity to rent was limited to those registered as living in the community as of 2003.

The first step towards rental, after the land survey, was a counting exercise—each community was instructed to count the number of people in the community and compare them to the list. If there were people who were not on the list or had transferred their ownership rights they threatened the possibility of leasing the land. As the Director put it,

> With the exception of inheritance (*moraadok*) to family members you cannot transfer property (*on sapsin mai dai*). Every contract that gets presented to the SRT will have to count the names on the list and make sure they are accurate (*nai tuk sanya ti ja namsanur kan rotfai ja tong nap chu nai raichu lae truatsob*). After we've approved your rental, the SRT will come down another time to check to see if every individual is the person who has requested to rent is accurate or not (*langjak bord anumat kankhaw chao, rot fai ja long mai ek ti lae truat sob pua hin khon ni tuk ru mai*). We'll check their name to see if it is true. We'll check to see if they have transferred their rights to someone else. Because the Railway doesn't have to let you use the land for whatever you want to use it for. This time we are giving you a special price for

people with low incomes. You need to understand that in the case of "congested communities" (*chumchon aeat)* we do not allow the transference of ownership (*rao mai anumat on sithi*).

Under these conditions, rental agreements would be difficult or impossible without a significant amount of negotiation, meeting, and mediation undertaken by the Railway, CODI, and the residents themselves. This work would need to anticipate, manage, and intervene in problems among residents who had sold their rights to the land and among residents that had moved into the space following the creation of the 2003 account. Additionally, these stipulations demanded that these groups address the question of what to do with the residents living in the twenty meters closest to the railline and the disputed community boundaries. Yet, in the above scenario, the director of the Railway proposed that the SRT's job was simply to check the lists against the actual settlements, leaving the question of how to deal with such conflicts and disagreements open for the UC network to manage on their own. For the SRT, the lists themselves would represent the ideal of harmony and it was up to the residents to sort these other complicated issues out with the help of CODI who could collect and verify documents and help the residents conduct more surveys.

If the counting exercise sought to regulate and stabilize residency, it also served to stir up deeply contested terrain. The count sought to end the hybrid practices of settlement that produced each community and supplant them with measured documented ones that would both end squatting and enable the uniform collection of rent by the Railway. As I described previously, settlement of these spaces was fluid. They were composed of permanent residents and temporary residents—both renters, family members from distant provinces, and recent urban migrants—of varying

incomes. Sometimes these temporary residents became permanent. The counting exercise sought to intervene in this fluidity, stabilizing the community by not only making it impossible for new people to settle along the tracks, but also evicting unregistered residents. By making the space legible it would allow the Railway to distinguish between legitimate and illegitimate settlers, making it possible to evict illegitimate residents while seemingly protecting vulnerable, poor occupants. Moreover, legalizing some communities and some residents (but not all) would have the broader effect of clearing the other landholdings for commercial development.

The counting exercise also created particular discursive perimeters. The notion of the special rental rates for "low income residents" and the special rules for "congested communities" defined the indicators of a legitimate resident and a legitimate community. Legitimate communities were those that were spatially unified and composed of harmonious villagers that stopped squabbling with each other and organized communally to administer the leases. Thus, in order to secure rental, community became defined by poverty, on the one hand and harmonious unity on the other.

This framing had effects that echo Laura Nader's (1990) path-breaking work on the "harmony ideology," which enforces the notion that conciliation and reconciliation is inherently good while conflict is bad and dysfunctional (1990:2). Her work among Zapotec villagers shows how harmony is political and can be both used to impose and contest hegemony. As she shows, harmony can be used to silence disagreements with the state, but it can also be used from within to make it impossible for states to see the differences within communities. Her ethnography demonstrates how Spanish law and

Catholic missionaries imposed harmony ideologies upon Zapotec villagers, who later

used the same notions of harmony to prevent encroachments by the state (1990).

Anthropologist Laurel Rose's (1992) study of "harmony politics" in Swaziland shows

that harmony is often strategically employed by both powerless citizens and powerful

and emergent groups of leaders in land disputes. Both groups, she points out deploy

harmony strategically to serve their own ends.

Yet, here harmony was not a result of speech, but of an embedded aesthetic of

unity and order within the notion of community as represented in documentary forms.

These requirements take on a deeper salience in light of the Railway's final demand that

communities be unified. In the director's words:

> In my experience when I've seen communities encounter problems that
> prevent them from renting it is due to problems within the communities
> (*nai prasopakan khong phom, waela chumchon mi panha thi khatkwang
> kankho chao yu kap panha nai chumchon*). I've said this again and again.
> When it comes time to rent, the community splits into 2 factions, 3
> factions, 4 factions until the rental process fails (*waela mai kep kha chao
> bup, chumchon baeng song fai sam fai si fai krabuan kanchao yut*).
> Sometimes groups will present and then we go down to check the
> community and we find out that the people that presented the community
> were not in the community (*bangkhrang klum ja sanur lae rot fai pai
> chek chumchon lae jer wa khon thi sanur mai chai khon yu nai
> chumchon nan*).

> For my part, I am in Bangkok (*samrap phom, phom yu nai krungthep*). I
> am not a member of the community and I don't know who is in it (*phom
> mai chai samachik chumchon phom mai rujak khrai*). They present and
> issue and I go down and look at the space and the next day there is
> another faction in the community that wants to rent. When we organize
> the community we can only complete the process if there are no conflicts
> (*waela rao jatkan chumchon rao ja mi khwam samret tha mai mi khwam
> thaek yaek*). If we decide to rent and there is conflict it is not possible to
> continue (*tha rao tatsinjai ja chao lae jer khwam thaek yaek tho mai
> dai*). You can't fix it (*kae mai dai*).

This last description of community obscured the productive work occurring during the meeting. "Inside" and "outside" were not stable but subject to intense disagreement. Though there were ostensibly problems "in" the community, what was "in" was never clear. Harmony was the imperative pushed by the Railway, but by considering the residents listed on MOU as the only thing "internal" to the community these boundaries obscured other "internal" factors, namely the Railway, the different networks, conflicted boundaries, and the shifting political economies that caused settlement in the first place. This harmony driven conception of "internal" community was actively being produced through these processes. In doing so, it highlighted the ways the residents could not get along while obscuring the many factors underlying and complicating the production of consensus.

In essence, residents neither agreed upon spatial boundaries nor the social boundaries of each community. These boundaries, and the legitimacy of various claims to authority over them, formed the core of the conflicts the director mentioned. The Railway's representative was right to point out the contentious nature of the rental process, but was incorrect in pointing to community itself as wholly constituted with coherent internal/external boundaries. This perspective had important stakes because it made it seem as though a coherent whole community either couldn't work together, when in fact it was the process of constituting that whole which obscured a series of factors that were critical to the composition of the "inside." However, from the beginning, this representation of harmonious community rooted in the behaviors of the residents was privileged, and thus became the benchmark for the modes of representing community that followed.

What followed the meeting was exactly as the representative anticipated. It was nearly impossible for the local leaders to verify the names on the list against the actual residents of the community. Although, the Railway imagined that simply using the 2003 ledger to check (*truatsorb*) residents would be a speedy process, the meetings that followed this one revealed that every community in the United Communities network had problems tied to the constitution of the original MOU, which itself was a product of the split between the two networks resulting in some settlements, like the Friends community, being left off the agreement entirely.

Thus, these difference were nearly unbridgeable but not for the reasons imagined by the Railway and CODI officials. It was not that the "villagers were unable to unite," but rather, that there were material stakes to having been rendered legible in a particular form. Evictions, demolitions, and radical changes in land ownership were the inevitable outcome of the process (which was based on a contested document). Under the current negotiating conditions there could be no consensus because those who disagreed with the foundational ledger of names, or those who had material reasons to not participate (e.g. they lived in the front twenty meters of the tracks), would simply not agree to participate, or dragged their feet disrupting the possibility of rental for the entire community. Either way, the end result was always the same: the "villagers" appeared to be selfish and unable to unite, demanding either eviction or development or both.

Personal Development Through Documents

At the same time that residents were attempting to organize their rental process, some communities began new infrastructure projects with CODI grants. Such projects were the result of long application processes to the city and CODI. Even though these projects technically violated the Railway's demand that nothing be built on the land until lease agreements were signed, CODI planners and UC network leaders theorized that "developing the land" would demonstrate the commitment of residents to "developing people" (*patthana khon)* and "not living like before" (*mai yu muan derm*).

Documents, numbers, and proposals were important components of infrastructure projects as each project had to be approved both by CODI engineers or architects, and the city architects and engineers. Planners theorized that this portion of the project offered yet another learning experience for residents as it would demonstrate that residents could manage money, be patient in the face of difficult tasks, and responsibly organize the projects on their own. By completing these complex tasks, planners told me that residents would "build confidence" (*sang khwam munjai*) and "begin to believe in themselves" (*rerm mi khwamnachua nai sakhiaphap khong tuaaeng*), Yet, the slow process of getting the documents together also limited participants' access to money and slowed the progress of badly needed infrastructure projects like drainage and paved roads. Both the bureaucratic imperative to have projects approved properly and the emphasis on proper documentation privileged these processes over the completion of projects, causing deep frustration among residents.

It helps to consider an ethnographic example from my field-notes (1/28/09) to understand how project participants experienced these processes:

This morning I was waiting around CODI's office for their monthly meeting to begin, when shortly before noon, I ran into two friends—Mr. Lop, a community resident from T3 and Mr. Prasert, local engineer/consultant that the United Communities network hired to help out with project proposals. They have been coming down to CODI for the past few days trying to get their project documents approved. Lop's community T3 is in the middle of constructing three new *sois* (access roads) into their community and they have run out of money. In order to get new money released, they need to provide documentation of how the previous money was spent and the exact amount of money they will need to complete the project. Although Lop's project has been approved in its full amount for months, the community has only received half of the money required to build the project. Residents have taken out short-term credit to keep the project moving, but their money is running out and he and Mr. Prasert have spent the past two weeks working on reports, drawing up numbers, correcting expense sheets, and submitting and resubmitting them to CODI and the Khon Kaen Municipal office. They have yet to receive this money.

When they arrived at the architecture office they found Khit, one of CODI's architects, and he checked their latest version of the documents. It turned out that the packet was missing the approval form from the City Committee so they had to go back down to the municipal office to speak with someone in the Khon Kaen Municipality's Department of Social Welfare in order to get a copy of the form demonstrating that the project they are proposing had been approved by the entire "city committee" in the November meeting. They invited me to come along and I happily joined them.

As soon as we left the office I could sense their frustration. On the way down they told me about their experiences with upgrade process:

Prasert: This process is just not clear (*krabuan yang mai chat laey*). They don't tell us which documents we need and which documents we don't (*khao mai khaey bok wa rao tong mi aekasan chut ni ru chut nan*). We've been looking for the right documents for the last week (*rao ha aekasan thang athithit*).

Lop: If it continues like this I am going to back out. I am done with this (*tha khrongkan ja pen baep ni ja toi).*

P: The process is always changing (*kankhrabuan plean talort*). The documents they require for the approval packet are not clear. It is not clear who needs to sign them and who is responsible for preparing them properly.

L: We are just villagers, they are the experts (*rao pen chaoban khao pen sathapanik lae wisawakan*). It should be CODI's job (*nikhu ngan CODI*).

P: Every time we try to do something it gets stuck in the process (*thit nai krabuan*). The villagers won't continue to work this way if this is how the entire process and they don't see some results (*tha ja pen baep ni chaoban mai thamngan tor khao tong hin khwamsamret*).

The frustrations continued when we reached the Office of Social Welfare on the second floor of the Khon Kaen municipal office. When we arrived we spoke with the receptionist who tried to locate the approval document from November's City Committee meeting. The officer in charge of these documents was out of the office and we were forced to rummage through his desk in search of the approval form. After five minutes of this it seemed apparent that the receptionist didn't know where the documents were and Lop left the office in frustration.

Prasert and I stayed and rummaged through more binders. I started looking because Prasert left his glasses in the truck and was having trouble reading the documents. I eventually found the packet of forms from the November meeting, but soon discovered that the sheet with the signatures approving the project was missing. It began to seem unclear whether anyone had collected these signatures in the first place.

Eventually we gave up looking and went downstairs. Outside the municipal office we found Lop and Mr. Wi, another resident along the tracks and member of the United Communities network. Wi was also having trouble getting the remaining funding for his project—a drainage system. He was waiting to speak with the deputy mayor charged with administering the Baan Mankong project from the municipal level.

Between puffs on his cigarette he looked at me: "Eli, we can't work like this. They don't give us salaries. If we continue to work like this we'll die for sure." They all laughed, pulling hard off their cigarettes. On the way back to the CODI office, Lop told me that he hadn't been able to make his hours as a security guard at the local hotel because he's been spending all of his time working on the upgrade project. He and his wife have turned to making pork rinds at home and selling them to make supplemental income.

This example supplies an example of the mundane frustrations of doing

"personal development" through bureaucracy. Creating documents, searching for

verification, and navigating the municipality and CODI's audit culture in the aim of proving the community's discipline and organizing capacity was irritating and only underscored that this was not the procedure that most citizens had to go through to get things done. They could simply hire experts or ignore the baroque bureaucratic structures they were implicated in. Yet, participants in Baan Mankong were expected to keep track of its money, gather its receipts, report expenditures, and maintain clear communication with CODI and city officials throughout the entire upgrade process. Yet, as the above example shows, often just what constituted transparency was difficult, if not impossible to achieve. This is the case because residents were poorly trained in bookkeeping, project budgets were not clearly defined (and procedures for administering them often changed), and bookkeeping practices in government offices were frequently as poorly managed as those in the community. Even though residents spent hours "fixing numbers" (*kae tualek*), calculating and tabulating balance sheets, and correcting mistakes, none of this mattered when procedures changed, grant numbers shifted, or government reports went missing.

When network leaders, CODI architects, or officials in meetings found mistakes, the documents were returned to the community for greater scrutiny and put back in the administrative queue for re-approval. These documents were often corrected by hand as most residents didn't have access to computers. Of those residents who did have computers, many didn't have much in the way of computer skills, though occasionally their children helped out. All of the time spent correcting and re-correcting numbers and maintaining transparency became a massive frustration for participants. As one

community leader told me, his still hands covered in whiteout from a day spent correcting numbers, "The officials think we are corrupt. They believe that we are the ones who *kin ngun* 'eat money,' but no one checks them. They have paychecks and we do not but we have to waste time on this" (*jaonati khit wa rao mi panha kap khwam tujarit khao khit wa rao kin ngun tae mai mi khrai truat khao khao mi ngunduan lae rao mai mi tae rao tong sia waela thamngan baep ni talort*) (Figure 5.3 and 5.4)

Figure 5.3: Audit culture and checking documents was an important part of getting

projects approved. Source: N/A

Figure 5.4: Community architects help residents prepare documents. Source: N/A

Politics and Personal Development

In spite of these problems, there were unifying moments but they were of an altogether different sort than what planners conceptualized. In April, the United Communities network learned of a plan to evict the Friends community and transform it into a parking lot and "walking mall" behind the massive new Khon Kaen Central Plaza mall. In response to the threat, the network planned a large protest to push the SRT to deny the application for this project and enable the community to rent. The day before the protest, I went to the United Communities network office for a meeting with the team organizing the protest. There, I met local community leaders and a community leader sent up from Bangkok by the CODI sponsored *Sahat Orngkan Chumchon* network named Arun.

Arun led the meeting, which was held outside the network office on red plastic chairs spread out beside a drainage canal that divided Zone 1 of the *Phatthana Sithi* community from the Friends community on the other side. From there we could see the massive rear façade of Central Plaza, feeling its effects on the Friends community behind it, which appeared tiny by comparison.

Arun spent part of the meeting discussing how to inform residents about the protest and part of it trying to motivate the leaders there to deepen their participation in the rental project. He told them,

> "You need to remember that you cannot fight for me or for other villagers you need to fight for yourself (*su samrap khon uen ru chaoban ni nan non, mai dai, torng su samrap tua eng*). You need to fight for your own house (*torng su samrap ban khong khun*)…We need to remember that this is our fight and that we need to force them to know that we have rights (*rao tong jam wa ni khu kantorsu kong rao rao tong hai khao ru wa rao mi sithi*). We are born with rights and we have those

rights until we die (*rao mi sithi tangtae kert jon tung tai*). The state won't give us anything so new need to fight" (*rat mai hai sithi prahchanan rao tong su*).

The speech provided powerful motivation. It underscored the fact that each person attending the meeting had their own rights that they needed to assert in front of the state who was unwilling to support them. This idea inspired many in the group.

My friend Pong eventually interrupted Arun. Pong is an emerging leader living in the most densely settled community in Khon Kaen called T1. Over fifty percent of T1 is built in the twenty meters closest to the tracks, which meant well over half of the community's residents would be evicted if they successfully signed a lease agreement. Regardless of the outcome of the protest, these residents would either be relocated or simply move on their own.

> **Pong:** Excuse me. I have a few questions. I hope you will be able to help us explain the importance of this fight to my community (*phom wangwa ja athipai khwamsamkan nai kantor su ni bawk samachik chumchon*). My community has many people who believe that they do not need to rent because they have been there a long time, more than forty years (*Nai chumchon phom mi lai khon ti mai chua wai ja torng chao prawa khao yu nan lao, sisipkwa pi laeo*). What do we say to them (*rao khuan ja bawk khao arai*)? We also have many people who have been through eviction threats before and they think these threats will never happen. What do we say to them? Also we have a headman who doesn't want to help us. What should we do about that?

Pong's litany of questions evoked the difference between talking about struggles over citizenship and visibility, and the actual terrain upon which citizenship is enacted and made real. Arun, coming from Bangkok, did not have any understanding of these issues. And yet, the differences between neighbors that Pong described were real and had prevented the signing of leases for years now. They caused T1 to split with T5, who

had signed a lease already. If some in the community fought to sign a lease, many would certainly lose their homes in one way or another.

Arun replied:

These are very good questions. We need to talk to these people about their rights and we need to explain to them that they can be here but they can't remain like they were before (*rao tong khwi ruang sithi rao tong athipai wa khao yu to dai tae mai dai yu muan derm*). They will receive money for housing improvements (*khao ja mi ngun somsaem ban)*.

Let's say you want to have a nice house, but you don't have enough money (*yak mi ban sua tae mai mi ngun por*). Can you save (*orm dai mai*)? Are you part of the savings group (*pen samachik klum ormsap mai*)? Do you work with the rest of the community? This is important because this is how the state agencies will allow us to be here (*ni khu withi orngkan rat ja anumat rao yu ti ni*).

The problem in your community is not outside, it is inside (*panha na chumchon khong khong khun mai yu dan nork yuu khang nai*). It is located here [pointing to his chest]. You can't drink whiskey in the morning and then fight with your wife at night (*mai dai dum lao torn chao lae chon kap mia thorn yen*). You need to adjust yourself (*praptua*) and change your own life (*plien chiwit tua eng*) first. You need to work together (*thamkan duaikan*).

Look at this canal [points to the dry canal behind the office]. What if we saw this canal and said it is dirty, I want to clean it up. You can work together and to clean it up. One afternoon of work and another and another, then begin working on something else, cleaning the streets. This is how you can do it. Little by little the community will change. You don't need to have 100% but only 70%. This is all you need.

Here, the question of citizenship—which seemed political at first—abutted all the other notions of belonging at play in the Baan Mankong project. Pong's question was political and material —how do we make ourselves visible in a way that does not lead to further vulnerability? This question was particularly important given that many in his community did not stand to benefit from the lease agreements given its current framework.

Arun managed to transform this important question about politics into a question of personal development. What were complex problems previously tied to the difficulty of intervening in cross-cutting disputes and the inevitable threat of evictions once rights were achieved, were pushed back onto Pong in the form of an entreatment to "adjust himself" in order to transform his community. This imperative towards techniques of the self, responsibility, and the conduct of conduct underscored the way that through Baan Mankong, community became increasingly conceived of as a mechanism of policing, disconnected from its rowdy past as a technique of politics.

Indeed, over the course of the year Pong did adjust himself. He worked every day as a stockclerk at a local market from 2am-11am. He would come home and sleep for 4 hours and attend to community business and spend time with his family from 4pm until 8pm (later if I stayed around to drink beer or he went fishing on nearby farmland). He successfully administered the community's aerobics program, which brought in fitness instructor every night of the week and organized and managed T5's community upgrade project, disbursing money, keeping track of receipts, and documenting project improvements. He also lost his job and later had family issues. Moreover, the community never signed a lease agreement.

My last contact with him was in the fall of 2010; after that I heard he moved to Bangkok. I tell this story not for the lurid details, but to underscore the very real risk and difficulty of initiating personal transformation amidst material constraints like those endemic to life along the tracks. Indeed, Pong's story demonstrates how personal transformations do not directly lead to development or community transformation. Rather, these transformations take place amidst the same structures and binds that other

efforts of transformation occur. For Pong, these changes did not materialize in a better life, but led to deeper complications.

From Struggle Back to Legibility

The following day, the UC network held its demonstration in a field facing the Khon Kaen Railway station. When I arrived, there were approximately three hundred residents sitting in the shade next to the field, avoiding the heat of the dry season sun. This significantly decreased the visual impact of the gathering, which was already smaller than two thousand predicted at the previous day's meeting.

By the time the crowd moved out of the shade onto the field, I ran into Khit an architect from CODI who told me that the meeting between the Railway, the municipality, and the United Communities network had already begun inside the conference room in the local office of the SRT. Indeed, by the time I got to the meeting the Railway had already announced that it would not approve the request to build the parking lot. The mobilization was effective, but not because the mass of people assembled had pressured the SRT. Instead, representatives from the UC and CODI had worked out a deal before the protest even started. The SRT reaffirmed what it had said in the February meeting that I described above. The SRT said that the residents would be given one more chance to rent, provided they followed the following procedure:

1. Survey their residents to see who was ready to rent.
2. Report who wasn't ready to rent to the city.
3. Develop a rental and a development plan.
4. Send six representatives to a CODI workshop in Chumphae city to be trained to manage the savings accounts and the community-upgrade process.

The protest had prevented the Friends community's eviction and left in its place renewed calls for participation, legibility, and training. These conditions were announced to the residents' cheers as many felt that this new joint process would give them the chance to sort out their differences.

After that, the Deputy Mayor made a statement:

> Today we can announce that we have reached an agreement with the community and the railroad that he communities will be given the opportunity to rent (*hai okat chao*). During the next three months, the communities will reach an agreement with the Railway and they will be given the chance to sign leases. The municipality will help you with this process. The municipality wants to be your partner and help the rental process but you have to want to rent too. You prepare your communities and yourselves to rent.(*triem khwamprawm nai chumchon lae tua eng thi ja chao*). In the past, there have been many people in the communities that have wanted to stay as they always have (*yuu babp derm*) [without paying rent]. This is not possible now. There are many people interested in this land so we have to rent now.

> There are two ways you can continue: The first is that you can decide you don't want to rent. The city will still try to help you stay on the land, but you will have to fight on your own. It will be more demonstrations like this. The second way is that we can work together (*ruam mu*) and everyone can agree and united in order to rent and develop their land and their homes (*hindua lae samaki pua chao lae patthana tidin lae tiyuasai*).

After the announcement he offered a few words of blessing and good luck to which everyone put their hands together, high near their faces in a *wai*, a traditional greeting and demonstration of respect.

The Deputy Mayor's speech, similar to Arun's the previous day, tied personal development with the project's larger bureaucratic aims. It was not enough to make the community legible on maps and documents. Nor was it enough for the residents simply to begin paying rent for land that many had occupied for close to five decades, but

rather in order to become legitimate, residents had to transform their approaches to the world. They could, in the words of the Deputy Mayor, "no longer remain as before" (*mai dai yuu muan derm)*. The word *derm* is a bit stronger as a temporal signifier than "before." It carries with a connotation of "origination," thus, the point here was that they needed to transform. Indeed, from CODI's, the SRT's, the Municipality's, and the leaders of the United Community network's perspectives for rental to take place the residents needed to develop themselves.

Immediately following the announcement the band started to play a boisterous *morlam* song and the whole crowd began dancing in celebration. Indeed, it was the happiest I had seen many of the residents who had been frequent participants in the network in the past few months. Although the network made explicit prohibitions on alcohol the day before, it became immediately apparent in the aftermath of the announcement, that these prohibitions were not heeded. The excitement and optimism of the moment gave everyone a sense that unity, legitimacy, lease agreements, and durable rights might be on the horizon.

During the celebration I sat with Mae Horm and the representatives from the United Communities Network. She warned them all that this might be the last opportunity that they would have to rent and that they "needed to be clear with the villagers that they have to be ready" (*tong put chat kap chaoban wa khao tong thriam khwam phrom).*

The protest successfully made many residents aware of the rental/upgrade process and served to unite those people who did come. I spoke with Paw Saman who, along with Pong, was working hard to organize T1, "This is the first time that the

villagers from our community have gotten together to do something like this. Now I think that everyone can see that that we need to rent. I think before no one wanted to rent and didn't believe that they could be evicted. They just wanted to stay there as before (*yu muan derm*). But today they feel like they can rent."

However, unity against the Railway was not the same as unity within particular communities. Indeed, unity across communities was much more successful than the localized efforts that followed. Yet, from this vantage point Paw Saman's reassurance relied upon the trope of the "uniformed villager" who wished to "stay there as before." That is, Saman's version painted the residents of the community as "skeptical" (*mai chua*) or ignorant (*mai khaojai*) rather than divided over real interests. In Pong and Saman's community a greater percentage of residents lived in the first twenty meters than anywhere else along the tracks. Although the fifteen-year struggle for rights had taken many confusing inconsistent turns, residents invariably understood the stakes and they participated selectively based on particular outcomes. Although the long process of struggle had no doubt made many residents skeptical of the immanence of an eviction, people understood what was at stake and they acted strategically in accordance with their perceptions of those stakes. The unity displayed at the April 2009 protest was unity of one kind, but not the kind anticipated by planners and state-officials.

Documenting Development

The documentation and pedagogical process continued after the protest. Again, where real disputes occurred, planners tried to push residents towards "personal development" forged by exercises designed to train them to see their communities, re-

orient their values, and help them document their efforts at making community. The workshops held in Chumphae in mid April were the first opportunity to see this process enact itself again.

Chumphae is small municipality approximately 90km to the east of Khon Kaen city. Although Chumphae is a small city, officially home to around 22,000 people, it has eight completed Baan Mankong projects and was in the process of embarking on its ninth. The city government actively supports these communities, which unlike the railway communities, were created via new construction projects created through negotiated lease agreements with the Crown Property Bureau (CPB), the agency responsible for managing extant royal land and properties. These residents were guaranteed low-cost loans in exchange for their participation in the project. All of these projects were new constructions so each community there was created by the Baan Mankong project's mechanisms. The successes of these projects pushed the small city's community and municipal leadership to the front of the Baan Mankong project. They frequently hosted communities as a way of exchanging ideas and helping to demonstrate the project's success. These workshops were conceived of yet another way to transform villagers by helping them gain confidence in each other.

In spite of Chumphae's successes, there were many differences between the histories, organizational processes, and contexts of the communities along Khon Kaen's tracks and the projects in built in Chumphae. Even still, the Khon Kaen Municipality and CODI believed that "exchanging experiences" (*laekplien prasopakan*) would the enable the "villagers" from Khon Kaen better understand the Baan Mankong process and help them to begin working together towards development and, ultimately, rental.

The meeting was held in two locations: The first was a Baan Mankong project community called "Cool Breeze." The leader of this community is Mae Nong a popular and active member of the Baan Mankong publicity circuit. The second location was the Chumphae Municipal office, which boasts a massive conference room that was built to resemble the limestone caves for which the region is known. On top of the craggy building is a large owl, another regional symbol. The city's head civil engineer designed the building. He is an affable, active supporter of the Baan Mankong project also. He has designed most of the projects in town himself, though his resulting community designs are less "ambitious" looking than the cave.

On the first day, we met at "Cool Breeze." The yellow bus owned by the Khon Kaen Municipality arrived with more than 50 residents from the United Communities network. They all gathered in the open-air "learning center" (*sun rienru*) where they were welcomed by Mae Nong who began the meeting by sharing the community's history. She explained how residents had organized themselves into savings groups, which became the foundation of the community. The groups were where people made payments towards the communal land rental, managed their collective savings, and interacted about community issues. She explained how these groups work together on issues and have successfully brought teachers in from around the area to teach computer skills to children. She was interrupted by a resident from the Railway tracks who asked her what the groups did when, "people didn't understand the process and they refused to participate." Mae Nong emphasized that differences are fine but that, "everyone needs to see each other as members of the same community. Everyone has some way they can help the community."

Many of the women from Khon Kaen were actively listening, nodding, and taking notes in notebooks on their laps. I noted that some of the male leaders from the UC network sat in an adjacent gazebo, laughing and smoking cigarettes throughout the discussion. The audience eventually stopped asking questions. One architect from CODI asked Mae Nong to explain the savings process. Another CODI staffer asked her whether it was ok to rent your new house to someone else to make money.

Mae Nong: "No Way! If you want you can have someone move into an extra room and make a little money this way. You have to check with the group first. You need to be clear with the group that you are doing this to help another poor person." By this point, CODI staff members began dominating the discussion and the residents completely faded into the background. The women stopped taking notes.

The Northeastern Regional Director of the Baan Mankong project stood-up and added, "People need to believe in themselves in order to make this happen. It takes time. You have to have participation to build the strength of the community." What he did not mention or emphasize here (but was emphasized in all meetings with the SRT) was that time was not a luxury many residents along the tracks were able to afford, given the heightened pressure from the SRT. No one else mentioned this either.

Another architect from CODI added, "You need to build yourself through saving (*torng sang tua aeng nai klum ormsap*). We don't just save money, we save people (*rao mai orm kae ngun rao orm khon duai*). One of the central parts of the project is that a new house won't solve the problem (*ban mai mai dai kaekai panhaa*). You need to think like you are the face of the city because you are its face, not Central Plaza [the company building the new mall]." The logic here was the same as that used before the

protest, personal transformation would lead to community transformation. These techniques of the self would be brought out in and through the process of creating groups and interacting. Through these groups, Mae Nong pointed out, the community came to care for one another.

After the meeting we moved to the city hall and its "cave" for the afternoon's workshops. At lunch I sat with friends from Paw Saman's community. One told me that he felt like a "businessman." He showed me his briefcase. We both laughed at this. Another was more circumspect, "This project will never work in our community. Things are too different from that community [Cool Breeze]. It is just a totally different situation" (*sathanakan mai muankan*).

As residents gathered inside the cave, CODI's regional director met with facilitators for the afternoon's workshops. He paired CODI architects (the majority of whom knew little about the specific situations along the tracks) and residents from Chumphae (who also knew little about Khon Kaen). He told them to take notes and keep the conversations moving. Each group of facilitators was to lead a discussion about the community's previous experiences with the project, some of the problems they encountered, their visions for the future of their communities, and how they might handle problems as they arose. His final and probably most telling advice was that the facilitators needed to get the villagers to see that there are more "internal factors" (*patjai nai*) affecting the success of the project than "external factors" (*patjai nawk*).

The schematic here of a community with a clear interior and exterior echoed that of the Railway director at the beginning of the chapter. Again this was not the official from CODI misreading the situation, but rather a critical approach to the *production* of

legible communities. The constant reaffirmation of this spatialization was an effort to help residents to begin thinking communally through this schematic, seeing themselves as fellow members of the same community in order to provide a social foundation for legibility to emerge. By affirming and reaffirming this spatialization, CODI made it possible to produce an interior into which residents and CODI architects felt justified intervening with its technologies of community building through savings and personal development. Yet, the schematic obscured the fact that only the SRT could change the rental process to accommodate the complex spatial politics along the tracks. Was the SRT internal or external to the community? What about the fuzzy boundaries, which residents were extremely attuned to? Were the residents in the front twenty meters internal? These questions were not asked or addressed so when the residents got into groups and began their discussions, they immediately highlighted a number of factors, which were deemed to be external.

The groups spread out across the lawn between the municipal office and the cave. Working with their facilitators, they detailed numerous problems, mostly tied to what CODI would call external factors—cumbersome documentation, infrequent meetings with the city, insufficient numbers of architects and engineers to consult on project planning. Another common complaint was the ongoing dispute between the United Communities network and the Khon Kaen Slum Revival (KKSR) network. These complaints surrounded the boundaries between different communities and the way in which the existing MOU had impeded the United Communities network from signing leases (Figure 5.5).

Many workshop participants also expressed the fact that the KKSR network fostered disputes between residents who were unsure of which group to align themselves with. Here, a new telling emerged once again disrupting the internal and the external. These extensive efforts to air grievances that trespassed across CODI's spatialization demonstrated the complex spatial experiences of members. Though these complaints were always rebuffed (per the instructions the facilitators received at the beginning of the workshop), they demonstrated a keen desire on the behalf of residents to try to get CODI to rethink its own spatialization of the community and address their problems more substantively in the process.

Perhaps the most important complaints voiced during the sessions were those surrounding rental. In one community, for example, residents complained that the homeowners in the first 20m of the tracks refused to save collectively because they knew they would be unable to rent. The facilitator in that group, unaware of the spatial regulations associated with the Railway, needed to have the spatial regulations explained by a resident. He apologized for not knowing more about the case, explaining that he rarely worked in Khon Kaen.

This was the case with many facilitators. When specific questions did arise, those facilitators were unprepared to address them. Moreover, these specifics weren't superfluous to the case, but essential to understanding the nature of the problems facing residents who tried to rent. The complaint about people in the first twenty meters not participating or not wanting to rent was repeated at several other sessions, yet because of the lack of specific knowledge the facilitators fell either into confused silences or

unproductive and generic calls for community leaders to return to the residents to help "build their understanding" (*sang khwam khaojai*).

The following day began without addressing the specifics of many of these complaints. The Regional Director of Baan Mankong project began the day not by summarizing the specifics of each discussion but by returning to the schematic of internal and external factors. He pointed out, "Yesterday, we identified some strengths, your willingness to work and willingness to help each other. But we also saw some weaknesses—villagers aren't confident in the project. Villagers aren't confident and they don't know what is going on. There are other external factors like the city and the other power structures facing them."

A local professor of urban planning continued, "Right now it is important that we see that the internal factors are larger than the external. For example, we always say, 'We want to rent! We want to rent!' and now the railroad and CODI have all the documents ready. The railroad is saying 'ok you can rent now' and the communities are saying, 'We don't have the money.' These internal factors can be changed if use the process (*chai kankrabuan*)." He continued by drawing a list of the many of the issues facing the communities from the previous day's discussions, dividing them between internal factors, external factors, and then linking them with a proposed solution. The list was as follows (Figure 5.6):

Internal Factors:

1. The savings groups have been saving but the money doesn't go anywhere so people don't believe in the groups. **Solution: Create reasons for the savings groups to use their money and explain the purpose of the savings groups to people.**

2. There is a lot of strife in the communities and in the members. **Solution: Make a mechanism where people can debate and discuss their issues in community forums.**

3. There aren't people to work on the projects.
Solution: Hold an event where people learn the development plan and can become aware of the process.

4. There are problems with consultants.
Solution: Make a group of people who can work with the consultants and tell them to not rush and explain the process to them. The group can also check their work as it goes.

5. There is a problem that there aren't enough skills and experience in building, managing the accounts, and working. (**same solutions as above).**

External Factors:

1. The problem of the railroad land and the rental agreements and the rights. **Solution:** None was provided, but the speaker added, "This is not a big problem. The rental process is underway and this is not going to be that big of an issue."

2. The process at the city is too confusing and the documents don't get passed through. (No solution provided).

Mixed Factors:

1. The issue of the 20,000bt for the upgrade of the houses is not yet clear.

2. The requests for money are not yet cleared.

3. The nature of the way that the different groups (City, SRT, CODI, network) in the process should work together.

Figure 5.5: Community workshop in Chumpae city. Source: N/A

Figure 5.6: List of internal (upper left)/external (upper right) factors facing

communities. Source: N/A

The professor moved through these final "mixed" factors quickly without offering solutions or addressing why they were mixed. Their categorization as "mixed" was puzzling in that a great deal of the possibility of the group receiving the 20,000 baht for housing upgrade or the issue of financial distribution were staunchly located within CODI and the Khon Kaen Municipality. Before moving on, the speaker paused, summing up the process of problem solving he had just taken the group through: "Now that we have recognized the problems we need to understand that we can fix them before they arise. It is important to see that there are less external factors than there are internal factors and that by working through the internal factors the external factors might be lessened." The effort here was to get residents to begin creating a particular mode of interiority but in the process it ignored the interpenetration of the interior and the exterior.

CODI's outward logic was the same as during the rest of the event: By focusing on internal factors and on the community groups, residents would be able to address all the problems that they might encounter during the upgrade and rental process. As he described the processes, first discussing the problem and locating it within the community, the architect showed how effective group organization might address each issue. He also showed what kinds of interactions might constitute the interior life of a functioning community.

Yet, two of the most important factors mentioned by residents—the rental process, internal disputes, and the creation of documents—went essentially unaddressed. Not only was the Railway's rental process the most essential problem

facing residents, but it was at forefront of *their* concerns and essential to understanding

most community disputes. To say that rental "wasn't a big issue" (*mai chai ruang yai*)

minimized both the long history of struggle with the SRT and the *ongoing* insecurities

directly associated with and growing out of the conditions associated with the leases. In

fact, the issue of "internal disputes" was deeply connected with this problem. The

substance of these "internal disputes," revolved around unbridgeable differences in

spatial interests and the different ideas about the upgrade/rental/organizing processes

was never explored in specifics.   Moreover, the notion of these interpersonal disputes

along the tracks as simply "internal" ignored the way disputes clustered along the

boundaries of communities—between residents in the first twenty meters and the back

twenty meters, between residents working with the United Communities Network and

residents working the Khon Kaen Slum Revival Network, and between groups of

residents who didn't recognize themselves as even belonging to the same community.

In the afternoon each of the small groups of residents had broken off to create

"development timelines" to chart their community projects and help them visualize

where in the process they wanted to be throughout the year. The documents themselves

were a grid in which each box started with a month, then a project, then an estimated

budget, then an estimated time to complete the project. As the residents filled out these

grids, new plans replaced knotted entanglements. The documents took the "old

community," rife with disagreements and divided in space, and replaced it with a "new"

one, homogenously unified, moving together towards development. Among some

residents the planning exercise even inspired some hope that the visions projected onto

the documents might become real. By the end of the session, some residents even

believed that their community might be like the "cool breeze" community where many

had slept the night before as a part of the exchange.

These plans served multiple purposes: Firstly, they were documentary evidence

of the community's desire to "develop." With these plans in hand, residents could show

the Railway that they were committed to "not staying as they were before." Second,

CODI planners felt that the plans would help leaders prioritize their goals and give them

a chance to brainstorm their visions of improvement. In this, the planners were right.

Echoing Arjun Appadurai's (2005) point that aspirations might be cultivated by

coalitions formed between experts and poor communities, the simple grid became a tool

for residents to imagine a path towards a new community, even as it obscured the

complex politics entailed in moving down that path.

Finally, the plans gave CODI staff a chance to interact with the community

leaders helping them channel their projects in ways that CODI felt were the most

important. For example, two communities prioritized the construction of a *sala*

chumchon over infrastructure projects. The *sala* is traditional open-plan building

common to rural villages. These spaces are used for communal activities like festivals

or meetings. This was a very common request in other projects and planners were

accustomed to using these kinds of requests to manage projects and to redirect

participants towards more "appropriate" (*morsom*) projects. Somewhat paradoxically,

planners felt that these *salas* were unnecessary even as they were the only resolutely

communal spaces that residents could think to build. For residents, the *sala* was

imagined as a means building solidarity, creating a shared space, and demonstrating the

legitimacy of their community. CODI planners pointed out that improvised meeting

spaces were suitable for most community activities as they not only allowed project money to be used for more pressing concerns, but also because they demonstrated a willingness to live within limits and an understanding of "enough." Although the documents presented a tool for aspiring, they also made space for the planners to interject their ideas to correct these aspirations based on the discourse of sufficiency.

Throughout the afternoon, as residents prepared these development plans, there was little discussion of the likelihood that these projects would come to fruition or the fact that, from the SRT's perspective, all of these projects would be considered illegal without having first signed lease agreements. Neither CODI planners nor the community representatives mentioned that these leases (or the failure to sign them) might disrupt the upgrade process. In fact, to my surprise it was just the opposite.

I later asked both Mae Horm and some CODI planners why they felt that these development plans and projects could, and ultimately should, go forward against the will of the SRT. Both groups gave me the same interpretation of this scenario, if the residents demonstrated their ability to develop and desire to improve the space then the Railway would be more likely to approve their lease agreements. These development plans, then, helped create a "unified community" with a temporally sequential development plan that seemed to be the result of consensus. While no consensus was achieved in the actual community, the sequence of the event—from workshop, to training, to development plan—portrayed a kind of progression that did not happen. Even still, the documents were the physical evidence that something did change and they seemed to show a unified community moving towards development (Figures 5.7 and 5.8).

At the end of the workshop, the groups from seven of the communities were told to prepare the documents to be submitted to the SRT for rental the following month. Residents were asked to submit a packet of documents that included a community history, a letter of agreement by each resident to follow the Railway's regulations, the development plan created at the seminar, a description of the way the community would maintain the regulations while projects are implemented, and a copy of their account books.

This list brought the entire workshop into relief. All of the instruction the residents received surrounding focusing on internal factors, personal development, and "knowing enough" was secondary to these documentary tasks that showed unified community without reflecting the complex disputes and disagreements that were portrayed at the meeting the previous day. The meeting thus demonstrated an element of collusion between residents and planners to produce a community through bureaucratic documentation. Rather than seeking to understand and remedy the problems as articulated by residents the day before, both planners and residents ultimately obscured them by presenting a vision of legible community, with an intact interior and exterior boundaries moving together in space and time towards development.

Figure 5.7: The Baan Mankong project's Northeastern Director critiques a community development timeline (behind). Source: N/A

Figure 5.8: A blank community development timeline. Source: N/A

Conflicts Become Visible

There were two outcomes from the Chumphae meetings: The first was that most of the United Communities groups had begun preparing their documentation to receive their twenty thousand baht upgrade grants.[60] Second, a new effort to go back into the communities to once again "build the villagers' understanding" (*tam khwam khaojai kap chaoban*) about both the Baan Mankong project and the rental process was undertaken.

As smoothly as the housing grant paperwork went, the informational meetings were the opposite. Working in teams with CODI officials, leaders from the United Communities Network created a schedule to visit each community individually to explain the upgrade and rental processes and the various requirements for participation. While various team members were to play a role, most of the presentation duties fell on Mae Horm who, by this point in my fieldwork, had made it apparent that she was the most important and active member of the United Community group.

Throughout the month of May 2009 these teams held meetings at various locations in their communities up and down the tracks. Meetings were held in the middles of streets, at half finished and fully finished *salas,* on front porches, and in other improvised communal spaces. Some of these efforts were well attended and a few went smoothly as in Paw Saman's community (T1) where there was a large turnout, for example. However, many other events did not go well. At one meeting, the community's official headman (as opposed to their Baan Mankong project

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[60] At the time of this research this was approximately US $600 (33 baht/ $1US)

representative, who was also the United Communities representative), told everyone in the community not to show up, so well over fifty percent of the residents stayed away. At another meeting, the community headperson stood up and told Mae Horm that she did not believe in the process, and that she felt that their UC/Baan Mankong community representative was keeping money he was receiving from the project, and that he was not to be trusted by the other residents.

Another session, held at a more recently settled community located on the southern edge of Khon Kaen city called *Chumchon Laklai* became quite contentious. There, the stakes were even higher, because that community was not even included on the original MOU with the State Railway of Thailand. The meeting began late, starting more than an hour and a half after the planned start time. As I waited for the meeting to start I chatted with one of Mae Horm's children, P'Nu. He had been active in trying to organize residents and had been put in charge of overseeing some of the infrastructure projects that various communities had undertaken. I asked him how the construction was going. He replied, "The villagers still don't understand how to do the documents correctly so it is stuck (*titkhat*)."

Eventually everyone did show up. The large crowd of residents spilled from the half built *sala* into the newly finished road, constructed with a combination of CODI funds and money from residents who supplemented the project after their official funding ran out. As it got dark, a few large fluorescent bulbs were turned on to light the area. We were immediately engulfed in a cloud of flying termites. Mae Horm started the meeting with a discussion of rental. She explained that the documents had been sent to the SRT and that at the end of the month she planned to meet with officials from the

SRT to schedule the next round of surveying. From there she described the rental

process itself—the SRT will survey, and the group will have to split the community into

lots to figure out how much each person owes. She pointed out that the rate in this

particular community was not yet decided because it sat on the border between the

center of the city and its outskirts. Additionally, the SRT had questions surrounding

whether or not some of the properties were commercial or if they were simply

residential.

In the middle of this discussion a resident arrived and set up a video camera,

asking if he might record the meeting. From there, one of CODI's staff workers, a

woman named Noi, explained the various savings groups. Mae On added, "Savings is

our tool for working together. What we need to do is focus on working together,

cooperating, and participating. We can do this through savings and working on projects

as our goal."

From here the discussion quickly turned from cooperation to disagreement:

Q: What if families can't save enough? Who will help them?

Noi: You need to start saving now. CODI has no money to help with the
rental agreement only infrastructure projects and housing improvements.

Q: But what will you do for those people?

Noi: First, the people who are renting need to figure out what to do. You
need to discuss this problem as a community to decide how to help them.
Second, the people that can afford to rent need to rent and they need to
figure out how much those who can't afford to rent need. Maybe you can
help each other. You need to figure out how much people need.

Mae Horm: You need to save a little everyday. This is the most
important priority right now. You will have time to save, but once the
agreement gets signed you only have 15 days to put together the money.

Q: How long until we sign the contract?

Mae Horm (exasperated): You have to wait until the railroad survey is done. That hasn't been scheduled yet. It will be scheduled on the nineteenth. First, we had to send the "intent to rent" agreement with CODI. Then CODI has to send it to the railroad. The railroad scheduled the meeting for the nineteenth. They will come to Khon Kaen to survey again. Once they survey they will send the contract and we will have fifteen days to transfer our money to the rental account. If the money is not there then they will not allow us to rent again.

Noi then repeats this point again. The questioner, who is sitting next to me, leans over and quietly tells me, "I was just wondering how soon this was. I need to know if I would have time to save enough money."

Next, they address the SRT stipulation that each family has only one right to only one plot of land in a single registered community. The man with the camera asks a series of speculative "what if" (*samutwa)* type questions: What if you have a very large lot can you split it into two? What if you have a large family? What if you have renters in one place and you live outside the community? What if part of your property is in the first twenty meters?

They were actually important questions even if they were thin veiled as "speculative." Mae Horm and Noi get annoyed:

Noi: The community needs to decide what it wants to do about houses that have part of them in the first 20m. If your bathroom goes into the first 20m it needs to be a community decision as to how to fix the problem. The community needs to live together. If this guy has more space in the first 20m than that guy, then it will have an effect on the community.

The man with the camera asks how Mae Horm knows the railroad will rent this time.

She says:

Mae Horm: The reason the process has been so slow is: First, the

railroad is slow. They change their authority and they change their regulations and they take a long time to get going. Two, the villagers are also slow. They don't give the right information. They don't participate because they think they shouldn't have to pay rent. CODI can't help us if we don't rent. If we don't have the money then CODI won't help us.

Man with the Camera: Let's say I am hardheaded (*huakaeng*), and I refuse to rent? (everyone laughs)

Mae Horm: If you or anyone else refuses to rent you can just write your name down and the community will report that name to the railroad. You can negotiate on your own behalf in that case.

Finally, Mae Horm, who had been swarmed by both questions and flying termites for the bulk of the meeting started to crack. She finished the meeting rather abruptly saying in the next three months rental agreements will be signed, in the next six months the infrastructure projects need to be finished, and in the next twelve months the housing upgrades need to be finished.

At this point a man named Mr. Lueng, a man wearing a yellow shirt, stands up and is really irate:

Mr. Lueng: Mae Horm you have been coming down here for ten years talking about rental. They've surveyed our land dozens of times, how come only one community has been able to rent? Nothing ever happens! We've been talking about this for ten years! What is CODI going to do to help us? Some people don't have any money! Some people here have their money ready right now. If you want us to rent, just ask us and we are ready to rent.

Why do we have to save as a group? Savings is the big problem. People will just save and borrow, save and borrow, save and borrow. Some of us don't want to rent. We know who to deal with, I've heard all this before and I am tired of it.

Mae Horm (equally upset): CODI doesn't do it for you. You need to do it for yourself. CODI is here to help in the process...
Mr. Luang (interrupts her): How many place in Khon Kaen have been able to rent? How many?
Mae Horm: The Friends community [she erroneously refers to the

section of the community across the tracks under this name, the largest section of the Friends community located behind the mall and is a member of the UC has been unable to rent]. Everyone else that has rented is with the Four Regions group.

Mr. Luang: Why?

Mae Horm: The villagers don't have enough money to rent.

Mr. Luang: No, that is not true. They have enough money.

Mr. Luang: It's because people are "*kii gong*"—they are corrupt and they take advantage of other people.

Mr.Luang: It's because they need to protest to get it.

Nu *(*Mae Horm's son): You want to have a situation like the PAD?

Mr. Luang: No! I want a true Mob (protest). I want to really protest for what is right.

This situation at the above meeting was repeated up and down the tracks from May into June of 2009. These disputes revealed the real differences between residents and the fact that it was not just that they were "villagers" who "did not understand" the rental or the upgrade process, but that there were real differences in both the spatial and political aspects of those processes. Moreover, they demonstrated the fact that these processes were only one part of a long history. Thus, if people did not understand it was because rental had been the subject of shifting and ongoing debates. These meetings underscored the tenuousness of the possibility of community government. Although those communities that managed to put together documentary evidence of their unity received money from CODI, they were unable to secure their land from the SRT. Thus, bureaucratic forms of harmony enabled some materials to be distributed to residents, but failed to transform the settlements into the governable communities.

The most immediate fallout of these disputes was that part of one community withdrew its membership from the United Communities network and began working with the Khon Kaen Slum Revival network. This was both another split in the UC network and a new community to add to the growing list along the tracks. When I spoke with the leaders of that community, they said they felt as though they had a better chance of renting if they worked with the Revival network. The leader of the remainder of the community—seven households that remained loyal to Mae Horm—told me that she felt like the Revival network was trying to "break apart" communities (*sang khwam taek yaek*). Although I will explore this idea in more depth in the next chapter, it is worth noting that the dispute demonstrates a growing awareness among residents that disagreement on multiple levels were going to be necessary to gain rights, even if that awareness sat in tension with the model of harmonious community.

Harmony and Housing Upgrades

CODI planners attributed local disputes to the calcified conflicts between network leadership and deficiencies in the villagers, but from these meetings it was clear that the disagreements were not just a result of "clashing personalities" or "bad villagers," but rather in the framework of community itself and its political implications. Some felt that participating with CODI and its program of savings and personal development was the best way to assert their belonging, develop, and gain rights. Others felt that if they could work through the Khon Kaen Slum Revival network, protest and make themselves visible through "a real mob" then the communities might gain rights. Others strategically engaged in both processes, gaining access to new housing

improvement grants and avoiding the process of paying rent or relocating as long as possible. In the end, the production of community through harmony and unity was nearly impossible for the members of the UC.

In July of 2009, I met UC leaders at the office of the State Railway of Thailand. The survey to be held in *Chumchon Laklai* was delayed. The SRT claimed that it would not survey the community because it was not included on the MOU and that the UC and its relationship with the CODI's network was not a sufficient basis to get the community onto the document. Mae Horm mobilized five buses of residents and brought them down to Bangkok. Mae Horm presented her list of two hundred plus communities (based on the CODI's surveying), which the Railway officials rejected, telling her that she could not just present these communities without having the documents in order. They told her that the communities in her network would have to wait until all of them could be surveyed again, but that once that process was complete the board would consider her applications for rental. All of the disputes over the month were for nothing because they did not produce verifiable documents demonstrating harmony.

When they returned, the group paused its efforts to organize and rent, and turned back to distributing CODI's housing grants. The process of preparing documents for the twenty thousand baht housing upgrade grants was remarkably smooth. These grants—administered by CODI and the municipality—provided residents with money to begin improving the physical structures of the houses. Most residents used the money in tandem with loans from the unofficial credit markets to buy new corrugated roofs, to fill low-lying foundations with dirt and concrete to prevent flooding, and in some cases to

tile spaces that had previously been bare cement. In order to receive the money, the UC representatives had to create a ledger of every resident living in the community, photocopy their housing registration, and their national ID card (*bat prachachon*). They also had to photograph every house applying for the grant with the owner in front. I frequently acted as the photographer in this process shooting photos and printing copies for each resident and the network. Although these packets were essentially the same information that the SRT had asked for, this information was much easier to obtain for this purpose. Residents in both the front twenty meters and the back twenty meters allowed us to photograph their homes and supplied the necessary documentation and duely received their housing grants.

These packets of documents took a long time to compile and they were checked and sent back to the UC several times over. However, when the upgrades were finally passed during a meeting of the Northeastern regional CODI approval board there was almost no debate. At first, I assumed this was because the documents were all correct and that the issue came up at the end of a long meeting. I assumed they moved through as a matter of perfunctory business. Now, I see the fact that after all of that preparatory work, whether the documents were completely accurate was less important than moving the money through after the failure of the group to get approved for rental. The upgrade project documents moved forward outside of the normal "learning process" I had become accustomed to because the planners decided that completing these upgrades might help out residents and perhaps aid them in forming community. The documents were approved through a moment of collusion. This was all good news for residents

who began implementing the first stage of the housing improvement grants by the end of the summer.

These grants were probably the biggest success of the Baan Mankong project and the UC's efforts along the tracks. As project money was delivered, the sounds of construction became ubiquitous within communities. The iconic sign of these changes was the juxtaposition of old rusted corrugated metal with shiny new metal. Roofs were replaced, floors raised, concrete poured, and tile laid. Rotting boards and old Eucalyptus posts were replaced with new wooden posts.

In some cases the money was sufficient to complete resident's projects as planned. In others, residents took out black market loans or simply could not finish projects that they started. In one house, a resident replaced the roof, raising it with concrete blocks but ran out of money. The results were a gaping space between the roof and the walls. In cases like this, it seemed that homes were not upgraded, but left in a half completed state, with residents confused about how to get their places back to where they started from. (Figures 5.9-5.12).

Yet, the money was largely put to good use as residents made much-needed repairs and to add some small comforts to their homes. Additionally, the grants did sow seeds of actual cooperation. In Pong's community, T1, the upgrades created numerous types of cooperative interactions. For example, residents pitched in to rebuild one home that was in danger of collapsing. Over the course of a few weeks, a group of volunteers demolished the structure, planted new poles, and constructed a new brick house where the previous one stood. Cooperation was possible but it organized itself around projects and material possibilities, it was not theoretical and not natural for residents. Moreover,

it was not simply time donated, but rather part of a reciprocity system in which someone would donate their labor and the homeowner would provide food, water, and in some cases money. Nevertheless, the upgrade projects did have an important impact on people's lives even though they did not lead to rental agreements, nor did they quell the underlying disagreements.[61]

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[61] Urban Planner Diane Archer (2012) confirms this insight about Baan Mankong projects demonstrating that in the cases she surveyed in Bangkok residents felt that the upgrades improved their living environments, but did little to secure longterm tenure.

Figure 5.9: A resident points to her renovated floor, which was raised through the use of

CODI upgrade funds. Source: N/A

Figure 5.10: New doors, concrete bricks, and corrugated metal purchased with CODI

upgrade grants and private loan money. Source: N/A

Figure 5.11: An upgrade left unfinished due to insufficient funding. Source: N/A

Figure 5.12: Interior of the same house with both old and new walls visible. Source:

N/A

Legibility Deferred

In 2010, when I returned to conduct follow up research, three new "communities" had joined the Khon Kaen Revival Network—each a faction from another, larger settlement. The number of communities along the tracks had jumped from 17 to 20. Nearly all of the residents affiliated with the Revival network had signed lease agreements. Although, homes were improved up and down the tracks, none of the communities under the purview of the United Communities Network had signed a lease with the SRT. Mae Horm was having a difficult time organizing residents because of this disconnect.

In the next chapter I will address the underlying reasons for this difference. Here, however, I want to suggest that one of the key problems that both CODI and the leaders of the United Communities network faced was that the notions of harmony that were so easy to represent in documents, maps, surveys, and ledgers were difficult to produce in practice. Making community demanded not harmony but politics, waged by disagreeing with the railroad and allowing residents to disagree with each other. Both CODI and the United Communities network were largely successful at creating bureaucratic forms that portrayed unified, legible communities, but those representations never actually corresponded with the social relations on the ground. These bureaucratic forms promoted documentary representations of community and made residents "eligible" (Walker 2012) to upgrade their homes, but did not address the differences that promoted disagreement. Throughout all of these negotiations, the residents that occupied the space directly adjacent to the tracks became more vulnerable to eviction.

As I have demonstrated here, the inability to sign leases was a result of the push to produce unified forms of community. Where disputes and tensions arose during the rental and planning process they were pushed or ignored so documents could be created. Such disputes were not harmony and threatened the documents. Residents and planners favored bureaucratic representations that filled the discursive framework put forward by CODI, rather than disputing the feasibility of the terms of rental in the first place. Indeed, in the process of making bureaucratic a vision of legible communities, residents and planners obscured those parts that could never be rendered properly legible. Ultimately, this divide produced more disputes between residents and increased vulnerabilities even as material improvements were made with housing upgrade money. While unity was forged in the aim of gaining access to upgrade money, it was nowhere to be found around the issue of rights. Indeed, as I will show in the following chapter, it was the conflicts, disputes, and schisms that enabled legibility and rights to emerge.

Chapter 6:

Disagreement at the Edge of Community

This chapter explores the micro-practices of disagreement that blossomed along the tracks and their effects. It considers the way the split between the networks that I described in Chapter 4 and the failed techniques of harmony that I described in Chapter 5, gave way to a series of acrimonious struggles. These conflicts between networks and neighbors had the paradoxical effect of securing the rights of some residents by producing communities with signed lease agreements and creating new zones of vulnerability as whole groups of residents were left unprotected.

The chapter below focuses on these themes through a description of the way the formerly unified Friends community became five different administrative communities/zones. This case highlights the ongoing, tenuous nature of community itself, demonstrating how local organizing produced new vulnerabilities as the community transformed from a site of contestation to a mode of administration and a technology of government. The SRT's rental agreement made it such that belonging to a community along the tracks was not optional. Residents could not sign leases individually so they were required to claim membership in a particular community. Yet, as I have shown, belonging is a fraught decision, rooted in differences in space and history. Still, without membership in one community or another securing a right to the land was impossible.

In this chapter, I focus largely on activists from the Khon Kaen Slum Revival Network to explore the way they waged disagreement on the ground. This is not because the United Communities network did not practice politics; they did. I

accompanied Mae Horm and numerous network activists on protests at the State Railway of Thailand and as they petitioned state officials like the Minster of Transportation. Such disagreements, however, always were waged in the name of their vulnerability, on the one hand, and outside the community, on the other. As I show below, one of the most important sites of disagreement was among neighbors. The activists from the KKSR paired their efforts at disagreeing with the government with struggles on the ground. Yet these two forms of disagreement had very different effects: On the one hand, they allowed the KKSR to overcome the dynamic I described in the last chapter—the bureaucratic forms of representation matched the actual "community" more closely. On the other hand, this meant that the ends of these disagreements were more policing. Even as the KKSR was successful at making itself visible and audible, doing so through the existing framework pushed them into excluding their neighbors. Such processes, though seeming to basically reinforce hegemony, also had the effect of laying the seeds of further disagreement. The KKSR ended up driving a wedge into the pre-existing forms of community, which had splintering effects that sowed the seeds for new disagreements.

The case highlights three things: First, it shows the importance of disagreement in making community. Indeed, without disagreement the production of community was impossible. Second, the case below demonstrates that communities come with a cost, as they produce new forms of exclusion and vulnerability because in addition to requiring disagreement, they entail policing. In this way these cases show how a close exploration of disagreement reveals the practice of politics itself. By disentangling these disagreements, I highlight binds, structures, and frameworks residents had to navigate in

order to make themselves seen and heard. These stories underscore how the Railway's framework for distributing rights and CODI's prevailing development models of participation and harmony—each rooted in notions of the poor as collective villagers— produced specific constraints that shaped the process of politics, but did not curtail it. In this way, acrimony, schism, and the production of vulnerability were not anathemas to community, but in fact, the direct results of it. Politics never erupts unstructured. Rather, politics are rooted in their material context, redolent with binds that give shape to the terrain and outcome of disagreement. I start below with a disagreement in *medias res*.

Announcing the Disagreement

After the SRT's representatives had left and Mr. Sapda's home had been spared (for the time being), Mae Horm took to the Friends community's Public Address system to broadcast her denouncement of the Khon Kaen Slum Revival network's latest actions:

> Brothers and sisters in the Friends community, today the "mafia" tried to evict one of the members of our community. They tried to evict Mr. Sapda, but the railroad said no. The SRT moved him out of the first twenty meters and they will take three months to decide what will happen to his land. Brothers and Sisters, today we only had twenty people protesting. Next time we need to have two hundred!

> The Friends community is a member of a large network. Our network has over two hundred communities and over 17,000 households nationwide. They will fight with us. This is our land! This community has been here since the beginning. It is one of the original communities (*chumchon derm*) in Khon Kaen. It has been here since 2520 (1977) and will always be here. The Friends community has always occupied this entire space from Sri Chant road to Prachasomorson road but we have been split apart and broken by the Mafia. They broke (*taekyaek*) us into

five different pieces. Then the Mafia came and rented right on top of us (*chao thap rao*)!

It is time for the leaders in the Friends community to come out (*orkna orktha*). It is time for us to show that we are a strong community (*chumchon khemkaeng*). It is time to show them that this is a community full of people, with hearts and souls (*jit winya*). They need to see that this community is not animals (*chumchon ni mai pen sat*). We are not animals. We are not cartoons (*rao mai pen katun*). We are not dogs (*rao mai chai ma*). We are people (*rao pen khon*). We have hearts and souls. My brothers and Sisters in the Friends community need to know that we are all leaders here (*thuk khon pen phuyai*). Not just a few people, everyone. We are the owners of this land (*rao pen jao khong thi din ni*). This is our land and we need to fight for it (*ni khu thi din khong rao lae rao torng su*). The Mafia split us apart (*mafia hai rao taek yaek*). They left our name off the list of the sixty-one communities.

CODI is also a problem and we will have to fight them too. They are the ones that allowed this problem to happen in the first place by approving this rental. They allowed them to rent on top of us. Baan Mankong is to help fix the problems in the slums not create problems here (*khrongkan ban mankhong khu withi kaekhai panha nai chumchon salam mai chai khrongkan thi sang panha*). It is a project to help people (*khrongkan naja chuai khon jon*). It is not a problem to split the rich from the poor or to break people apart into classes (*mai chai withi sang khwam taek yeak ru bang khon ruay lae khon jon*). It is CODI's job to fix this problem too (*ni khu panha kap CODI duai*)! They treat us like dogs! Are we Dogs? No! Then we have to show that by fighting! The railroad said it will be back in 3 months with a decision about this land. We will have to be ready then. Until then, anyone that builds on this land will be a trespasser and we will evict them!

Mae Horm was livid. For the time being, she had prevented the eviction of Mr. Sapda at the hands of the Khon Kaen Slum Revival (KKSR) network but she wanted the rest of the Friends community to know that they needed to mobilize or, perhaps, suffer the same fate. In doing so, she highlighted the essential invisibility of the Friends community, telling residents that they were not dogs or cartoons, but legitimate political subjects, provided they took up the mantle of disagreement.

Officials from the SRT had given of Mr. Sapda a temporary reprieve from eviction. Mr Sapda, is a man in his seventies whose home occupies a space that the Railway had granted to T5—a member community of the Khon Kaen Slum Revival Network (KKSR). When they approved T5's lease, the SRT allowed its residents living in the twenty meters closest to the tracks to claim the vacant lot across the street from the community to allow residents to relocate there. Mr. Sapda, whose house is enclosed behind a fence in a yard shared with an engine repair shop, stalled this relocation for four years, refusing to join T5 and refusing to sign a lease. Activists from KKSR claimed that Mr. Sapda was not poor, but was a wealthy patron of the Friends community. They said that Mae Horm simply wanted to obstruct their rental process and protect a powerful friend. These ambiguities allowed Mr. Sapda's home to remain on the land even as the residents from T5 continued to dutifully pay rent for the land.

Mae Horm, was upset that the activists from across the tracks had turned on this "poor villager" (*chaoban khon jon*) as she called him. Her speech, broadcast from the community office in the middle of the Friends community, alerted everyone to this fact. The dense speech mashed ideas about good citizenship, development, participation, and social unity together with schismatic accusations that dredged up histories of a community and network, now rife with divisions and disagreements. For Mae Horm, the "real" Friends community—the one that made a claim to this entire piece of land, including the land now claimed by T5—was buried underneath the rubble of other false communities born of disagreement (see Figures 6.1 and 6.2).

Figure 6.1: The land at the heart of the disagreement. Mr. Sapda's lot lies behind the

fence. Source: CODI

Figure 6.2: The Friends community with its maximum size, contemporary boundaries,

and the various communities that split from it labeled with different boxes. The contested

space claimed by T5 and Mr. Sapda is located in the upper right.

Unconstrained by these contested boundaries, the community's PA system delivered Mae Horm's speech into the communities that these disputes had spawned. For those in the immediate area, Mae Horm gave a rallying cry, for those just beyond the boundaries it was an insult. The speech's meaning and content transformed as it moved across just a few meters of physical space. When she finished the announcement, I crossed these boundaries as well. I left the office in the Friends community and went to collect my motorbike, still parked in front of the community center in T5, less than one hundred meters away. The morning was stressful and exhausting. I spent most of it navigating between opposing groups of activists I had become friends with over the course of the year. Neither position surrounding Mr. Sapda made sense.

As I crossed the boundary between the Friends community and T5, Paw Kan, a leader in the KKSR stopped me: "Why did you let her insult us like that?" I did not have an answer. Stymied by these complexities, neither position seemed better than the other. I didn't understand the disagreement. Was he rich or poor—a patron or a villager? Why did the answer to that question matter? Why was the KKSR evicting someone? Why were Mae Horm and the UC preventing people from securing rights to the land?

Community and Disagreement

The answers to the above questions are rooted in disagreement. Conflicts like these, between networks, neighbors, and communities, have structured the possibilities for rights and development along the tracks for much of the first decade of the twenty-

first century. Frequently, both groups of activists I worked with cast each other as bullies or mafia, charging each other with pushing "poor villagers" out of their homes and preventing the possibility of rental for large groups of residents. Instead of fighting with the Railway to change its policy, residents began fighting with each other.

These disagreements are so essential to understanding the situation along the tracks that, before completing the last visit of my fieldwork in 2010, a friend who worked at CODI in Bangkok cautioned me not to allow them to overtake a broader perspective on the Baan Mankong project. "Remember, the railway communities in Khon Kaen are not the entire Baan Mankong project." Yet, as my research traversed across the boundaries of communities and networks, I encountered these disagreements finding that their importance exceeded their immediate context speaking to the broader construction of that policy and the political structures that produced it. Indeed, instead of indicating which network had a legitimate claim to being the "correct" way to struggle on behalf of the poor, these disagreements revealed something of the practice of politics and its constraints in contemporary Thailand.

Planners, architects, and many community organizers interpreted disagreement as a perversion, disruption, and pathology of community making. They felt that the practice of community was intended to produce unity, consensus, and development and that such disagreements were signs of the inabilities of "villagers" to cooperate (*ruam mu*) and unite (*samakkhi)*. As I showed in the last chapter, such perceptions not only obscured the real roots of the disagreements, but the importance of disagreement itself. Accordingly, the normative understanding of negotiating for rights, administering rental agreements, and distributing upgrade funds was that it would be the result of a

harmonious community working together to develop their homes, land, and selves. In practice, however, successfully waged disagreements were more critical than harmony in the process of gaining rights and making community a real mode of government.

Disagreement was more than this, though. It was also an indication of the binds facing these political "trespassers." Wishing to demonstrate their capacities as visible political subjects, the residents along the tracks had to engage in disagreement. Yet, the techniques and outcomes of these incipiently political struggles were uncertain. Jacques Rancière (1999) argues disagreement is the heart of politics—it is the method by which the gaps that constitute the political community, both as imagined and lived, become visible. Yet, the practice of politics is structured by socially produced binds that give the practice its shape. Although such binds do not necessarily determine the outcome of politics, they do set the terms for the next round of disagreement. In short, politics is not conducted in a vacuum, subjects wishing to be seen and heard do so amidst a field of complex social and material binds. As such, politics frequently gives way to its own sorts of policing—defined in Rancièian terms as stabilizing a new order of bodies.

Disagreement is an inconvenient and messy practice. So while it produced visibility for some along the tracks, it also produced vulnerability and new forms of policing. The results of disagreement were not always the renovation of politics such that the residents along the tracks became visible and commensurable with others (e.g. equality), but rather, they produced more conflicts that served to reflect back on the larger political order without rectifying it. Rental proved to be a point of inflection in this regard: Once the KKSR communities began renting, the residents themselves became agents of policing community, even as they simultaneously sought to expand

the terrain of rights by advocating for other communities in their network. Their efforts to stabilize the situation along the tracks resulted in new forms of disagreement, not about who was visible in general, but about who would be included and who would not.

This occurred several times over in Khon Kaen. Disagreements with the city and SRT produced the first communities of activism that fought eviction. These disputes led to the production of first one, then two networks, each working different sides of the state for financial support and pushing for broader possibilities of rights and material support for poor citizens. Disagreements led to the possibility of leases, which provoked discussions among residents that, ultimately, produced new communities and new strategies for avoiding community. These processes led to leases for some, but excluded others. These disagreements also revealed the essential imbalance in the logic of community itself. At the heart of such disagreements were the uneven processes and the continuing pressures associated with ongoing forms of exclusion, poverty, and inequality. The arguments tended towards finding resolution in new processes of government, different forms of negotiations, and new policies that intended to police, the sources of the disagreement remained unresolved and so politics continued.

Ethnographic attention to disagreement, thus reveals the binds implied in particular political frameworks: For residents to be outside community along the tracks was to be without the possibility of protection from eviction and to be excluded from other benefits that flowed to and through community. In this way, the decision to participate or not was precisely a question of the correct way to become visible. This posed a serious question for residents. On the one hand, presenting oneself as poor and vulnerable marshaled a moral argument against eviction. On the other, participating,

paying rent, and complying with (and even policing) the Railway's regulations was another way to be seen as a legitimate political subject. However, to be outside of these debates, unaffiliated, or amidst conflicted affiliations, was to lack a voice in general.

The results were that communities split from one another into smaller and smaller units until agreements could be reached allowing bureaucratic productions of unity (see chapter 5) to more closely resemble the situation on the ground. Even then disputes did not find resolution, but could be managed through small discussions and accommodations. Among the six communities in the revival network that signed lease agreements during my fieldwork, all built community out of a fundamental disagreement and schism with larger territorially unified settlement prior to negotiating their lease with the SRT. In this way disagreement was precisely the process through which community was formed. While policing was the way communities were controlled.

I want to be clear: This is not a utopian perspective on disagreement. These struggles weren't simple instantiations of democratic dispute that lead to harmonious communities and equal rights, equally distributed. Rather, as I will show, disagreement often entailed the production of new communities and new vulnerabilities. Most leases produced groups of residents like Mr. Sapda—the resident at the center of Mae Horm's broadcast above—who fell beyond the possibility of rental. These residents were left unprotected by leases and subject to potential evictions. While actual evictions like Mr. Sapda's were rare and piecemeal (not the kinds of mass evictions that were common fifteen or twenty years ago in Thailand and still are across Asia cf. Zhang 2001), they reflected a broader pervasive insecurity created by the emergence of dual pathways

toward rental and the underlying insecurities rooted in poverty and inequality resulting

from Thailand's uneven development.

The small evictions and exclusions I document in this chapter serve as a stark

reminder of the gaps and inevitable policing entailed in community making. I explore

community's divisive side then, not to demonize the strenuous activism and organizing

undertaken by the KKSR, but rather to understand its uneven application as a method of

politics and as a mode of government. This description reveals that even as

disagreement makes community possible, its continued presence alerts us to the

ongoing political struggles rooted in unequal access to rights, resources, and ultimately

the lived process of becoming a visible and intelligible subject of politics. Continued

disputes then simultaneously sow the seeds of deepening political engagement as they

produce new fractures.

Harmony, Disagreement, and Community

In the last chapter I described the numerous counting exercises that were

involved in producing representations of "united communities." I showed how these

efforts to document and "render legible" community along the tracks failed because

legibility required the occlusion of disagreement and dissent via "harmony ideologies"

(Nader 1990). Such harmony politics tamped down the disputes central to the

distributions territory and belonging along the tracks. The results of the process were a

miscount that resulted in unity produced in bureaucratic forms that barely resembled the

situation in each community. Indeed, community as it was rendered legible, and the

processes through which communities signed leases, were never one and the same.

With conflicts ever-present among resident along the tracks, unity (*samakkhi*) and cooperation (*kanruammu*) were inevitable prescriptions for producing development. On a national level this same language became common during the conflicts between the Red and Yellow-shirted civic movements (Pavin 2010). For example, at nearly every major intersection throughout the Northeast, large billboards entreated the population to "stop damaging Thailand" (*yut tam rai prathetthai)* and to "Protect the Institution [the monarchy]. Tranquility, Peace, and Unity" (*pokpong sataban, sangop santi samaki*. As disagreements became widespread both in Khon Kaen and nationally, so too did this talk of harmony and unity.

Here, I take a different tack by focusing on conflict and disagreement. In doing this I follow theorists like Lefort (1988) to Rancière (2004) who have pointed to the intimate relation between democracy and conflict. Lefort argues that democracy, as a unique social form, is rooted in the production and management of social differences. Rancière takes this point further, emphasizing the fact that politics itself is defined by disagreement over parts within the social order. He points out that the "scandal" that undergirds all politics is a miscount whereby parts are included in the political order without any share to it. This "part without a part" is included, but remains invisible. Jacques Ranciere argues that, "Politics is the practice whereby the logic of the characteristic of equality takes the form of processing a wrong, in which politics becomes the argument of a basic wrong that ties in with some established dispute in the distribution of jobs, roles, and places" (1999: 35). Disagreements arise to disrupt the assignments of roles, jobs, and places. In this sense, it should have been no surprise that

a policy like Baan Mankong became filled up by disagreements. Those disagreements, taken seriously, could have been signs that the policy was actually working.

My approach here is intentional then: By analyzing disagreement, this chapter seeks to undo the ideologies of unity, harmony, and community endemic to thinking about development and the political capacities of the poor. In taking disagreement seriously I highlight three things: First, I show how the production of communities is risky and always laced with dispute. Community—as a mode of government and as a space of affinity—is always subject to policing and politics. Second, rather than ascribe disagreements to the natural behavior of "unruly" villagers—*ni khu chaoban* (that's just villagers)—or to a particularly caustic set of individual leaders (both explanations I frequently heard during my fieldwork), I examine disagreement in its own right to better understand the relationship between such struggles and politics writ large and small. These disputes then come to reflect and resonate the broader imbalances in Thailand today. Finally (and consequently), these disputes are not merely metaphorical reflections of the larger disagreement that are inevitably subordinate to national political struggles like the Red Shirts, rather the disagreements in Khon Kaen are themselves lived expression of the way the distribution of roles, jobs and places is being disrupted beyond the Red and Yellow movements. Thus, these incipient kinds of politics do not necessarily presage or foreshadow a mass political movement (or even the current one), but rather they are representative of the uneven way that such efforts at producing visibility and engaging politics among the poor are already happening in Thailand.

Friend(ships) Dissolved

The dissolution of the Friends community provides the clearest example of these processes in action. The past fifteen years in that community have been marked by intense disagreements and schisms. Although the same processes were also at work in other communities, the Friends community's deep involvement in local organizing, from the earliest activism to the current Baan Mankong project accounts for the depth of these disagreements, but also makes it the clearest example of the processes I described above. Although I detailed some of this story in Chapter 4, here I return to some of the same issues to show how the structural binds I described before resulted in a particular range of political possibilities for residents wishing to become visible and sign leases with the SRT, gaining rights to their land.

The Friends community was not the first community formed along the tracks, but, by the late 1990s, it was certainly the most prominent in Khon Kaen, if not nationally. Formed largely through evictions in other parts of Khon Kaen city, the Friends community became a site of both local and global slum activism during the 1990s. Its leadership, Mae Horm and Paw Singtho, became national activists, board members of the newly formed Four Regions Slum network, and part of the growing group of urban activists from the global south. They took study trips to Denmark and the Philippines to discuss organizing strategies and share their experiences with others. This prominence was remarkable given the fact that Slum activism in provincial Thailand was relatively new when compared to the older activist networks in Bangkok.

Mae Horm, Paw Singtho, Paw Raengkai, (in the Friends community), Prathan Thi, Mr. Jin (from T5 and T2 respectively), and a host of other activists from

throughout the Khon Kaen Municipality brought the concerns of the provincial urban

poor to the attention of Thailand's housing policy makers. Paw Raengkai, another early

leader called the Friends community the "NGO community" because of its close

interaction with the emerging scene of urban NGOs in Bangkok. Paw Singtho, for

example, joined the board of UCDO (the precursor to CODI) while Mae Horm served

on the national board of the Four Region's Slum network. In this way, Khon Kaen's

developing importance in the national housing networks was rooted directly in that

community. These activist-residents applied for grant money for new urban

development projects including infrastructure and housing projects as well as formed

savings groups and new mechanisms of credit. They also began organizing to try to

prevent the Railway from renting their land to businesses. These activities started the

process of community organizing, which helped influence the creation of the new

housing policy that would become the Baan Mankong project.

As I described in Chapter 4, these relationships began to sour as more money

poured into the community for projects. The late 1990s in particular were marked by an

increase in funding for projects and a number of successes—the achievement of

temporary housing registration cards and the beginning of negotiations for rental in

particular. But these successes had paradoxical effects, as local, national, and global

funding priorities changed, disputes within the network over leadership emerged and

conflicts manifested themselves in the splitting of the local network of activists. As the

network split, so too did the residents within communities. The Friends community was

in the center of all of these disputes. When the network split the community split into

different communities situated on the east (the *Pathana Sithi* community) and west

sides (the Friends Community) of the tracks. Then, the *Patthana Sithi* Community split into 3 different zones.

Paw Raengkai, whose house is in Zone 3 of the *Patthana Sithi* community, was a leader during this time. He recalled the conflict in this way, "At first it was just money [that caused the split]. The money from CODI, SIF, and the [Japanese Recovery Grant] Miyazawa grant was coming into the community but we didn't know where it was going." This money created a number of conflicts and claims of corruption both on the part of local leaders and the local NGOs. Ultimately, Paw Singtho and Mae Horm who were aligned with the contemporary Friends community (on the west side of the tracks) divided the network. Raengkai and the other activists—including their NGO counterparts—became isolated from CODI and began working towards rental with the help of the Four Region's network.

As Raengkai puts it, "At first I was working towards rental only (*chao yang diao*), but no one really wanted to work with me. Even Paw Kan (the leader of the Zone 2) worked against us. So I worked in other communities. We tried to avoid the Friends community, but they came and disrupted us (*rao mai yung kap khao, khao ma yung kap rao*)." Paw Raengkai told me that among his closest neighbors he encountered obstacles. "This [Zone 3] was one of the first communities to sign a lease in 2000. I signed back then, but no one around me wanted to rent so it failed. I stopped working completely from 2001-2003. I didn't work at all. Then I started helping others rent. Paw Kan (in Zone 2) began renting before us and so did the city's peripheral communities— "City's Edge" Zone 1 and Zone 2. When the Railway opened this area to rental by

businesses, then my they [his neighbors] woke up (*tun tua*)." As I describe below, Paw Raengkai's neighbors in Zone 3 did not sign a lease until the fall of 2008.

Where new grant money arrived, its apportionment caused new disputes. These disputes were discussed as administrative issues or through suspicions of corruption, but they evoked broader questions about how such development funds were to be distributed: Which communities would be supported which would not? Who would manage the money? What were the links between NGO administrators and the communities? Why did such money need to be issued to "communities" in the first place? In this way, the terms of the dispute were simultaneously material and structural. The disagreement highlights the problems inherent in the frameworks through which the projects were conceived even though the actual disagreements did not challenge those frameworks.

Often this history of the split was described through corruption with residents on either side of the split blaming the other for mismanaging project money and keeping some for themselves. Without weighing in on those claims directly, the underlying descriptions of this corruption are useful to explore because they demonstrate the way the above structural questions led to such disputes.

Leaders in the KKSR frequently claimed that Mae Horm stole money from the projects. Among the leadership in the KKSR this was the most commonly cited reason for the split. When I discussed this with Mae Horm, she pointed out that NGO consultants demanded five percent of the project's budgets for administration. She claimed that the missing project money went to set up the new network, which would avoid the five percent budget allocation asked for by the NGOs. Mae Horm did not

seem to have gotten rich off the alleged corruption and it was hard to tell whether not she was responsible for missing money as she continued to actively spend most of her time working with CODI and organizing along the tracks. In short, Mae Horm thought it unfair that NGOs "earn a living off" project money directed towards material improvements in poor communities so she decided to set up her own network.

This explanation is pretty unsatisfying (and inevitably contested), but it speaks directly to the question of trusteeship and the role of NGOs in these project budgets. Although the NGO activists had formed close bonds with the residents in the communities, they were not residents of the communities and their continued engagement was seen by some as producing new forms of inequality even as they attempted to remedy it through organizing residents to struggle with the state. Mae Horm's claim rested on the claim that any money directed towards administration outside the community was aid money not going directly to residents. In a similar way, residents complained that CODI officials were corrupt because they earned salaries for work that resident/participants in the Baan Mankong project did not earn. These controversies speak to the way that projects embedded residents as trustees to be managed by others. Rather than giving money directly to the residents, it had to be used to create a number of new frameworks to govern the communities. So while residents were expected to participate and cooperate in the name of communal spirit, development experts were earning a salary from these projects. I do not bring this critique up because I support it, but rather to demonstrate how the underlying framework for the project made such a critique possible in the first place.

Paw Raengkai and his allies in the Khon Kaen Slum Revival network, on the other hand, criticized the way that CODI tried to strip their network of its budget by moving support from existing NGO based savings groups to the new national program associated with Baan Mankong. Having recently split from the National Housing Authority, CODI's shift in strategy had important financial and social stakes. It created two different paths towards development: one that emphasized rights before development and the other that emphasized the opposite. While the activists in the Khon Kaen Slum Revival network pursued the former, the United Communities activists and CODI pursued the latter. The disputes, then, were provoked by the very structures through which the poor were called into the development process in the first place—as villagers to be improved and *entrusted* to either CODI or the NGO network. The disagreement hinged on how the poor would be governed, how money was accounted for and distributed, and how to determine just what kind of citizens the "villagers" along the tracks might be turned into. These disagreements did not resolve these questions, but created multiple paths to contest them.

From Paw Raengkai's perspective these disagreements were material and personal. That is, he felt he could no longer trust his neighbors or their intentions to rent so he ceased working with them. However, he fundamentally disagreed with the processes that privileged development above rights so he continued the process of organizing, working with like-minded activists in Khon Kaen and Bangkok. It wasn't until more disagreements blossomed that a community could be forged in Zone 3 among residents who previously were not unified in anything other than their resolve not to rent and their desire not to be evicted.

From Mae Horm's perspective, these disputes were not about whether or not to rent, but about the role of NGOs in the organizing process. She claimed that apportioning a specific percentage of the budget for the NGOs was tantamount to stealing from the "villagers." That system of budgeting reflected the broader power relations between NGOs and the community leaders with whom they worked. It also reflected the bind facing residents seeking to gain resources from these projects.

Disagreements manifested themselves at the level of networks—the split between the United Communities and Khon Kaen Revival—and at the level of community, as residents became entangled with policing. Struggles over rental rates, over leadership, over definitions and boundaries of communities, and over political practices, all evoked the complex binds entailed in the system produced to manage the settlements. These processes resulted in disagreements up and down the tracks that reverberated with the underlying political tensions, reseeding disagreements within neighborhoods and between these new networks.

The disagreements did not resolve this structure. In fact, they could not resolve this structure because the structure grew out of the more profound question about who is proper to politics in contemporary Thailand in the first place. Seen as neither ready for citizenship nor capable of practicing politics, residents had to use community to contest evictions and police themselves. The funds given to communities through networks were also structured by this logic. Thus, these stories of activism and disagreement expose the contested nature of community and the disputes that undergirded its formation.

The deeply fractious nature of organizing and administering in the name of such communities was endemic to people trying to figure out how to manage a set of procedures and techniques that they had not attempted previously. Yet, NGOs, CODI, and the various community leaders along the tracks claimed that such disputes were not endemic to community, but rather pathological approaches to the practice. The resolution for these corruptions was rooted not in reconsidering the practice more closely, but in disagreeing over who might intervene and act as guardians of the poor, reforming their interests and training them to be better villagers. This further embedded use of community as a means of resolving their claims and organizing the settlements to be governed. While disputing their secondary legal rights through community, residents became more deeply embedded into the care of the NGOs, CODI, and community itself. Residents, left to speak through their *philiang* (guardians), could do little more than struggle to work within the framework of community to solve their material problems even as they felt the chaffing at these constraints.

The story of the splitting of the Friends community, as told Paw Raengkai and Mae Horm, demonstrates the difficulty of practicing politics in the age of community. Although community frequently appears in the language of social science as an *a priori* social fact, the story of the Friends community demonstrates that something quite new was at work. Community, here, was something special, used to improve the poor and serve as a new node to govern them. Community had to be made via forms of inclusion and exclusion, which demanded new forms of management and new kinds of disagreement. Although community seemed to emerge as a benign technology of

harmony, it was in fact something quite other than that. Community was risky, divisive and came with high stakes.

Conflict and Cooperation in Zone 3

The story of Zone 3's rental contract explores these risks more closely, demonstrating the way in which this framework produced new pockets of vulnerability policed not by the Railway, but by the residents themselves. In November of 2008, I accompanied Nung, Paw Raengkai, and some of the leaders from the KKSR network down to CODI's office in Bangkok to see Zone 3 sign its lease agreement. After an overnight trip, we arrived at CODI's main office expecting to be greeted by officials ready to sign documents. Instead, we waited in the building's open-air plaza for two hours with only limited contact from CODI's staff who only came down to ask for more time. Eventually, I asked one of the architects from Bangkok who was in charge of handling all of the communities in the Four Region's network what was delaying the lease. He told me that Mae Horm had interjected herself into the meeting. She was concerned that when the lease was signed four houses would be cut off from the road and their owners evicted.

The news of Mae Horm's involvement in the delay came as no surprise to the residents from Zone 3. To me, however, this was a shock. I knew Mae Horm from her involvement with CODI and her role as a leader in the United Communities network. At this stage in my research I could not understand why another activist would actively obstruct a lease from being signed, even if it was not in the name of her network. The residents from Zone 3 however, knew instantly that she was the one delaying the rental.

The issue at hand was that the residents of five houses located in the middle of the community did not want to sign the lease. Mae Horm intervened on their behalf because they were concerned that once a lease was signed they would be evicted because they were not part of Zone 3. Yet, the residents from Zone 3 told me that the loyalties of these homeowners lay with Mae Horm and the broader Friends community. Mae Horm claimed that these residents did not trust the KKSR and did not want to protest the government but wanted to participate in the Baan Mankong project. Privately friends in Zone 3 told me that the homeowners were using the split between the networks to avoid paying rent and "remain as before" (*yu muan derm*).

Space complicated the situation. Though the majority of the houses in Zone 3 were spatially clustered, the homes of the residents refusing to rent sat in the middle of the community and, complicating this picture further, these houses were themselves neither spatially clustered nor located adjacent to the alleyway that ran the length of most of the community. Lacking direct access to the road, these houses were accessed by a footpath located between two other houses that backed up to a drainage canal. A second cluster of houses in this group of abstainers was located directly adjacent to the tracks behind houses of active members of Zone 3's leadership committee. This spatial dispersion and disconnection from community infrastructure posed important questions when it came to Zone 3's infrastructure redevelopment plan and housing relocation projects. Mae Horm was particularly concerned that these projects would cut the residents of the homes off from the access road. Thus, she stalled the signing of the agreement until a deal could be reached whereby those homeowners would not be blocked from the road.

Eventually the leaders of Zone 3 agreed to a deal with CODI in which they agreed to leave an access zone for these residents, but the tone of the day had changed radically, particularly for my friend Khem. Early that morning he and I had been joking as we waited for the officials from CODI to meet with us to sign the final rental contract. By the time the final documents were signed all of his energy was drained and he was withdrawn. One of the abstaining households was the small tin shack located directly behind his house.

Khem is a machinist; ninety percent of his house is taken up by his busy metal shop/vocational training center. Most days he works with a staff of a few experienced workers and several local youth who he trains to do metal work. They fill orders for iron driveway gates, basketball hoops, cafeteria chairs, and Khem also makes custom tools and blades. When he isn't working, he is very active in Zone 3's administration and travels to Bangkok with other leaders in the Revival network for public demonstrations with the Four Region's network. The small shack that sits behind the house was particularly vexing for him because its owners were preventing him from gaining secure rights to the land even as that house remained in violation of the Railway's spatial regulations.

I asked him why that house's residents were not included in the rental agreement and he shared his frustration, "What am I supposed to do about them? We asked them if they wanted to rent and they refused (*phatiset*). We are trying to work with the Railway. You have to go along with their policies (*tong pai tham naiobai khorng khao*). It is their [SRT] land (*ni thi din khong khao)* and if they don't want to rent then they

can't live there (*tha khao mai yak chao yu thor mai dai*)." The way he framed it cast these choices into stark relief: rent or be evicted.

Technically, the previous day, Khem and his family were trespassing, living on the very same land without a lease. Yet, having signed an agreement, he was in the position of being the one administering the Railway's policy. Given the fact that he and his family had decided to pay rent for the land, it now seemed unfair to him that the people living in the house behind him be allowed to live there rent-free in a space that violated the SRT's stated policy. Indeed, he even referred to them as "*phubukruk*" (trespassers), a word that, a few weeks prior, he had used when describing his own feeling of illegitimacy as a resident of the city before signing the lease. In Khem's framing, his neighbor's refusal to join the community was a choice. They had been given the option to become good citizens and by refusing they were bad citizens—they were refusing to develop and remaining as before. Rental was the point of inflection where politics gave way to policing.

Yet, with their house in the first twenty meters and limited space and resources to move, the shack's owners did not have much of a choice. The disagreement emerged out of that dilemma. Leases came with legitimacy, but they also produced new zones of illegitimacy. As I have shown throughout this dissertation, loyalties were not always spatialized and the decision to participate in one community or another was a complex one tied to histories of struggle and pragmatic decisions about the future that were always in tension with the uneven frameworks that governed the space along the tracks. Where residents joined together to form communities, they had the power to administer their own rights, to participate in the creation of a newly governed space, and to police

and exclude those who refused to participate. At the same time, residents who refused were in a position to stall negotiations with the SRT or disrupt leases altogether. This tension seemed to give Khem and his neighbors a good reason to exclude and evict. Not only were residents who did not participate, not paying rent, but, they threatened the lease itself, which was predicated on unified communal administration and collective payment. In this way, the excluded (either by force or by choice or some mixture) could do real harm to these newly formed communities.

Prior to signing communal leases, residents organized broadly, gathering divergent groups from across the tracks with the aim of stopping commercial rental and pushing for expansions of housing rights. However, after residents began the process of signing communal leases and creating demarcated communities, this kind of broad-based, pro-poor activism became more difficult. In the case of Zone 3, the group of residents who fell outside the lease were not only excluded from leases but also from upgrade funds and access to permanent electric and water meters. Furthermore, they were no longer seen as potential allies and were instead seen as trespassers, illegitimately stalling the development of their now legitimate neighbors.

On the other side of the fence, so to speak, residents who didn't sign leases posed a significant threat to new communities. Railway representatives often said that their interest was not in mediating land disputes but in collecting rent. So, these disputes threatened the long-term security of those leases. From the Railway's perspective, CODI was to act as a mediator in these situations. Yet, CODI representatives were often unsure of how to handle these types of disputes precisely

because the underlying disagreements emerged out of the fundamentally uneven

arrangements that served to govern the tracks in the first place.

The story of the dispute between residents in Zone 3 shows why these conflicts

were intractable: Common solutions to the underlying disputes over land and access to

lease agreements were difficult to achieve given the range of loyalties, strategies, and

spatial politics at play. The collective subjectivity sat at the center of the disagreement.

Residents were called into the rental process "villagers" naturally inclined to work

together. This occluded the spatial, social, and material differences between residents

and the disputes entailed in actually creating community. Politics not harmony became

the stuff through which communities were made.

At the same time, however, disagreements and social tension were the social

phenomenon that "community" as a technology of government was designed to quell.

As communities were created they needed to become harmonious. So, when a new

community emerged, it was imperative for its members to quash disagreements and to

appear homogenized. Rather than build disagreement into the community process,

activists, planners, and residents were forced to ignore it, cover it up, or exclude it. The

best way for residents to appear homogenously united was to portray those who refused,

those who disagreed, as choosing to remain outside of the community. The structure of

the lease privileged this approach as well. However, as Rancière (1999) alerts us, those

ongoing disagreements were not just disputes between neighbors, but rather the signals

of the miscount. Those lingering on the edges of communities became heard through

disputes that signaled the continued exclusions that resonated with the broader structure

of Thai citizenship. Thus, these intractable disagreements were manifold processes in

which micro-level social conflicts were sites in which national level social inequalities became visible.

In the end, these disagreements resulted from the very real dilemmas facing residents trying to demonstrate their status as legitimate political subjects by following regulations and participating in state sponsored projects. So, where Khem explains that his neighbors are *phubukruk*, trespassers, he is also pointing out his own efforts to police the local order. The persistent illegality around him both highlights his choices, but also threatens them at the same time. What, for all intents and purposes, looked like a dispute between neighbors was in fact a dilemma emerging from the tenuous frameworks created to manage inclusion and exclusion more generally. The perversion here was that Khem—a dedicated community activist, a local leader, a business owner/educator, a father—had also become the administrator of a potential eviction rooted in the same problems that structured his own experience.

The Case of Mr. Sapda

I want to return to the incident that began this chapter—the eviction of Mr. Sapda—to show how the bind I describe above was rooted in the different possibilities for making oneself visible along the tracks. Given that residents had increasingly become seen as trespassers (both by the Railway and each other), the range of options for becoming visible came down to two new possibilities: one rooted in poor villager-ness and a politics of vulnerability, one rooted in good citizenship and policing. Mr. Sapda's story reveals the way such subjectivities enable particular political contestations.

Nearly every time I saw Mr. Sapda he was wearing a loose-knit white shirt, long blue shorts, and sandals. That outfit, and his passive, deferential smile bespoke a kind of villager-ness that occluded the fact that he (at one time) owned a successful auto-repair shop sitting at the largest intersection in Khon Kaen. I saw Mr. Sapda a dozen times between late May and mid-July of 2009 as Railway officials attempted to mediate a land dispute between him, T5, the Friends community, another adjacent engine repair shop, and their associated networks of activists.

Mr. Sapda's house was at the center of this dispute, occupying a space about forty meters wide and 80 meters long, enclosed behind a patchwork fence made out of rusting aluminum. The fence divides his lot from the rest of the space surrounding the tracks, which residents from T5 had already backfilled with earth, preparing it for housing. In the KKSR's development plan, this was to be the resettlement zone for residents from T5 living in the twenty meters closest to the tracks. Their relocation here would bring that community into full compliance with its lease from the SRT.

Although it was located on Railway land, Mr. Sapda was not actually a member of any of the surrounding communities. The fence that partitioned his lot was both material and social. For four years the owners of the engine repair shop and Mr. Sapda (both of whom shared the land inside the fence) had avoided eviction by refusing to demolish the fence and vacate the space. Leaders from T5 and the other activists in the Four Region's network tried to include him in the lease when it was approved, but he refused. Since then, the activists from the KKSR actively petitioned the Railway to intervene in the hopes that they would evict him and allow the residents from T5 to be able to relocate to this space.

Up until recently, that piece of land was the last piece of undeveloped land along the tracks in the Khon Kaen municipality. Four years ago, Prathan Thi (the leader of T5 and the chairman of both the Revival network and, at the time, the national board of the Four Region's Slum network) along with his allies from the Four Regions network negotiated rights to the land with the SRT and CODI. When that agreement was signed, the residents of T5 began paying rent on this land. But in that time, only the community center, a two-story frame for a house, and another small single-family house to the south were completed. The resident of that house, Mae Noi, joined T5 after having a disagreement with her neighbors in the "Friends" community. Her defection made it possible for T5 to make a claim to this land.

The morning of Mae Horm's speech was tense. Residents from all over the tracks came to see the outcome of this struggle. But this day in late-May was ultimately anti-climactic, only the fence was evicted. Even that was partial, as the entire fence was not destroyed, but simply moved back, bringing the lot into compliance with the Railway's twenty-meter safety zone. Of the crowd assembled on the muddy road, half were residents from the Friends community, the community located directly to the south of the plot of land. They defended Mr. Sapda arguing that he was just a "poor villager" (*chaoban khon jon*) who not only deserved to stay on the land, but also needed protection from the "mafia," a word they pejoratively use to describe the Revival network.

Throughout the morning, Mr. Sri, the Friends community's leader, used a microphone and amplifier to announce the community's demands—1) that CODI, the SRT, and the Four Regions network be held accountable for "evicting villagers" (*lairu*

chaoban); 2) that T5 should lose its right to the land and that the Friends community should be given the land; and 3) that the Friends community should be allow to rent more generally. His speech simultaneously sought to de-legitimize the work of the activists from the Revival network while demonstrating that the residents of the Friends community were both legitimate and compliant citizens ready to rent the land. At the same time, his speech claimed not just the land that the community center occupied, but the entire original space designated within the municipality as the Friends community— including the community across the tracks *Patthana Sithi* Zones 2 and 3, which by this point had signed their own leases with the SRT.

Though the groups stood apart from one another throughout most of the morning, occasionally a few women from T5 would curse at the representatives from the Friends community. Visibly angry, one woman leaned over and asked me rhetorically, "Is it right that we have paid rent for four years and haven't been able to use this land?" (*raw mai dai chai thii diin leay tae rao jai kha chao sii phi laew nii took mai?*). Later an acquaintance from the Friends community called me over and asked if I had brought a gun with me.

There was no violence or direct confrontation, but navigating this newly shared space proved a fraught test of my own loyalties as a fieldworker. While I had hoped that this research would result in some space or site for advocacy, it had mostly resulted in me becoming embedded in the complex and confusing disagreements between these two networks. Towards that end, I attempted to remain neutral when asked about which network was the correct one (as I was frequently asked). Instead of answering this

question I simply told residents that I thought everyone along the tracks deserved a right to the land. Yet, this situation highlighted the naïveté of that position (Figure 6.3).

Prior to this series of encounters I maintained a simplistic "pro-poor," "pro-rights" stance residents asked me which network was working in the interests of its constituents. This was how I answered when network members who wanted me to weigh in on the actions of their rivals asked me about my own loyalties. Indeed, it was also the position I advocated when I spoke with CODI staff. Yet, this situation underscored the simplifications and elisions in my own position. Rights came with costs. There was not enough space along the tracks and, given the current framework, some people were going to be excluded—it was not a question of if, but how to handle such exclusions. As I considered the disagreement, my position became difficult to maintain given the range of constraints—material, structural, spatial, regulatory—facing residents. It was not because the values behind my position were wrong, but rather my position's bluntness ignored the complex processes residents had to go through in order to make claims to space through politics.

The situation highlighted how disagreement was essential to gaining rights, but also how the pre-existing systems of policing did not disappear when a group signed a lease. Rather, leases redistributed the job of policing to the newly legitimized communities. When the residents along the tracks sought to make their voices heard, they could do so by portraying themselves as advocates for the vulnerable poor, or as good citizens policing the tracks for the state. Each position served to undercut the

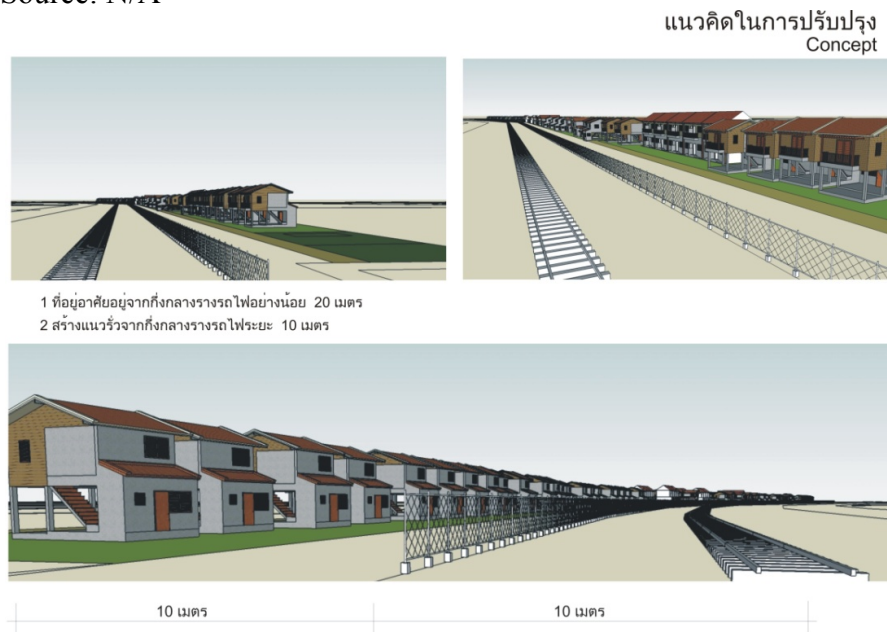Figure 6.3: Members of both networks gather to watch/protest Mr. Sapda's eviction. Source: N/A

Figure 6.4: CODI concept drawing for the railway communities. Source: CODI

others' efforts and highlighted the general problems of the framework at the same time—that the communal distribution through harmonious notions of community was impossible. Paradoxically, disagreement deepened the framework of community in the moment, but also highlighted its flaws by bringing these intractable binds into view.

Members of the KKSR network told me that Mr. Sapda was a rich businessman (*nakturakit ruay*) and not a villager. They said he shouldn't be allowed to occupy this land. Paw Kan, a leader in the revival network told me, "Mr. Sapda is just a rich man that looked after (*du lae*) the leadership from the Friends community and Mae Horm. He has plenty of space to live in the building he owns in front of the lot. These villagers from T5 have been paying rent for this land for the last four years and have not been able to use that land at all." Paw Kan argued that Mr. Sapda was using the Friends community to protect his own interests. In doing so, he stood in the way of T5s efforts to comply with the Railway's policy, impeding their ability to work with authorities to solve the slum problem and their abilities to become legitimate citizens.

Mae Horm and Paw Sri, on the other hand, claimed that Mr. Sapda was a "poor villager." Mae Horm admitted that in the past he had money, but that his business failed. Furthermore she pointed out that the activists from that network were dividing rich and poor thus, going against the philosophy of the Baan Mankong policy, which was to build unity. For months, Mae Horm complained about the Four Regions Network and the leadership of the KKSR, telling me that they are just trying to "evict poor people" (*lai ru khon jon*) but it was not until that afternoon that I saw what she meant. Previously when I asked Mae Horm who was getting evicted she deflected it by

launching into a discussion about how the activists and residents in the Revival network

were responsible for creating conflicts and divisions (*sang khwam thak yaek*) among

residents who should unite (*samakkhi*).

When I asked why leaders from the Revival network refused to work with Mae

Horm and the Friends community to help them rent, or why they did not allow Mr.

Sapda to join their community, they argued that they tried and that they refused to rent.

As Paw Nokhuk, another leader from *Patthana Sithi* Zone 2 pointed out, "They don't

want to rent. They are playing games (*len kaem*) and they don't want to participate with

us (*mai yak ruam kap rao*). We gave him a chance (*hai okat*), but you have to follow

the Railway's requirements if you want to gain rights" (*ja tong tham tham kotrabiap*

khong kanrotfai tha yak mi siti). These conflicts were over models of development and

good citizenship. Since both groups felt they were acting as legitimate representatives

of the poor it made for an intractable disagreement and an irreparable split between

residents. At the same time, Paw Nokhuk acknowledged that he was simply working

within the existing set of practices to get towards his goal. The binds that the KKSR and

UC community were up against were visible through the disagreement, but neither

group addressed them directly. Instead, they disputed each other's claims.

The ambiguity of Mr. Sapda's status became central: Was he poor? Was he a

villager? Was he even a resident of the Friends community? These questions were

important, but were really proxy questions that pointed to the larger gaps in both the

NGO project of community organizing and CODI's attempt to develop the tracks.

Neither approach had a good answer for these thorny questions because they relied on

frameworks which excluded others from the possibility of renting by deepening the

requirements that residents had to be uniformly poor and uniformly communal in order to rent. Given the spatial constraints along the tracks, the meager funds apportioned via Baan Mankong's upgrade money, and the limited ability of residents to take on low cost mortgages to relocate, it was impossible to house the current number of residents living along the tracks while still complying with the SRT's regulations. Moreover, the logic of community was built into every part of the process. It was essential to both the SRT and CODI's frameworks and it was a part of the NGO logic of organizing as well. So, as residents could highlight the problems related to implementing community, they had difficulty arguing with the concept itself.

The hegemony of this notion of community is evident in a "design concept" that CODI's architects made to inspire residents along the tracks. The design shows an unbroken line of uniform duplexes (*ban faet*) running along the tracks (See Figure 6.4). These images were only loosely based in reality. They did not account for the number of houses that would be necessary to house residents and there was no clear funding to help the poorest residents save enough to guarantee that they could participate in any mortgage scheme. Although CODI planners reminded residents that all they needed to save was 1 baht per day (*wanla baht*) this amount was not enough to cover the cost of construction. The drawing offered a nice vision of a unified future of an organized community with clear boundaries and improved housing for all, but the plans were blunt instruments, not attuned to the nuanced constraints to which these disagreements responded. Regardless of how compelling CODI's plans were, the question of whose land this was could only be decided through disagreements.

The terms under which that disagreement should be decided—who had a legitimate claim to the land and who didn't—were uncertain, rooted in the questions surrounding Mr. Sapda's status. If he was poor or wealthy, for example, was a question that sought to uncover the economic and moral standing of his claim to the land. From the UC's and Mae Horm's perspective, it was clear that obstructing T5's housing project was an effort to protect the vulnerable Mr. Sapdaa—poor, old, and a villager. Although Prathan Thi and the Khon Kaen Slum Revival Network made similar claims on behalf of the residents of T5, they ultimately pinned their legitimacy to their status as responsible rent paying stewards of the land ready to police it in order comply with the SRT's policies. They used this logic to legitimatize their claims arguing that Mae Horm and the UC were preventing them from being good, compliant citizens, and should to kick Mr. Sapda off the land in the process.

The situation exposed a conflict between two languages of claims making: One that sought to marshal the moral capital of poverty to expand politics and another that emphasized rights and responsibilities enacted through policing. There is an irony here: The KKSR, who typically was seen as being prone to protest and associated with confrontational activists, ended up policing the space. The UC, who presented themselves as striving towards participation, harmony, and cooperation, ended up engaging in politics more directly. This was not because they wanted to, but rather because their efforts at harmony had failed, and the only option they had left was to expose the more fundamental disagreement, that all of these people were going to be evicted in the current framework. Prior to signing leases, the KKSR and its claims to the land were based in the same moral imperative to stop evictions and empower the poor.

Once residents had signed leases, this broad claim no longer served the interests of its

communities who needed to be compliant and lawful in order to maintain the leases.

The effect of the dispute was to make visible the continued presence of trespassing,

which upset and made visible the tense boundaries between harmony and disagreement,

between belonging and exclusion, between policing and politics along the tracks.

Networks of Disagreement

In July of 2009, Mr. Sapda's house was destroyed. When it finally happened, the

event was rather low key. Whereas the previous visits by the Railway authority, trips to

the enforcement office, and partial evictions were subject to counter-protests or covered

by local media, only a few other residents were around for the actual eviction. The only

people in attendance were some local officers from the SRT, a few Police officers, and

a couple of local enforcement officers, in addition to Paw Kan, Paw Nokhuk, and a few

women from T5. Mae Horm and the residents from the Friends community were

noticeably absent.

When I arrived, I wandered over to Paw Kan who shook his head and said,

"This has taken nine months. We've been waiting since November for this, but now it's

finally happening. Now we can take this drainage pipe and extend it all the way to the

road and have a proper drain. We'll be able to begin filling the land in and start building

houses. We'll also build a large fence across the back so this can't happen again."

One of the women from T5 squatting next to me pointed to the couple whose

business shared the yard with Mr. Sapda and said, "They look sad, huh (*khoa mi na*

siadai chaimai)? Look at them [pointing to the owners of the engine repair shop]. They

have several cars and a Kubota tractor (*khao mi rotyon lae rotkubota*). They are rich

(*khao pen khon rua*). We don't even have one car. They've made us wait and look how

much they have (*khao mi yut mak lae rao tong ro*)."

Mr. Sapda sat uneasily between these dualities. He was a resident along the

tracks but unlike the people who owned all the junk in his yard, he was not

unambiguously wealthy. Yet, he also lacked clear enough credentials as a "poor

villager" to make a claim to the space. He might have been poor but he did not belong

to a community. The ambiguity surrounding his status was precisely what made him

problematic and why his case became evocative of the political tensions I describe

above. Indeed, the fence oriented his shop and house towards the main highway. This

marked him as a rather different type of subject than other residents I interacted with

more closely. Spatially and economically he did not fit a clear image of a "villager in

need of development." Yet, the mobilization of the Friends community on his behalf

highlighted his status as a resident of the tracks nonetheless. In the end he faced the

same difficult dilemmas, poor or not.

Paw Kan then asked me about United Communities and the current status of

their rental. Because my methods took me back and forth between networks, early in

my research I had decided that it was best not to share either speculations or strategies

and only share knowledge that was publically known to other parties. I told him that

they were still in the process of trying to negotiate rental. He scoffed,

> So basically they are just where they were before (*khao yu thi derm*).
> They are trying to present every community at once and you can't do
> that (*khao ja payaym tuk khrongkan tang paek laey*). It just won't happen
> (*mai dai*). They have to do it in small blocks like we have (*khoa torng
> sanur ben klum pen blaeng*). This is the way to get the community to

work together (*ni khu withi sang khwam ruam mu nai chumchon*). This is the only way the communities can get things ready on their own. They need to work at things a little at a time."

Paw Nokhuk joined us adding,

> The UC just want to present [to the Railway's board of directors] and finish like that—boop! (*tham hai set bup)*. But it is harder than that (*tae yakkwa ni*). If you look at each community it will be just like this [He pointed to the eviction] (*tha ja hin tuk chumchon ja hin baep ni*). CODI has its own problems too, they have so many projects that the bureaucrats (*jaonathi*) just approve and approve and give money to the villagers. But when the government inspects (*truatsob*) the projects they will see if CODI and the UC have followed the correct procedure. The government will see that they haven't. They will learn that the bureaucrats are just giving money to people and the projects are not done correctly.

He pointed out that this kind of problem was recurrent in each settlement, continuing,

> As for CODI, they are supposed to fix the problem but this is really the way to fix it [again pointing to the eviction]? You need to fight, struggle (*torng su*). You need to use the courts (*torng chai san*). That is how you fix the problem (*nii kuu witikaepanha*). The other network is good at talking. Mae Horm says the right things. She will stand up in a meeting and tell the villagers this or that but the villagers don't understand that this is what the process is like. The villagers don't have enough information (*chaoban tong me khormun*) and the leaders don't give it to them and the villagers don't listen (*phuyai mai hai lae chaoban mai fang*). So nothing ever happens over there. It is just talk until something happens. Look at the first 20m of the railroad tracks, the railroad says you need a plan for these people you need to give them somewhere to go. Do they have a plan?

I tried to explain their plan, saying that Mae Horm had said she would negotiate a way

to allow residents living adjacent to the tracks stay in the first twenty meters in the

city's densest communities. He responded:

> That is just *their* plan. The railroad didn't approve that. You need a plan. You can't just write something in and say it is a plan. You need to have the railroad approval. Like with their idea to lower the rent to 5 baht/square meter/year—do you think the railroad will approve that? No

way! The railroad is already in a lot of debt. Who do you think is going
to pay for that? They think the government will do it but they won't.

This description was the most distilled version of the four-year saga over Mr.

Sapda's eviction that I had heard—the SRT's spatial regulations exerted pressure on the

networks to organize themselves in a particular way. In order to gain access to the land

you "needed" a plan agreed upon by the SRT. To create that plan residents needed to be

make community. This required reorganizing space and people, finding the social and

spatial boundaries of community. That involved struggle, managing differences, and

making a series of charged decisions with tough consequences for people who chose not

to participate. Once those obstructions were encountered, residents had to decide

whether to remain vulnerable villagers or make a claim to citizenship which, given the

prevailing design, engaged in both politics and policing through community.

Initially the spatial struggle had been primarily between residents and the SRT,

however the post-rental phase pushed residents into conflict with one another. Paw

Nokhuk's comment was in response to Mae Horm's attempt to submit all of the 302

railway communities identified through CODI's survey to the Railway board for rental.

This strategy operated on a notion that the SRT's land was homogenously settled by

needy and vulnerable subjects.

Paw Nokhuk's skepticism rested on top of hard won insight. Recognizing that

the Railway viewed neither the land nor its settlers as homogenous meant that the rental

process demanded struggle, disagreement, and, ultimately, exclusion. These outcomes

were set into motion by the SRT's guidelines, but enacted by the residents. With the

possibility of eviction on the line, their choices had consequences. Given the disjunctive

reality of life along the tracks, these kinds of processes were the only ones through which community could be born. They were also the same processes and structures that produced inevitable disagreements because they could not be initiated for the benefit of everyone equally.

Mr. Sapda's eviction made clear the kinds of disagreements that would take place all along the tracks. While his was the only case of a resident being evicted during my research others, like the homes involved in the dispute in Zone 3, demonstrate that the threat of eviction is omnipresent. Each lease signed by the KKSR underscored the depth of the UC failure to rent. More residents belonged to the UC than the KKSR, so their inability to organize and get leases signed, left the majority of the residents along the tracks unprotected by any claim to the land. In the past, the Railway might have been the arbiter of evictions, but now residents themselves policed the tracks.

I continued talking with Paw Kan and Paw Nokhuk over a lunch of steamed fish, vegetables and papaya salad, nearly black from homemade fermented fish. Paw Nokhuk continued:

> This space is really just one community. It has always just been one community. We all will work together but these projects have split us into many different groups. Like here with T5. At first we wanted to build a wall to protect the people in the first 20m but the railroad didn't like that idea, so they proposed that we move over here. We didn't decide to do it. The railroad asked if that would be acceptable and we said yes. Before it was just forest and trees over here, so we moved and then we asked those people (Mr. Sapda and the people who owned the engine shop) if they wanted to be involved in the project and they refused. This was all the railroad's idea.

Amidst the imperative to unify, develop, and behave communally, residents along Khon Kaen's tracks could only do so by engaging in practices of disagreement

with each other. "It was the railroad's idea" was Paw Nokhuk's way of acknowledging the underlying, uneven politics that had emerged from these struggles. Indeed, the rental framework had structured these disputes, ensuring that it was no longer possible to "remain as before." In doing so, it pushed the residents into a void because what to become and how to get there was also uncertain? Nearly a century of "citizen designs" in Thailand sought to create a villager unwilling and uncomfortable with engaging in politics. Yet, with limited capital as a bulwark against the tectonic shifts of Thailand's political economy in the wake of the 1997 markets crash many villagers became trespassers. In so doing they were thrust directly into the sphere of disagreement.

As this chapter demonstrates, this is a complex sphere to occupy, requiring residents to navigate the binds of normative notions of citizenship with regularity and important consequences. Charged with making a claim to the land, residents needed to engage a range of subjective positions demonstrating moderation, poverty, vulnerability, cooperation, harmony, and ultimately disagreement to attempt to remain in their homes. The last of these was risky as it actively upset the balance along the tracks and produced new forms of exclusion. This chapter demonstrates that the imperative to develop came along with a new impulse to disagree. To not do so is to remain as before, which as I have shown, is no longer possible.

Chapter 7:

A House is More Than a House: The Aesthetics of Belonging and Being

One of the central conceits of the Baan Mankong project is that "developing people" (*phatthana khon*) is a necessary precursor to development more generally (*kanphatthana*). In this context, developing people referred to cultivating the disciplines associated with communal living and personal moderation, both icons of the sufficiency theory I described in Chapter Two. This desire to move beyond physical development was expressed in the phrase "A House is More than a House," (*khamwa ban khu makwa ban*), which CODI planners said to contrast the house's materiality with its potential as a node of communal interaction and personal development. Yet, as I have described throughout this dissertation, moderation and sufficiency were not simply remedies to capitalism run amok, but also critiques of the aspirations of many residents along the tracks, which entailed material improvements, economic and political equality, and secure rights to their land. In this way, these comments sought to problematize residents' interests in physical improvements in order to encourage them to develop themselves prior to thinking about fixing their homes.

During the Baan Mankong project, "developing people" also took the form of a critique of modernization and developmentalism embodied in spectacular "megaprojects" (*maekaphrojek*). In fact, the failures of *maekaphrojek* like dams and highways were frequently evoked as a central rationale for the turn towards personal development. Living amidst this entangled history of state centered modernization and state and non-state driven small-scale development, both the residents along the tracks and the project planners frequently raised the question of what constituted "real

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development" (*kanphatthana thae jing*). This chapter explores how residents, NGOs, and CODI architects and planners used aesthetic practices as a means to propose answers to this question.[62] Practices like arranging space, creating architectural model homes, creating home improvements, and imagining futures through aesthetic registers, were all efforts to materialize improvement in particular ways. These aesthetic practices were attempts to create a present that resembled development in a particular way even if such efforts ultimately fell short of achieving their goals.

Following Jacques Rancière, I use aesthetic to refer to the "*a prioi* forms determining what presents itself to sense experience. It [aesthetics] is a delimination of spaces and times, of the visible and the invisible, of speech and noise, that simultaneously determines the places and the stakes of politics as a form of experience," (2004: 13). Aesthetics provide a configuration of roles, spaces, and times for bodies within society. Rancière argues that the senses are critical to the process of locating subjects who are only visible and intelligible through relations within a "distribution of the sensible." Aesthetics, from this perspective, are related to the definition of political subjects as occupying roles and jobs that are legitimate and illegitimate with regards to their particularly defined position in the general distribution. In this way, the aesthetic only refers to appearances but also to the ordering and arranging of the coordinates of

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[62] I do raise this same question. As James Ferguson (1994) and Arturo Escobar (1995) have pointed out, to undertake such a question would not only be fatuous, but would also be deeply problematic, extending the very same development discourse they identify without recognizing it as discursive. Nevertheless, as Marc Edelmann (1998) has argued, development remains a critical imaginary for thinking about the future, particularly in the same places that the development discourse deems undeveloped. The paradox here is that the very sites in which the most cogent critiques of development have taken root are also those that reinvigorate the term with new meanings and promises. I take up the aesthetic dimensions of development in order to consider understand the durable power of the term for thinking about social change.

that which appear to our senses and is, in turn, a highly political field. Such

arrangements are not merely surface appearances, but rather essential systems for

creating, maintaining, and disrupting social orders.[63]

Aesthetic practices, then, become charged sites of political action. For Rancière

such practices are " 'ways of doing and making' that intervene…in the relationships

they maintain to modes of being and forms of visibility " (*ibid*). Aesthetic practices, by

intervening in the "distribution of the sensible," can reinforce and disrupt the

arrangements of roles, spaces, times, and modes of being appropriate to particular

subjects. In this chapter I show how the "distribution of the sensible" is subject to

rearrangement, manipulation, and reconfiguration as an everyday action. As I will

show, the aesthetic work done by planners and residents is always done in tension with

an *a priori* set of coordinates tied to the various citizen designs I described previously,

however it never reproduces them exactly.[64]

Particular forms of materiality become important here: Bricks, tiles, zinc, and

concrete siding all become aesthetic markers of a particular sort. For example, when

conducted follow up research in 2010, I visited Mae Ni in Zone 3 of the *Patthana Sithi*

community. She showed me around her home, which had been relocated alongside the

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[63] Terry Eagleton emphasizes the role of aesthetics as mainly a means of enforcing hegemony. He points out that aesthetics emerge as part of a 19th century rational project, which he says parallels the movement from coercion to hegemony evident in the emergence of manners and notions of propriety and "lawfulness without law" (1988: 329). As Eagleton puts it, "What matters in aesthetics is not art but this whole project of reconstructing the human subject from the inside, informing its subtlest affections and bodily responses with this law that is not law" (1988: 330).

[64] Ranciere continues, "Politics revolve around what is seen and what can be said about it, around who has the ability to see and the talent to speak, around the properties of spaces and the possibilities of time," (2004:13). Indeed, this is a central question of citizenship—who has a part and how much of a part they have. Rancière argues that this "apportionment of parts and positions is based on a distribution of spaces, ties, and forms of activity that determines the very manner in which something in common lends itself to participation and in what way various individuals have a part in this distribution," (2004: 12).

extension of the road they built with CODI upgrade money. One of the things she made sure to show me was the bathroom, which they had done with small stone tiles. I laughed and told her it looked like a resort. She smiled and said her son had helped them purchase all the stone at a discounted rate. Not everyone had children working at home improvement stores, so most residents amassed mismatched ceramic tiles to renovate floors that were previously bare concrete (Figure 7.1). The materiality of tile was important as an aesthetic mode of claiming and also enacting a particular kind of life.

In this chapter I make three arguments: First, that the aesthetic is a critical terrain of disagreement in the production of development and its attendant modes of citizenship. For NGO activists, residents, the Thai state, and CODI's architects of development found physical shape in various aesthetic forms and projects. Thus, regimes of aesthetics are important to both the development project and the demonstration of citizenship itself. Aesthetics provide a visual grammar through which various citizen designs are enacted, proposed, and lived.

Second, aesthetic claims to belonging are not simply political. They are also a lived-in claim to a particular kind of life. Aesthetic productions of house and community *are* political, but they are also attempts at being in a particular way. As such "aesthetic practices" are also tied to ideal ways of living—ethical and moral claims to a good life—that aspire to exceed this political project. There is a kind of bittersweet irony in such claims because the aesthetic may manifest a vision of the good life, one that might even be located beyond disagreement, but such claims can never circumvent politics. In fact, as Holston points out that it is not voting that effectively politicizes in

the contemporary city but "rather it is in the realm of the *oikos*, in the zone of domestic life taking place in the remote urban peripheries around the autoconstruction of residence. It is an insurgence that begins with a struggle for rights to have a daily life in the city worthy of a citizen's dignity" (2008: 313). Aesthetics provides a ground for moral living, but always remains in tension with and productive of new forms of politics.

Finally, I argue that the even as aesthetics are important for producing forms of development and citizenship, appearances, like development itself, are also suspect and laden with gaps. Simply put, just because things look "developed" does not mean they are developed. The gap between appearances and lived experience does not undercut their importance but serves to remind residents of the limitations of their aesthetic claims. The persistence of poverty, exclusion, and disagreement amidst physical improvements has frequently served to underscore the limits of development as a framework for thinking about making life better. Ironically, these limitations become apparent exactly where development shows itself. Where things appear to improve, critics, social reformers, activists, and (occasionally) ethnographers, are likely to point out that the conditions of life in such sites may have stayed the same or gotten worse; appearances are not only deceiving, but can obscure *real* conditions.

Nevertheless, physical improvements *can* be manifestations of slow but real material and existential improvements in people's lives. Thus, this chapter explores the tense uncertainty surrounding the appearances of development. Knowing and deciding whether development has occurred then becomes a contested question burdened by the complex, often contradictory relationship between the political, material, and moral

dimensions of the development. Aesthetics emerge as important in the lives of residents living along the tracks because they must struggle to assert the complex and conflicting visions of who they think they might become as developing citizens and how they might produce a better world or community or home through their own actions.

Gardening the City

One of the most common projects created after communities gained leases were communal gardens (see Figure 7.2). In the "Rail's Edge" community, my friend Bunma and his neighbors planted one immediately after signing their lease. They pulled up the tangle of weeds from the narrow strip of land closest to the tracks and replanted it with medicinal herbs, fruit trees, hot peppers, and vegetables. The garden was so close to the tracks that it violated the Railway's spatial agreement not to build any projects in the ten meters next to the rail line. The Railway sent a letter to Bunma, the community's leader asking that it be demolished.

The community and their allies in the Khon Kaen Slum Revival network protested. In early September of 2010 about 60 residents from up and down the tracks gathered at the Rail's Edge community and walked two hundred meters to Khon Kaen's office of the State Railway of Thailand to meet with the local head of the Railway. Bunma and Prathan Thi, now the leader of the national Four Region's network, handed in a petition requesting that the community be allowed to keep the garden. They argued that the community had the right to improve its land and the quality of life of the residents. They also told the Railway officer that by making the city beautiful the community was helping it develop.
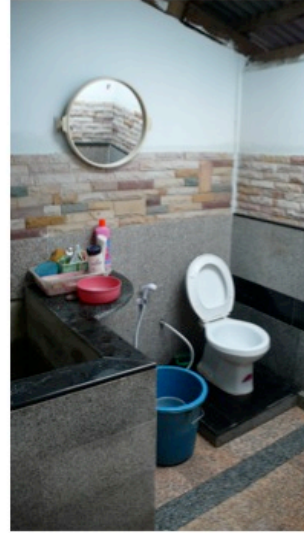
Figure 7.1: Tiles were a common feature of housing upgrades.

Figure 7.2: The garden in the Rail's Edge community.

Finally, they told the SRT that the garden was important as a space for the community to interact with each other and to practice sufficiency. The SRT relented, allowing them to keep the garden even though it violated the spatial regulations.

This struggle is revealing. On the one hand, the garden can be seen as a way that aesthetic forms reasserted the hegemonic notions of the poor as villagers, living close to nature, who valued sufficiency. The struggle over the garden merely reaffirmed this logic of sufficiency without challenging its uneven foundational logics (see Chapter 2). On the other, the garden was an aesthetic practice that was lived in. It was not just a symbol but a way in which the residents living in the Rail's Edge community positioned their lives as not only legitimate, but also an improvement on city as it was. During the protest, residents argued that they not only had the right to occupy the space, but that they could use as a means of improving the city as a whole. The garden did not challenge or undo the structure of the capitalist economy or the unevenness of the Sufficiency Theory. In fact, it had no effect on either. It did not even provide enough food to offset residents' own expenses. However, the garden did assert a moral claim to a certain kind: It emphasized that the community was a space of both legitimate being and belonging. Amidst the contradictory economic, political, and social pressures that shaped life along the tracks, this claim was a potent one.

Appearances of Development

Epistemologically, the language of development offers a way to evaluate temporal change. In the Thai language this is particularly obvious. Development (*kanphatthana*) is always associated with incremental forward movement cast through

the language of progress (*khwamcheroen)* and improvement (*khwamkaona)*. These words are not simply markers of economic improvement but are also related to other fields of progression linked to personal prosperity and communal flourishing. For example, throughout Northeastern Thailand during the *Songkhran*, the Thai New Year festival, people offer each other blessings for development (*kanphatthana*) and progress (*khwamcheroen*). In short, development is tied to the sense that things are getting better. Yet, knowing how and where "better" manifests itself (and for whom) is a slippery question that not only calls on material manifestations of improvement but also political and moral dimensions.[65]

Residents along the tracks, progressive NGOs, and CODI used a notion of "real development" (*kanpatthana tae jing*) to underscore the difference between changing appearances and substantive change. Their opposition between appearance and reality relocated notions of development away from external transformation towards an emphasis on internal transformations signaled by personal changes and accepting the values of temperance, moderation, and, in some cases, social justice. Consider the following quote from Sakkarin Sapu one of CODI's architect consultants and a professor of urban design at Mahasarakham University: "Making physical improvements to your house is like changing your clothes...you don't think differently in your new clothes; you just look different."

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[65] The word *phatthana,* development, is also associated with the *Abhidhamma* the last of the three books of the *Tripitaka—*the Therevadan Buddhist canon. It is also one of the one of its most esoteric of these books. I point this to emphasize the deeper moral resonance the word *patthana* carries with it. It is almost certain that few, if any of the residents along the tracks, NGO activists, or architects I worked with had encountered this text in any meaningful way. However, the linguistic connection between the words demonstrates the moral link to the term development that I am describing above. Moreover, the idea's Buddhist roots underscore the division between appearance and reality that plagues debates about development.

(http://www.codi.or.th/housing/CommunityArchSakarin.html last accessed 30 March 13).

This perfectly expresses the disjuncture expressed by many in CODI between personal development and aesthetic transformation. External change obscures internal continuity. For many in CODI and the NGO community, *"real development"* is produced by "developing people" and opposed to classic signifiers of modernity, like shopping malls, technology, and other *maekaphrojek,* which merely change the city and nation's appearance but without transforming its people for the better. Such projects and sites, are classic evocations of modernity through what Mary Beth Mills has called "up-to-date-ness" (*khwampenthansamai).* By relocating the site of development away from material embodiments of modernity, towards personal projects of moderation and social justice, these reformers sought to broaden the definition of *kanphatthana* and criticize the pursuit of growth through capitalism.[66]

While CODI, most NGOs, and some residents adopted the above approach to personal development as being distinct from "modernity" achieved by being "up-to-date," in fact, along the tracks these two projects were related through belonging. Residents' aspirations for personal development and social justice were in tension with aspirations for equality indexed by the aesthetics of modernization and consumer capitalism. The first thing many residents did once they secured rights to their land was to purchase new consumer goods and materials for home improvements. Residents expressed these transformations by improving their homes in ways that marked them as

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[66] This effort is obviously not limited to Thailand. Consider the proliferation of development indices each attempting to get a little closer to "real development": GDP, GNP, HDI, Human Poverty Index, Gender Inequality Index (GII), Multi-dimensional Poverty Index, Gross National Happiness.

equal to others through aesthetics that referenced consumer modernity. Residents along the tracks saw these aesthetic transformations as signs of increasing social parity that they did not see as distinct from personal and political development.

For example, on a tour of the "Golf Community"—a settlement built on the edge of a Railway owned golf course in Khon Kaen city—one of the tour's highlights was when the residents proudly showed off their new permanent electrical metering units (Figure 7.3). These mundane boxes, not at all aesthetically notable in the classic use of the word, marked the improved material conditions in the community. They were not symbolic. Rather, the boxes were a specific material manifestation of the resident's permanent housing registration numbers, which were reserved for homes with long-term rights. The electric meters offered an aesthetic index of permanent, legal, and stable access to the electrical grid. The meters attached to electric poles embodied the promise of development as modernization and development as rights.

Yet, proponents of personal development sought to temper this kind of excitement over both inclusion and modernity. For example, one night I asked residents in *Patthana Sithi* Zone 3, what they planned to do after they signed their lease. Ko, a local NGO activist who was sitting with us at the time, made a point to applaud my question saying it was very important. He added that if residents couldn't envision ways of working together after they signed lease agreements then their communities might dissolve. The residents we were sitting with paused and supplied a number of answers that I came to see as a standard response to this kind of question, specifically to improve

Figure 7.3: Permanent (right) and temporary (left) electric meters.

education or address "quality of life" (*khunaphapchiwit*). However, they never

specified exactly how they might address these issues. As I discussed in a previous

chapter, these issues, what NGOs referred to as "cold issues," were much more difficult

to address than the "hot issues," like occupancy rights. The problem here was not that

these were bad answers, but that it was not clear how community could function in

ways beyond protesting and implementing the leases. Moreover, it was not clear that

residents wanted to continue to work communally.

Activists like Ko observed that once material improvements and lease

agreements were signed, residents urgency to organize decreased. Often residents

stopped participating altogether. This, both the NGO organizers and community leaders

felt made the community vulnerable to both the ongoing strains of poverty and renewed

threats from powerful organizations like the State Railway of Thailand. For NGO

activists working with a broadened rubric of personal development, the achievements of

rights and aesthetic home improvements were seen as short-term, impermanent, and

illusory forms of development that demanded further mobilization to be secured. I

observed a similar post-lease effect: For many residents, the signing of leases served as

a moment of reprieve in which they felt they could retreat from the constant tasks

related to community organizing. Although NGOs often created new trainings to help

residents think of new problems to solve, many community leaders in the KKSR

highlighted a drop in attendance to network activities after leases were signed.

Nevertheless, residents' efforts to physically manifest development were

everywhere. When CODI loan money was released to communities for upgrade

projects, new zinc roofs, piles of dirt to raise floors and prevent flooding, and new tiles for kitchens and bathrooms, became ubiquitous along the tracks. The sounds of saws and hammers accompanied an increasing number of visits by informal credit agents on their motorcycles, as residents bolstered their initial twenty thousand baht grant with "loan money from outside the system" (*ngun ku nork rabob*). Residents worked hard to improve their homes by taking out loans on the unofficial market to not simply upgrade them incrementally but to radically transform them by tiling the inside, replacing sliding metal security doors with a brick façade, or razing the house completely to build a newer more suitable one.

In addition to these home improvements, residents dedicated time to improving communal spaces, weeding along the tracks, planting gardens, and paving roads. Most communities also requested funds for signs that marked the name of the community, the number of residents, and in some cases the amount of loan money they had received from CODI to improve their spaces. So, even where social justice seemed to have progressed it often was most apparent in aesthetic practices associated with the notions of good citizenship and visions of a good life that circulated broadly through Thai society. A new car, a satellite dish, a concrete house, a tile roof, a national flag, a permanent electric meter, and even a bit of space to grow a community garden became important external ways to show both social and personal transformation. In short, residents used these aesthetics practices to attempt to redistribute the sensible, making themselves visible and intelligible as legitimate citizens.

How best, then, to understand the aesthetics of development? Is the pursuit of consumer aesthetics simply a form of mimesis—the extension of an illusory and

fictional notion of development? James Ferguson points out that claims of modernity

are often read as mere mimesis. He suggests that the claim that "want to become like

you" (2007: 156) is neither mimicry nor an examples of resurgent cultural forms in

western clothing (as in the example he draws from Friedman (1990) of Congolese men

dressing as Europeans to harness the "life force" of the other) but rather are claims of

membership and belonging in the "new world society" (2007: 161). Ferguson's point is

that rather than calling the adoption of the coordinates of sensibility linked with

modernity mimesis, they are better understood as claims to belonging withinin the

existing but exclusionary social order. Expanding on this argument, I suggest that the

expectation that subalterns will necessarily upset or fundamentally transform the

existing coordinates is unrealistic because it is that order from which they have been

excluded. Many of the residents along Khon Kaen's Railway tracks explicitly told me

as much in their criticisms of NGO and CODI projects that cast them as collective

villages with secondary sets of rights from individuals living elsewhere in the city. This

does not mean that they are not critical of the existing order, but rather that they

acknowledge the difficulties and contradictions entailed in producing social change.

I argue, instead, that it is critical to understand the ways in which claims to

belonging manifest themselves within particular coordinates of sensibility. This is not to

say that resistance movements cannot offer critiques that fundamentally challenge those

coordinates, or that alternative projects cannot spring up in poor communities. In fact,

they often *do*. Improvement operates in multiple registers, proposing new hybrid

coordinates for living by balancing hegemonic and counter-hegemonic visions of

progress. However, I want to highlight the way in which the use of existing aesthetic

coordinates often indicates a tension between activists' dreams of a new social order (perhaps defined through a new aesthetics) and subaltern demands for belonging in the present order (and their efforts to demonstrate their belonging by employing the existing coordinates of sensibility). What is at stake in such forms of politics is not the imposition of a new, coherent counter-hegemony, but rather the struggle of subalterns to embody a contradictory politics like other political subjects.

Aesthetic Judgments, Moral Judgments, and the Politics of Being

Suntari, suntariya, suntariyasat are the Thai words that most closely parallel the English term aesthetics, its relation to the senses, and its category as a philosophy (Chua 2012: 30). I never encountered these more academic sounding appraisals of beauty during my fieldwork. Rather, words like *na suai* (beautiful), *na yu* (nice to occupy), *du di* (good looking), *suai ngam* (beautiful), or even *morsom* (appropriate), were ways that my friends expressed aesthetic judgments.

For example, in Zone 3 residents engaged in a debate about whether an oddly shaped lot could be used as a community meeting space. One of the community's leaders, Nung argued that even though the lot's space was sufficient to hold meetings, its triangular shape made it inappropriate (*mai morsom*). I asked him what he meant by this and he told me that the triangular shape wouldn't look right when a building was constructed on it. The objection struck me as strange, but it made sense when put into relationship with his broader aim to have the community appear official. Thus, from his perspective, building a communal space in this irregular fashion extended the community's appearance as something other than a legitimate neighborhood. A

triangular community center did not constitute a strong enough break from the previous arrangement in which meetings were held in temporary spaces—garages, porches, workshops—with plastic chairs and folding tables. This sentiment was echoed in other communities when residents repeatedly requested funds for "official community halls" (*sala chumchon*) and community signs (*bai chumchon*), which they felt were essential to producing official looking communities. Planners and architects at CODI repeatedly tried to dissuade residents from building these projects by denying their requests, admonishing them for not knowing "enough," and by referring to them as "show" (often using the English word here) projects.

On their surface, aesthetic words can assess the qualities of sensation related to a space, house, or object. However, as the above example shows such words are also signals of what art historian Yuriko Saito calls, "moral-aesthetic judgments" which link an item's or space's sensuous quality to its moral quality as positive or negative (2007: 208-213). Of course, some words seem to carry a heavier moral weight than others— appropriate (*morsom*) is more related to morality than sensation, while beautiful (*suai ngam*) evokes sense more than morality. Yet, Saito demonstrates how *both* are intimately related. She points out that assessments of a person's appearance, environmental eyesores, design for special needs, among others, are good examples of the way morality and aesthetic judgments are linked and how morality enacts itself both through design and aesthetic appearance. Thus, to judge a house as either beautiful and nice to occupy, or a community center as necessary and its design as appropriate, is to tie together aesthetic and moral experiences.

I argue that the (re)arrangement of things, symbols, materials, language, and bodies always entails a kind of political/moral process that grows out of already existing coordinates of sensibility. This approach both draws from Rancière and pushes his framework further, by considering the way that everyday acts of arranging are politically and morally charged, embedded in, and challenging, the existing networks of sensibility. In this way, practices of aesthetics like rearranging space, choosing home improvement materials, idealizing visions of home, community, and self, are both political assertions and a means of morally enacting a particular way of being in the world. In this sense, aesthetics are political, but they are more than that. They are not only a means of asserting claims of citizenship but also modes of being. They are political and ethical practices.

My interlocutors' efforts to remake their communities were struggles to *show* themselves as legitimate citizens and responsible stewards of their spaces and lives amidst at the edges of belonging. Yet, they were not just simple assertions of belonging rooted in one order or another. Rather, they referenced complex imbrications of aspirations for belonging in Thailand's broader political order, participating in its bustling capitalist marketplace as full consumers, and (sometimes contradictorily) perhaps restraining their desires enough to live sufficiently as well.

In fact, many sought to incorporate sufficiency aesthetics into their lives even as the expanding marketplace and its ethos of aspiration through consumption worked directly against this project. The aesthetic production of the home was not simply a means of challenging the social field but of choosing the parts to challenge and the parts to participate in. The choices of materials made by residents highlight how the

"distribution of the sensible" is contested and contradictory, marked by ongoing

struggles in which different types of citizens work to locate each other in various fields

of political, economic, and moral action.

Moreover (and perhaps more importantly to my friends along the tracks) the

house is also a site in which people make an attempt to manifest some notion of a good

life. This claim to the good life through spatial transformation underscores the moral

quality of questions about development. These questions, though phrased in a language

of policy and politics, also rest on an even more complex and slippery moral question of

what defines a "good life" and where and how one might be lived. Here the tension

surrounding the relationship between aesthetics and development reemerges with

deeper and more problematic stakes. Architect Alain de Botton has written specifically

about the moral quality of the house, pointing out that even though the house "may lack

solutions to a great many of its occupants ills, its rooms nevertheless give evidence of a

happiness to which architecture has made its distinctive contribution" (2006: 11).[67] I

think it is important to follow de Botton here and consider the moral valences of

architecture and aesthetics as a means through which occupants to attain to both a good

life and a political life simultaneously.

Doing so, marks homes as unique structures that, simultaneously, reflect the

occupants' conceptions of moral and political modes of being and belonging. Indeed,

as I will discuss at the end of this chapter, such moral question are essential to holding

political, material, and personal development in tension with one another. Indeed, if the

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[67] The house's contribution is 'suspect' (to use de Botton's words) in the same way that the appearance of development is suspect—they both speak to the appearance of happiness without necessarily indexing its substance.

house gives evidence of a striving towards happiness of a sort, then it is a critical site to consider the ways in which political, economic, and moral claims intersect in aesthetic forms evoking answers to questions of belonging and being. The answer to such moral questions of the "good life" is indeterminate, yet the tension between an aspiration for a better life (variably indexed in material forms) and moderation of one's desires for a sufficient one, is central to contemporary disagreements over *both* politics and development in Thailand. I will return to this opposition throughout this chapter to probe the relationship between being, belonging, and improvement.

The Politics of the Aesthetic in Thailand

As I demonstrated in Chapter 2, Siamese and Thai state-makers have always paid close attention to the aesthetics of citizenship. In that chapter, I described how a range of policies proposed new aesthetics (theater, fashion, architecture, sartorial regulations) as means to design a new citizenry (Thongchai 2000a, b; Jackson 2004; Chua 2012). A brief review of this "regime of images," to use Peter Jackson's term, helps to give a sense of the "distribution of sensible" and the importance of appearances in contemporary Thailand.

From the beginning of the modern period, aesthetics were a crucial domain of political production and contestation in Siam. Peleggi's study (2002) of the refashioning of the Siamese monarchy demonstrates how the modernizing monarchs from Chulalongkorn onward transformed themselves in the image of modern, bourgeois European rulers via new forms of self-representation. For example, they adopted European military dress uniforms and staged constructed *mise-en-scène* for photographs

representing the Thai monarchs through their European tastes—in order to assert their

commensurability with European leaders in the face of colonial encroachment.

Peter Jackson (2004) builds on this point, arguing that after 1932—the fall of the

absolute monarchy—aesthetics continued to be a central domain through which the

Thai state asserted its legitimacy. Under Phibun Songkhram, "the ethos and aesthetics

of civilized respectability were transformed from a strategy to preserve the Siamese

monarchy and national autonomy into the legitimating ideology of the constitutional

regime" (2004: 243). In particular, he points to Phibun's "Cultural Mandates"

(*ratthananiyom*), which sought to "westernize the Thai public sphere." The Cultural

Mandates were directed internally, seeking to institutionalize "the aesthetics of civilized

respectability into a minutely detailed and intensely policed code of behavior" (*ibid*).

The Cultural Mandates were rooted in the same tension that animated the Siamese

monarchy's makeover—the seemingly contradictory concern to redefine "western"

tastes and practices as indigenous.[68]

Architecture was important to this period's aesthetic production of citizenship as

well. Chua argues that, "By manipulating aesthetics, Thai architects and patrons sought

to determine not only what could be seen, but experienced, by a national public through

physically and discursively ordering space and social relations, categorizing

architectural forms and the bodies they encountered, and manipulating events" (2012:

25).[69] Chua's study documents the ways in which Thai state-makers attended to the task

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[68] Jackson argues that a link between these seemingly disparate "regimes of images" was the reaffirmation of the cultural domains of public and private life (2004: 243).

[69] This was not unique to Thailand but is a common part of the architectural fantasy of remaking society through the built form of city and structure that binds colonial, post-colonial, and non-colonized countries alike (c.f. Holston 1989; Wright 1991).

of creating a nation-state by redesigning the urban space of Bangkok. He argues that the remaking of Bangkok's architectural forms—theaters, boulevards, temples, stadiums—was part of a program of "aesthetic nationalism" in which "the architect became the handmaiden of an official form of nationalism that sought to preserve the role of the monarchy, while trying to assert its relevance in a modern world" (2012: 39).

In a contemporary setting, Mary Beth Mills (2001) highlights the role of "up-to-dateness" or *khwampenthansamai* as an aesthetic value that female urban migrants aspire to through their consumption practices. Being up-to-date, Mills points out, always exists in tension with tradition (*praphaeni*) and culture (*watthanatham*). For female urban migrants, their labor and lifestyle choices evoke anxieties around the drift towards capitalism and away from tradition. Yet, as she shows, desire to be up-to-date remains important and becomes enacted through commodities, life-style choices, ways of spending leisure time, tastes, and rearrangements of domestic space. Being "up-to-date" is an ideal enacted through the arrangements of materials, symbols, and things. These arrangements not only evoke the tension between the modern and the traditional, but as Mills points out, also changing patterns of labor, gender relations (especially the rapid increase of female rural-to-urban migration), and class dynamics.[70]

Similarly, Sophorntavy's (2009) study of the Bangkok middle-class, highlights the way consumption choices and urban spaces are marked by anxieties over status, frequently assessed through aesthetic criteria as either high-society (*hi-so*) or low-society (*lo-so*). The ambiguities of appearances and "reality" mark these domains as

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[70] Alternately, Suzanne Brenner argues that aesthetics can be just as important for holding the past in place. Aesthetic forms like photographs presenting a produced notion of the authentic. She problematizes these forms as "appearances" of authenticity, which give the outward appearance of "truth" even as they are "just as likely to mask it" (1998:210).

evocative of precisely the tensions associated with aesthetic modes of belonging that I described above.

> Savvy marketers, who decades ago produced the first commercial to feature a *hi-so*, have created a highly specific category of individuals and a set of tastes, lifestyles and images, which now pervades the media and which has become a *bona fide* cultural phenomenon. This has in turn created a sharp and discernible distinction between those who are *hi-so*, those who are trying to be *hi-so*, and those who will never be *hi-so* adding to the multitude of other ways in which Thai society is stratified. (Sophorntavy 2009: 202)

So, as Sophorntavy demonstrates, what constitutes *hi-so* and *lo-so* is a shifting and mobile regime of taste and distinction, defined through temporally limited spaces, fashions, aesthetics, and activities in Bangkok. The aesthetics of *hi-so* is a "taste regime," to use Bourdieu's term, that shifts and morphs as new trends emerge and older regimes are adopted by lower classes. As Bourdieu points out, aesthetic tastes provide one way in which classes divide and unite (1984: 56). Sophorntavy's argument demonstrates that aesthetics not only form a means for classes to divide and unite, but they also form a shifting ground upon which citizens in Bangkok mark themselves as particular kinds of members in relation to one another.

Rosalind Morris argues that paralleling these transformations in the coordinates of aesthetic belonging is an increase in the "concern to perform order through the cultivation of appearances" (2000: 181). She ties this to the proliferation of media technologies. Peter Jackson argues that Morris' observations speak to both the persistent importance of appearances in Thailand *and* more importantly (from his perspective), to the growth of mass-market technologies of image production (2004: 227-229). All of this, Jackson points out, results in a new intensity surrounding the

field of appearances and the deepened power of "the regime of images," which he suggests has strengthened itself based upon preexisting Buddhist norms (notions of "face", Buddhist cosmology, and the theatrics of power), new forms of technology, and the Siamese/Thai modernizing project (2004: 227-229).

From an ethnographic perspective, the importance of images presented by Morris and Jackson, is not fully formed, but rather one rife with tensions. On the ground, there is an awareness of the disjuncture between these images and the things they purport to represent. Nevertheless, these studies demonstrate both the coordinates of sensibility —tensions between *hi-so* and *lo-so*, up-to-date and traditional, public and private face, civilized and backwards—and a heightened awareness of aesthetic coordinates in contemporary Thailand.[71]

In this sense, a house *is* more than a house, as my friend at CODI would say. Nor is it simply a "machine for living," as Corbusier argued. Rather, the house is a potent site of both civic pedagogy and a space from which to assert claims of proper belonging. Through Baan Mankong, the architecturally driven fantasy of redesigning the nation has shifted from the macro-territorial concerns of the city and nation writ large—population, boulevard, theater, stadium—to the micro-concerns of the city and nation writ small—citizen and house. The Baan Mankong project's emphasis on

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[71] Two additional studies, one sponsored by USAID (1964) and another by Feigenblatt (2010) also address aesthetics in Thailand. The former was a US government sponsored study to determine the aesthetic preferences of northeastern Thais in an aim of producing informational material for the US military to distribute. The study is notable not for any of its conclusions, but for the difficulty noted by the research team in getting the participants to cooperate. The latter study, though flawed, is an effort to consider the effect of "popular aesthetics" and hierarchies of beauty. It argues that global images and lightened skin are now preferential and that stereotypically rural features are derided. This resonates with my experiences of popular images and practices of beauty, but deeper ethnographic attention needs to be paid to regional regimes of beauty, which, in my experience, are more complex.

community and sufficiency can also be seen in its aesthetic grammar, while highlighting the persistent importance of architecture and appearance in Thailand.

This shift also emphasizes the changing configurations of aesthetic coordinates that residents must navigate as they use their home to mark themselves as visible subjects in multiple projects of belonging. In some cases, these choices have similar effects to James Holston's observation of "autoconstruction" in working-class Brazil, "reinforcing hegemonies of modern industrial society" (1991:447). In other cases, however, aesthetics can be used to subvert those orders. In the homes along the tracks what links these aesthetic choices is not necessarily a stance for or against particular modes of development, but rather the way aesthetic practices are employed by residents to manage contradictory visions of belonging.

Beyond the reassertion or the subversion of any particular order, the residents I encountered desired a home that spoke to multiple, contradictory, and seemingly incoherent stances towards belonging. Although planners and NGOs might have wished that residents adopted an aesthetic milieu that reflects notions of collectivity, sufficiency, post-capitalism, and mutual assistance, they rarely did. Rather, residents' preference for particular materials and objects were not efforts at producing a coherent programmatic for belonging—that is a neatly reproduced a citizen design—but rather were material, aesthetic, and moral efforts at participating in multiple versions of belonging at the same time. In this way, community gardens—markers of sufficiency— took on equal importance as the new trucks, concrete blocks and bright red satellite dishes. I argue that the way residents tethered together of these contradictory aesthetic arrangements of things and spaces enacted a vision of themselves as full members

engaging in social justice, community, sustainability, capitalist modernity, and sufficiency all at once.

Thai Houses, Traditional and Otherwise

In many ways, debates surrounding domestic architecture closely resemble the kinds of debates surrounding citizenship that I have described throughout this book. Conflicts over modernity, capitalism, sufficiency, and democracy are all evident in aesthetic productions of notions of house and home. This is of course not much different from other parts of the world. In fact, anthropologists from China (Zhang 2009) to Chile (Murphy *forthcoming*) to Brazil (Holston 1991; Caldeira 2000) to West Papua (Stasch 2011) to Nicaragua (Nading 2012) have pointed out how domestic architecture expresses idealized modes of being and belonging for both states and homeowners. Each of these cases suggest that the aesthetic form of the house links it to notions of proper citizenship (Murphy), modernity (Holston), hygiene and public health (Nading), and social belonging (Stasch), marking the resident of the house as a particular type of person.

Edward Murphy, for example, has pointed to the close relationship between the politics of property and the "politics of propriety," which undergirded Chilean programs of urban renewal. These programs operated under three assumptions: "First, the assumption remained that citizens who behaved in ways considered proper should live in legally sanctioned properties. Second, residents should inhabit distinctive places appropriate to their social position and financial situation. Finally, the city should evolve in an orderly, efficient, and vibrant manner" (*forthcoming*). As Murphy's

analysis demonstrates, property and propriety link the house and the citizen to the state through its production of an orderly aesthetic of urban modernity

Holston points out that in working-class Brazilian communities, "autoconstruction," the construction and improvement of one's own home, "engenders political actions about residence and aesthetic judgments about houses through which the working classes develop new kinds of social agencies and subjective capacities that not only subvert historically ascribed incapacities but paradoxically actualize the new hegemonies of modern industrial society" (1991: 447). In both the Chilean case and the Brazilian case, the production of the house and the forms it takes are central to the production of citizenship as both a form of policing and a ground for politics, maintaining and challenging the social order.

The houses along the tracks sit at the center of similar aesthetic politics. In Khon Kaen's fast growing urban environment, residents on the tracks build and rebuild their homes in a milieu in which gated communities advertise the city's "most modern living." When residents and I traveled to Bangkok to negotiate with CODI or the SRT we encountered bright yellow advertisements announcing sleek condo projects with the word *itsara*—independence—marking these projects as the perfect home for urban dwellers experiencing new freedoms arising from late capitalism. Throughout Thailand, so-called "traditional Thai houses," or *ban thai,* are now valuable commodities, built as expressions of both power and authenticity. On TV, houses are featured in advertisements promoting the Sufficiency Economy by showing homes attached to

integrated farms as more stable and less likely to lead to debt, crop failure, foreclosure, family decay, and urban migration.[72]

Navigating this aesthetic labyrinth requires managing both the moral expectations for being among the deserving poor and the political pressure of asserting oneself as a fully formed individual in a consumer capitalist context. Doing so returns residents to the contradictory matrix of the "villager" and the contradictory demands of that subject position that I have described throughout this book. As I show in this section, the aesthetic production of the home has become a prime site for the management of these pressures.

What constitutes a "traditional" Thai house, like everything modified by the word "Thai," is both regionally complex and internally contested. As Thailand has urbanized, the form of the house has been at the center of an important, if low-volume, disagreement between promoters of traditional forms and those who seek homes that reflect contemporary tastes, materials, aesthetics, and spatial arrangements. Although there are some specific regional differences in what constitutes a "traditional Thai house" (*ban thai/ruan thai*) these regional differences have largely been subsumed by an archetypal image of a hardwood home built on raised posts. The basic components of the so-called "Thai house" are: use of local materials, skeleton frame construction, a

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[72] In a clever advertisement for a now defunct website called www.porpianglife.com, an advertisement I call "The story of Mr. Daeng and Mr. Khiaw" portrays the divergent life courses of two farmers—one who grows a monocrop of sugar cane (Mr. Daeng) and one who grows an integrated farm (Mr. Khiaw). The advertisement describes what happens to both farmers and their families when the price of sugar cane drops. Mr. Daeng loses his farm and his family has to move to the city while Mr. Kiaw who practices sufficiency agriculture has enough to eat and can sell another product for better prices ("The Story of Nai Daeng and Nai Khiaw" http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SbrDS1YZLZM).

light external wall skin, terraces and verandas, and elevated dwellings (Askew 2003: 261).

Across the regions, there are distinct construction styles based on whether or not a home is constructed out of permanent or temporary materials (hardwood or bamboo), as well. The materials of the home speak to the status of the occupants—the more permanent the materials, the higher status the home (*ibid*). Although hardwood homes have become synonymous with traditional *ban thai*, this obscures another form of traditional home construction that evolves with the owners' lifecycle—moving from temporary materials towards permanent. Hardwood homes often signify a person's higher economic and social status. Only recently has there been a renewed interest in these temporary housing styles (*ibid)*.

The central Thai house, which Askew argues has come to stand in for all traditional Thai houses, is called the *ruan na chua*. It has distinct features like a steeply gabled roof, which ends in decorative horns. Additionally the house is marked by paneled exterior walls and elevated floors. Other regional variations in housing exist, in the north, for example, houses of "distinguished citizens," *ruan ka lae*, are much larger than surrounding houses, contain more than four rooms and are clustered in compounds (Ruathai et al. 2002: 133; Askew 2003: 265). Southern homes have shallower pitched roofs and are built on posts sunk into stone or concrete because of the region's soil. These distinctions are also important: Homes with posts sunk into concrete or stone mark permanent claims to land.

"Traditional" domestic architecture in the Northeast is tied to the particularities of the evolving extended family structures common to the region. As Ruethai et. al.

point out, housing in the Northeast reflected the "family's life cycle, with its oscillations between stem and nuclear family" (2002: 165). Traditional housing in the northeast resembles a compound with a large house, *ruen yai,* or a *ruen yai mi khong,* where parents, children, and one son in-law all reside, until the daughter and son in-law split and form their own nuclear family. The compound allows members of the new family time to gather material for the eventual construction of their own home. These compounds often have a number of other buildings, typically built in a more temporary style—often with woven walls and a central post sunk into the ground to support the roof. These temporary structures are used for relaxing, dining, and, sometimes, as the homes of new families before they begin construction on their own home. In this way, lifecycles are essential to the domestic aesthetic in the Northeast. Shifts in the family's structure become reflected in changing construction materials and spatial arrangement of structures.

Mark Askew (2003) argues that this style of housing emerged in the rough settlement conditions found by migrants moving across the Mekong River into the harsh climates of the Isan plateau. He says, "These settler groups were the peasant 'fragments' of more complex social orders which had developed around the capitals of the old Lao kingdoms of upper and central Laos…As such, these Lao settler housing designs were basic and generally unsophisticated. They are built on stilts and constructed from local materials" (2003: 270). Regional politics have no doubt contributed to the perception that these temporary housing styles are not "traditional," thus strengthening the imaginary of the hardwood, permanent central Thai house as the hegemonic form. The effect of this positioning is to make permanent settlement (and its

architectural reflections) the hegemonic norm for what is considered appropriate tradition.

Although the post and beam construction is not unique among Isan houses or even in Southeast Asia region-wide (See Dumarçay 1987), the ritual system associated with house construction is important. Posts are planted in a particular order, on auspicious days. The most important post is the first post or *sao aek.* The lowering of the *sao aek* is a milestone in the life of both the house and the owner. Anthropologist Rosalind Morris argues that the sacred geography of the house also mimics the socio-spatial cosmology of the mandala, which gave order to the Siamese monarchy's territorial authority (2000:119) and (as I argued in Chapter 3) later became inscribed into territory through the raillines. The house's various ritual posts—the women's post and the auspicious post (also the first post)—provide horizontal and vertical coordinates for the lives of the dwellers.

In the house-building examples I saw along the tracks, when the *sao aek* is lowered into the ground, a local elder chants and wraps the post in auspicious cloth and attaches to it various offerings including banana leaves, a miniature fish trap, and a small Thai flag (Figure 7.4). These offerings are efforts to ensure security (*khwam mankhong*) for the residents of the home by pleasing the spirits that previously occupied the space and asking them to vacate it to allow the residents to pollute it with their daily activities. According to Bunjan, an elder from T1 who performed the ceremony, the goal of the ritual is both to ask for prosperity and to clear the land of the spirits that previously occupied the space. The symbols are all directed towards generating prosperity for the home's residents. The goal of clearing the house of the spirits is so

that the home's occupant are free to pollute it with, as Bunjan told me, their bodily

waste (urine, mucus, feces), food refuse, animal waste, and dirty water. Asking the

spirits to leave the area ensures that they will not have to live in this pollution and won't

bother the people living in the house due to their discomfort.   After the purification

ritual's chanting, the elder makes an offering to the spirits for sustenance, wealth,

prosperity, good health, good luck, and the strength of the family, which Bunjan said

are important for family security—*khwam mankhong*.

Bunjan told me that without this ceremony, "a house is not a real house (*ban

maichai ban thae*). People can live there but they won't feel complete and they will

suffer *(khon yu dai taerusek mai sombun khoa aja mi khwam thuk*."   The *sao aek*

ceremony and its attention to the bodily dimensions reflect the way the aesthetics and

structure of the home are imbued with a moral dimension as well as a political one. By

casting the post ceremony in the language of "security" or *khwam mankong*, Bunjan's

description of the *sao aek,* reveals an alternative set of coordinates towards security

from those associated with the *Baan Mankong* project, which root security in new

homes and participation.

A second notable feature of some vernacular home designs in Thailand is the

ranaeng (Figure 7.5). The *ranaeng* is a ventilated window used to encourage a cross

breeze while minimizing the amount of solar heating entering the home. Although

these vents are commonly seen on cooking structures in rural areas, they are not part of

all home designs. Yet, in home surveys at various Baan Mankong projects, residents

Figure 7.4: *Sao Aek* ceremony in T1, Khon Kaen Railway Tracks. Source: N/A

highlighted them in their home designs as nods to this kind of traditional wisdom. *Ranaeng* have also become increasingly evident in many contemporary fusions of modern and traditional architectural styles. They are now ubiquitous parts of certain Thai modernist buildings, which attempt to combine modernist design with an aesthetic drawn from local wisdom and sufficiency. However, in most cases the modernist employment of the *ranaeng* are purely for appearances, serving to break up blank space with their evenly spaced horizontal or vertical battens, rather than providing any meaningful ventilation (Figure 7.6).

"Sufficiency aesthetics" and the continued importance of notions of "Thai authenticity" have allowed the *ban thai* to remain part of an aesthetic ideal. Yet, as Askew points out, finding a traditional home in Thailand is extremely difficult and those that do exist are expensive reproductions. "In contemporary Thailand, the *ban Thai*, has become commodified as an artifact and symbol representing a leisured tropical lifestyle. Owning a *Ban Thai* is the iconic signature of an elite whose members enjoy lifestyles and material aspirations that are cosmopolitan and global in character, but who also seek to express this modernity in a distinctively 'Thai Style'" (2003: 279). Tradition is now one possible version of luxury among many.

Tradition however, is not the only form of luxury. Throughout the countryside and in cities, concrete block-houses, with enclosed ground floors, granite or marble tiles, tile roofs, and satellite dishes, all demarcate a second aesthetic of politics tied to images of convenience, climate control, and modernity. Indeed, the *Mitthrapap* highway leading to downtown Khon Kaen is crowded with home improvement stores

advertising stone and marble tile, new forms of weather resistant siding, and sleek modernist furnishings. Khon Kaen city is dotted with new housing developments (*ban jat san*) that advertise themselves with photos of homes with tinted windows, manicured landscaping, tiled roofs, and gated entrances. Although some nod to vernacular forms, these homes represent the possibility of life outside of a village, marked by individual ownership, a nuclear family, and modern amenities.

These housing forms loom just as large—if not larger—than the traditional *ban thai* on Khon Kaen's landscape. Billboards at nearly every major intersection in the city advertise new housing developments with slogans like, "Your dream of a home in a nice society that is nice to occupy. You can find happiness like this in every project by Land and House." The slogan speaks to both the possibility of a better society and a better, happier life achieved through a new home. And, while slogans like these do not necessarily exert the same force as, say the NGOs and CODI officials, they speak in a softer, but more omnipresent register that maps the road to the good life through the structure of the house.[73]

Although they seem to be bifurcated, both the traditional and the modern stand as aesthetic possibilities, each marked by their own kinds of membership. Even where such aesthetics merge, as in the case of the growing popularity of the "Sufficiency Aesthetic," such spaces stand as ideals for individuals living outside the boundaries of "community" and "village." For buyers seeking something "authentic" the *ban Thai* offers the possibility of a kind of modified return to the past without the hassles of

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[73] *Fan yak mi"ban"nai sangkhom di di thi na yu. phop…khwamsuk chen ni dai thi land and hous tuk khrongkan.*

Figure 7.5: Vernacular *Ranaeng,* Khlong Bang Bua, Bangkok. Source: N/A

Figure 7.6: Modernist *Ranaeng*, Khon Kaen City. Note the air conditioner cover (upper

right). Source: N/A

village life. Similarly, for residents seeking modernity, gated communities offer a return on that same promise, offering a space away from the noise and density of the city. In either case, modern homes and traditional homes are built for individual owners, constructed of durable materials, and are set apart from their neighbors. Each, in its own way, marks the aesthetic ideal for proper citizens (appropriate middle and upper class urbanites). However, as I show in the next section, residents did not always want to simply reproduce such spaces.

Though residents tended to want materials that were secure, durable, and modern, while architects preferred more experimental designs that blended traditional materials and aesthetic arrangements, these fields never perfectly lined up. Residents did strive for community—even though it was difficult and laden with disagreement— and sufficiency of some sort. These engagements were attempts to participate as legitimate citizens by building different lives from the ones they saw middle-class citizens living and to participate in a new project of moral being that has become common across the country. Such activities were occasionally outright critiques of emerging orders of homes like the housing developments around the city. At the same time, residents sought durable home materials that spoke directly in the register of middle-class stability and aesthetics. As such, residents along the tracks sought to express belonging through multiple aesthetic registers. In the next section, I will explore these decisions and their inversions, contradictions, and bifurcations more closely.

The (pragmatic) limits of tradition

More than once I heard architects from CODI complain that one problem with community residents' designs was that the first thing they wanted to do was to enclose their open ground-floor homes with concrete blocks, making them both aesthetically homogenous and, worse, hot. In my experience, this observation of residents' preferences was true. One of the first upgrades residents made, after replacing leaky roofs and raising floors to prevent flooding, was to enclose their first floors in concrete.

CODI Architects like my friend Khit complained that residents did not want to experiment because they wanted to use strong durable materials and make their homes appear less temporary and also that they wanted homes that looked up-to-date. Although CODI architects had created mock-ups of some alternative home designs—on view in the CODI offices—more conventional designs were almost uniformly implemented in the agency's projects. Such conventional styles of home—largely made of concrete—were used due to pragmatic, financial constraints and, more importantly, because they reflected the desires of the homeowners. Khit speculated that these choices were not dictated by residents but by children returning home from Bangkok who told their parents that an appropriate house has to look a certain way. He pointed out that by enclosing their first floors, these homes had rejected "local wisdom" (*phumpanya*), making the house both unattractive and uncomfortable.

The aesthetics of tradition were often favored by CODI architects. This was evident during a community tour with a group of international NGOs and academics organized by the Asian Coalition for Housing Rights (ACHR). As we walked through one of Khon Kaen's railway communities—the Unity and Development community

located on the northern edge of the city—CODI's first president, a longtime housing activist, one of the chief intellectual architects behind the Baan Mankong policy, and a current board member at ACHR showed our group various examples of what communities along the tracks had done with their twenty thousand baht upgrade grant.

Throughout the tour, she struggled to find examples of complete homes that had been upgraded with the loan money alone (without taking out loans on the unofficial market). This was difficult because most of the residents had taken out extra money from the unofficial credit markets in order to complete their projects in ways that they saw as appropriate. It was also difficult because most of the homes lacked any notable architectural style. The vast majority of homes simply had replaced their roofs and added concrete blocks. Other common improvements were new tiles floors and redone bathrooms, both considered unnecessary by CODI's standards. Although CODI architects tried to get residents to improve their homes a little at a time, most residents did as much as they could to maximize their grant money.[74]

At one point on our community tour, we came across a two-story wooden home with the bottom open to the outside. It was one of the few homes in the community that reflected that endemic "Thai style." Our tour guide was quick call out to its owner, "Grandmother, please don't demolish that house! Its very beautiful. Don't demolish that one (*baan ni mai tong ruu na. suangam naka! mai ru na!*)." Compared to the upgraded homes made of bricks and tin, the wood house with its posts and beams was beautiful to her eyes. It didn't look as solid as the concrete house, but, to my eye as well, it certainly seemed more appealing to live in given its shady and breeze-friendly design. On the

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[74] At the time of my research this was roughly equivalent to USD $600 (33 baht/US dollar).

other hand, it was unclear what the resident would have liked to live in. She never said. She merely nodded and waved at us. This particular community had a problem with theft, so the open ground plan was much more vulnerable than the enclosed one— something a resident of another community noted to me when I asked her why her family chose to enclose the first floor of their two-storey home.

CODI's architects recognized that the structure of the house provided an important, if not essential, ground for transforming the lives of its residents. They, thus, conceptualized communities as architectural laboratories, seeking to blend "traditional" designs—like the raised houses and *ranaeng*—with new building practices, like the use of recycled wood and even earthen homes. Khit frequently bemoaned how residents rejected these ideas in favor of more durable looking concrete structures. On several occasions, I accompanied Khit as he attempted to research the costs of some of these alternative materials. While earthen home building was affordable it was never attempted during my fieldwork.

On another occasion we researched prices for recycled wood, which was far too expensive for most residents. Khit reckoned that people rejected earthen homes because they did not want to live in a house made of dirt, even though according to him, it was practical, cheap, and naturally cooler than concrete and zinc. Other durable recycled materials proved harder to come by and, given that many of the homes along the tracks were already constructed in part or whole from found objects, second-hand materials were seen by residents as undesirable. CODI architects did create some innovative models, including some that blended vernacular architectural features like raised posts or passive cooling vents in roofs. Yet, in the communities I surveyed there was a

Figure 7.7: CODI home design. Note vernacular features like, passive cooling vents in

the roof and the traditional raised post construction. Source: N/A

Figure 7.8: Concrete and wood home with a passive cooling system. Chumpae City
Source: N/A

preponderance of houses constructed out of concrete block. This reflected both a deliberate aesthetic choice by residents, as well as a range of pragmatic decisions rooted in economic scarcity (Figure 7.7 and 7.8).

Government architects and planners weren't the only people who held up "traditional designs" as ideals. NGO activists, many of whom had been involved in rural struggles for autonomy during the previous decades, saw rural life as an aesthetic ideal as well. This was reflected in a number of taste preferences—they tended to dress in modes that recalled the rural resistance with green army jackets and traditional plaid sarongs (among male activists). They had a preference for the Northeast's glutinous rice over white rice, and they often loved the region's folk music.

Bunma owns a restaurant along the tracks in the Rail's Edge community. One day, he told me a story about how one NGO activist came to his restaurant and said he should get rid of the tables and allow people to eat on the floor like they do in the countryside (*chonabot*). Bunma's restaurant is outfitted with plastic chairs and tables and serves a variety of food—mainly central Thai dishes—like many of the other restaurants in the area that cater to students and professionals looking for beer and a cheap meal. Bunma, recalling some annoyance at the suggestion, reminded the NGO that his was a "city restaurant" (*ranaharn muang*). He told the activists that if they wanted to eat in a more rural way, they could move to a nearby community that had a more natural ambiance (*banyakat thammachat*).

Even though many activists and architects shared a preference for the aesthetics of "tradition," there was no consensus on what constituted tradition. For example, most of the low-cost housing designs created by CODI architects kept costs down by

removing the *sao aek* from the house plan. Rather than having the central pole dug deep into the earth, the homes were designed simply and cheaply with posts at each corner. Residents preferred the *sao aek,* both because of its spiritual significance and their simply stated preference that it made the home look stronger. Khit and the other architects had to constantly explain that home designs that contained the *sao aek* cost significantly more. On more than one occasion, I went to meetings for new community construction projects where discussions of the *sao aek* dominated much of the meeting. Although this issue was less important in onsite upgrade projects where homeowners were often simply improving upon preexisting structures (like those along the tracks), it was important in new community construction where residents had to choose between house designs.

CODI did try to incorporate the *sao aek* ceremony into new construction projects. On more than one occasion they performed the ceremony for an entire community as a public event. In one case, CODI performed the ceremony before the residents had managed to save enough money to lease the land, before the community plan was complete, and long before construction could begin. The irony of this did not escape attendees of the ceremony.

For many residents, participation in Baan Mankong enabled a different kind of traditional aesthetic transformation—from temporary housing materials to more permanent. Although this transition was not one that anyone cast within the ideology of the "traditional" (*phrapaenithai*), it is one reflected in the regional hierarchy of housing aesthetics and the political and ethical aspirations of the residents.

Envisioning Independence

In late 2009, I was sitting with my friend Nung in his backyard enjoying the cooling night air of the earliest breaths of Khon Kaen's so-called cold season. He had recently demolished the back five meters of his house. Doing so brought his house into full compliance with the Railway's twenty meter, "no-build" zone, certifying his and his community's commitment to upholding the terms of their new lease. Having completed a new back wall for his house, we now sat on a table in the middle of a concrete slab that had previously been his kitchen, eating spicy soup and drinking beer. There were still a few traces of the original structure, though. The palimpsest of the concrete slab and a half-demolished post marked the structure's furthest reaches in his days as a "trespasser." The house had shrunk but was now legal along with the homes of the rest of his neighbors in *Patthana Sithi* Zone 3. Nung's occupation of the home and land had been legitimized through both the lease agreements and these physical transformations.

Our discussion that evening touched on many topics, calling on a number of aesthetic forms during its course: During the discussion he showed me his color-coded ledger books for all of the community's collective accounts—savings, rent, finance, and community work. Each book, its neatly arranged columns of numbers testified to the bureaucratic aesthetics of the community that I described in chapter 5. He told me that he hoped these books would serve as an example and a learning tool for other communities. Nung shared his plans to upgrade his home as well. He wanted to smooth out the concrete in the backyard and get rid of the ruins of the former house. He hoped to plant some trees to offer shade from the midday heat and privacy from the train that raced by the house every hour—a natural fence (*rua thammachat*) would replace the

tangle of overgrown weeds that provided privacy before he and his neighbors uprooted them to show the Railway their progress as a community and their commitment to "taking care of the land" (*kandulae phunthi lae thidin*).

As our night wound down, he told me about all the things he had learned from the NGO activists he had worked with. He told me about how he learned to organize people. He told me that after working with the activists, he felt like a leader and when he spoke now his neighbors listened. He told me how he was indebted to the activists like P'Rak, an important organizer for the Four Region's network from Bangkok, and local leaders like Paw Raengkai who taught him to believe in himself.

He also told me about his desire to become autonomous from the network he had worked so actively in for the past three years. His dream of becoming *isara* (independent) had a physical manifestation. "I think I could be satisfied (*porjai*) with about five million baht. Just that much and I wouldn't need any more. I would buy a piece of land maybe six or seven rai outside of town and I would make a little resort, I'd grow vegetables and fruit and then have a fishpond and raise chickens. I'd just like to have enough (*por*) to take care of my wife and we could eat chicken or go catch fish whenever we needed food. I think that would be enough for me."[75]

This dream tied together capitalist fantasies of income security (only 5 million baht) with a vision of personal independence manifest in "sufficiency aesthetics." The dream was an arrangement of things that, through the language of sufficiency, integrated the living space with small-scale production. In doing so, the dream imaged a

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[75] At the time of my fieldwork, five million baht was equal to roughly USD $150,000. 7 rai of land is approximately 3 acres (1 rai = .39 acres).

simultaneous withdrawal from poverty, debt, and contentious local politics. Nung's fantasy envisioned an arrangement of the sensible—a rural idyll—as his escape route from bureaucratic procedures, community negotiation, and the intense disagreements endemic to his and his family's life along the tracks.

Idealized Community, Idealized Home

Navigating the pressure to improve housing durability within a range of socially and politically charged aesthetic modes, while still controlling costs, limited residents' ability to produce their ideal homes. Nevertheless, they still had some opportunities to discuss what they hoped to achieve at various workshops. One such workshop occurred in July of 2009, there, NGO activists and representatives from the Four Region's Slum network came to Khon Kaen to conduct a workshop/training for the leaders from the Khon Kaen Slum Revival network communities. These kinds of leadership trainings (*kanfeukoprom phunam*) were common parts of both CODI and NGO-run activities. In general, they focused on developing skills to help residents facilitate community meetings, survey their neighbors, discuss local problems, and collectively create solutions to them. Workshops focused on cultivating the appropriate techniques of the self to help residents govern their communities and negotiate with their neighbors.

This particular workshop was quite typical of the other NGO-led activities I attended during my fieldwork in its attention to developing these skills and placing local struggles in a broader historical and social context. The morning began with a song made popular during the student movements of the 1970s, *Su Mai Toi*, "Fight! Never Retreat." The lyrics describe the fight for justice in the name of the Thai people.

The song led to a recounting of "the people's history," (*prawathithisat prachachon*) of Thailand's resistance movements. After which, each resident was asked to recount their own entrance into local network activities. The activity encouraged residents to see their "struggle" in the context of this broader history of social justice movements in Thailand. From the NGO perspective the activity helped contextualize the work done by residents by placing their local movements in a particular political genealogy of national struggles for democracy, particularly the student movements that overthrew the military government in 1973 and ushered in a brief period of democracy until it was violently ended in 1976. The mantle of this movement was later passed on to the NGO influenced pro-poor movements of the late 1980s and 1990s and subsequently to the highly local struggles supported by NGOs throughout the country.

One by one, local leaders from the KKSR stood-up and described their reasons for joining the network. These ranged from highly personal stories from people, like Nung, who recounted the story about how leaders in the Friends community accused him of selling the rights to the community so he could purchase his new truck. Most offered much more general responses. Others, like my friend Bunma, said that they joined the network due to changing local conditions. As he put it, "We fight because our housing is insecure and the city is developing too fast. I could see that it was changing so fast that we could no longer live as we used to and we needed to do to something to secure our houses and our way of life."

In most cases, instead linking their struggle to deeper reflections on social justice and inequality in Thailand, most residents simply described their personal

reasons for joining the network. It was clear from the reaction of the NGO facilitators that this was not exactly the conversation they were planning. So P'Rak, an NGO organizer from Bangkok who facilitated the workshop, redirected the residents towards these big issues, "We begin with the issue of land rights. The house is the core issue (*rao rerm kap ruang thi din lae ban khu ruang lak*), but that is not the whole issue. We use the house as a tool (*ban khu kruang mue*). The broader issue is the rights of the people (*ruang yai khue sithi khong prachachon*) and the abilities of communities to think for themselves (*lae sakayapap khong chumchon kit aeng lae tam aeng*). It is like rivers, they come from small streams. Each person and their community are critical to the network because it all starts from there."

P'Rak's move from the personal to the political, broadly conceived here, was indicative of the underlying aims of the workshop and training of the "villagers" in the network. For NGO activists like P'Rak, visions of improving Thai society and broad projects of social justice constituted real development. Activists often placed political projects of social justice in opposition with material interests of the residents in the network. During an interview, for example, Rak told me how Thaksin's success was rooted in his populist (*prachaniyom*) style of governance, which split the poor from the NGO activist networks (*Thaksin thuk salai khon jon*) through agencies like CODI. This analysis highlighted a sense that poor citizens' votes for Thaksin and his policy agenda, which favored their own interests had, in fact, deceived them into corrupting democracy. P'Rak saw the poor's votes as veering away from a program of social justice towards one of self-interest. P'Rak's analysis and his facilitation of the

workshop points out the particularity of not only the narrative of "the people's history" but also the forms of citizenship attached to it.[76]

P'Rak's redirection of the "people's history" to the history of the NGO movement was typical of the ways that the NGO activists encouraged the participants to see their struggles in relation to the larger structure of Thai society. However, the shift also reveals an important gap between the visions of social justice promoted by Thai NGO activists and the aspirations of residents. P'Rak's vision of the house as tool recalls CODI's mantra "a house is more than a house" (*khamwa ban khu makkwa ban)* in that it highlights the way the house is seen as a method of transforming residents and their desires. It also implied that residents should participate in community activities for more than their material interests. More than that, it suggests that the materiality of the house and its development is itself deceiving, while justice is substantive. In the case of CODI, the physical house obscured the deeper goals of community participation and mutual care. For NGOs like Rak, the structure of the house obscured larger struggles for social justice that he saw as essential to real development.

But what was the house for its residents? Was its materiality separate from its political content? Was its materiality itself political? The final activity of the day suggests that the answer to this latter question is almost certainly, yes. P'Rak divided the residents into three groups and gave them the task of building their ideal houses out of paper and tape. Each group had to design their house together and, construct it using these flimsy materials. Housing, once again, was supposed to stand in for process. The

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[76] P'Rak's analysis of Thaksin's populism recalls Benjamin Arditi's (2007) criticism of notions of populism that place it as a practice outside of democracy.

intention of the exercise was to have residents go through a learning process and discover that the house itself was less important than the actions of working together, surveying the group's opinions, and planning the building process collectively. Ultimately, the activity suggested, that this process would result in a house form that reflected "community values."

While these were the implicit lessons residents were to derive from the activity, the physical objects they produced gave important insights into these different visions of the home. Groups worked together to create paper structures that represented their ideas about houses. They had to work together both to discuss their visions of what they might create and to create the materials that they would need to build the "house." One group, lead by Paw Raengkai, created a large house that used "traditional" construction elements like posts (*sao*) made of rolled up pieces of paper. Across the building's lintel, the group wrote the words, "united hearts develop harmony" (*ruamjai phatthana samakkhi*). Another group built a large house with "concrete brick" walls (bricks drawn on paper) and a large fish-pond and garden to represent the "sufficiency economy." A final group, led by my friend Bunma, built a modestly sized, middle-class looking house, with concrete bricks, no visible posts, a hand-drawn tile roof, a red "UBC" digital satellite dish, and a driveway. When I asked about the driveway, Muan, one of the group members, laughed and said, "That is where you can park your Vico"—the latest model of Toyota truck.

These choices—posts, fish ponds, gardens the concrete block, tile roof, satellite dish, and Toyota truck—all speak to the dilemmas of citizenship facing poor citizens. While the former three symbols—posts, fishponds, and gardens—speak through

sufficiency aesthetics—the latter three are all potent symbols of belonging in urban

modernity. Thus, during the activity, the residents attempted to make their homes each

fit into several aesthetic regimes of citizenship simultaneously. In doing so, the models

demonstrated the desires of residents to participate in multiple, seemingly contradictory,

projects of belonging.

Satellite dishes (and other communication technologies like computers and cell

phones) and technologies of mobility like cars and motorbikes, were frequently held up

as problematic desires by reformers and activists. The items became essential parts of

what I came to see as a list of dangerous commodities, which reformers referenced

whenever they sought to problematize the poor's consumer desires. Criticism of these

desires was an essential part of the rhetoric of those protesting the Thaksin regime and

his Red Shirt supporters. Yet, as Sopranzetti argues, such desires were essential to the

political claims made by the Red Shirt supporters, even if they called upon the

symbolism of consumer capitalism. "The expressed desires for the new product,

obviously, went beyond the use and necessity of mobile phones as tools of connection

towards a larger desire to partake in the cycle of conspicuous consumption, but also

configured and offered a material language to articulate perceptions of inequality and

differentiated access" (2012: 367).

When the group at the workshop was asked to explain the rationale behind their

designs they inevitably did so in ways that would resonate with the NGO trainers at the

meeting by speaking to the citizen designs they attempted to incorporate into the house.

Khem went first, presenting on behalf of Paw Raengkai and the house built with all the

posts (Figure 7.9). When asked about the design, Khem said, "The house is designed to

be with nature so that it won't be too hot and won't require air conditioning." (*yu duai thammachat mai torng chai air*). The house neatly took up the values of authenticity and sufficiency, literally building them into the aesthetic structure of the home. In doing so it offered a version of belonging that critiqued consumer modernity (you don't have to use air conditioning), critiqued capitalism (with its self-sufficient gardens and ponds), and promoted the traditional values and aesthetics of the Thai village reaffirming the close proximity between village and nature.

Group two presented their simple one-floor house with a corrugated roof (Figure 7.10). Paw Kan, the group's leader, made sure to tell everyone, "We're poor so we don't have car." On the outside his group left space for "sufficiency economy" activities like a fish pond, vegetable garden, and rice field. He claimed that the house cost 38,000bt though there was no electricity and no water yet. Paw Kan said that they did not add these because they did not want to borrow money to do the upgrade, reflecting the constant reminders to upgrade little by little.

When one of the trainers, a local leader named Jin, asked the group about participation, Mae Lae, the leader of the "Golf community" said, "We have a committee and they came to check the land and helped us survey the community first. We have a large area to raise fish and animals and to grow vegetables. If we have the chance to add more, we will." This group and the previous group contained a number of longstanding participants in the network so the fact that their homes so closely hewed to the aesthetics expected by the NGOs was not surprising. Different from the previous group, however, Paw Kan's model tied the morality of poverty to moderation. In fact, these

homes did not look anything like the homes that any of these people lived in along the tracks, which were entirely made of concrete and tiles and, no doubt, had TVs.

The final house was the house with the satellite dish (Figure 7.11). Its group, lead by Bunma, was made up of communities that had joined the network more recently. When they stood in front of the group to present their home someone from another group shouted, "If you have money your house would look like this," (*tha mi ngun ja mi ban baeb ni*).

Bunma replied, "All our members worked together on the house. Outside there is a place for members to meet and a place to hold seminars [pointing to a porch]. We also have a satellite dish so that people can come here and get the news and so that the network will have information. We have a place for 'sufficiency' too so we can grow vegetables." I took this "garden" to be an ad hoc addition for the sake of the presentation. Unlike the other groups, Bunma's group made no attempt to represent "sufficiency" in the model. After he finished his presentation all of the residents joked that they want to move into this place. Bunma claimed it would cost 70,000 baht to build, adding, "We used good materials so that they will last a long time and we won't have to fix them." A few people in the group laughed at this price tag, indicating that they thought it was too low. At the end of the session, P' Rak moved the discussion away from the houses and towards the process (Figure 7.12). He pointed out once again that community leaders should, "talk first and not just jump in and start working as soon as possible."

He continued:

> Most of us think and go at the same time. Did anyone plan? You need to plan from the outset. If you just think as you go you are bound to make mistakes. First, you need to gather ideas. See what is going on in the community and what people want. Second, you need to develop the community. Plan together, summarize the plan, decide together, and do activities that promote culture. With real life, it is not a game like this. You will need to meet and work together. If you think that people have problems how will we solve them? We need to listen to everyone do they have ideas and hearts? Then we need to listen to them even if we disagree. It does not have to do with the building of the house, what we do is to decide what we are going to do as a community.

The activity attempted to create a neat division between the aesthetic of the house and the development process associated with its construction in order to shed light on the fact that "real development" involved cooperation, moderation, and patience. It seemed to me that the models built by the participants attempted to point out that real development also involved things—better things—sometimes more durable, sometimes more moral, sometimes more modern—than what many residents had in the present. Where the residents focused their attention on the end product, the physical house, the NGO facilitators tried to refocus residents' attention on the process through which communities and houses are constructed. Beyond this contrast between process and product, the houses produced stood in stark contrast to the morning's activities, which sought to situate the local resident's political activities in the larger history of social movements in Thailand. The discursive bifurcation between "real development" and its aesthetics served not only to problematize these material desires, but also to reinforce the notion that residents were not yet ready for autonomy.

Figure 7.9: Paw Raengkai's group's house. Note the open first floor, raised construction, and the tree and "fishpond" on the side. Source: N/A

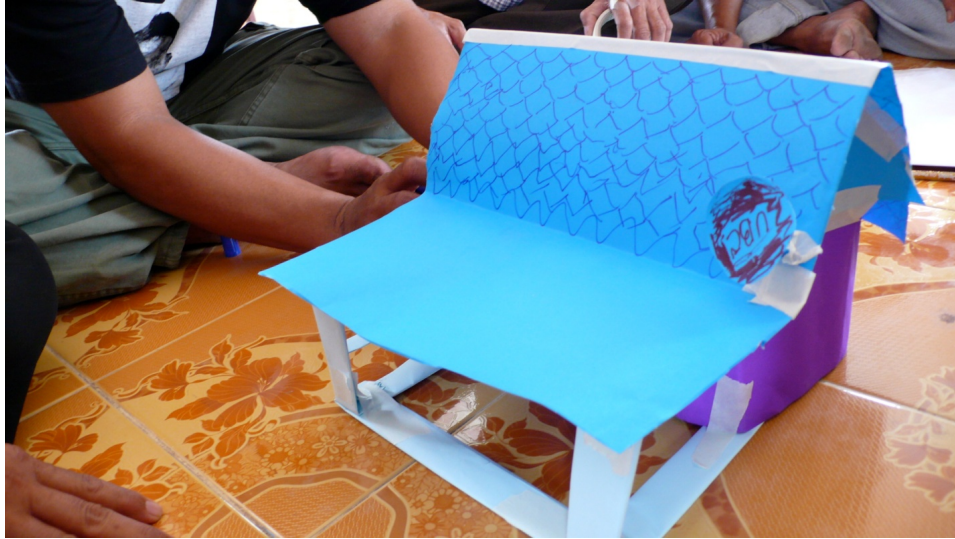Figure 7.10: Paw Kan's group's house with a garden drawn onto the foundation. Source: N/A

Figure 7.11: Bunma's group's house. Note the tiled roof and the UBC satellite dish. Source: N/A

Figure 7.12: Group process. Source: N/A

Although there were some nods towards sustainable housing—for example the house that lacked electricity, the multiple fish ponds and community gardens—the houses were more remarkable for the way these aesthetic choices skillfully wove these conflicting terrains of belonging. No one proposed a house that was built for communal living (though many mentioned meeting spaces) or even a multi-family compound as are often referenced as typical northeastern houses. Rather, each reflected the spatial demands and constraints of an urban nuclear family. Similarly, none of the models were "built" out of some alternative building material. Instead the homes were potent articulations of desires to belong to a better if only slightly altered political and aesthetic order. The models each spoke through multiple registers, offering a vision of residents' efforts to enact complex and contradictory visions of belonging and legitimacy. In doing so, their houses were constructed through aesthetic and material bricolage, making material reference to modernity, security, tradition, authenticity, community, individuality, and sufficiency all at once.

Redistributing the Sensible

The combination of aesthetic choices residents made during the above exercise were evident in real design choices people made at their own homes. Residents incorporated elements of "traditional" design where practical, as in the homes that incorporated the *ranaeng* as ventilation and shade. Others incorporated elements of sufficiency—like community gardens and other landscaping, or raising frogs for home consumption—in order to demonstrate their desires to belong and participate in this nationwide project. One home in the Golf community was particularly notable, as the

owner constructed his walls out of poured concrete and broken tiles he collected from other projects around town. This home and its reused materials often received attention from visiting activists and students who toured the community to survey the upgrade projects because it embodied their hope that the homes along the tracks might take up an alternative aesthetic that critiqued consumer modernity. This home's reuse of broken tiles seemed to do just that for many visitors to the community (Figures 7.13 and 7.14).

Community gardens were frequently planted after residents achieved rental rights. The one I described at the beginning of this chapter, in the "Rail's Edge community" was planted in a previously overgrown, swampy strip of land adjacent to the tracks. They also built a temporary shack like those seen in rural rice fields as a space to rest and socialize in this more "natural setting," mere meters from the rail line itself. In addition to the garden, Bunma also built a large pen in the back of his restaurant to raise frogs to eat. I asked him why he and his neighbors had gone to so much trouble to create such projects. At first, he answered the question simply by saying "Sufficiency Economy" (*sethakit porpiang*). When we spoke about the garden later, he told me about it was part of a response to his concern about how city was growing and how the land around his restaurant used to be a forest and that the area was much cooler. The garden, he said, would help make the environment around the community nicer and the city more livable (Figure 7.15).

By answering in this way, Bunma pointed out how his community could serve as an example of an alternate set of coordinates for urban development. His project, like many others, sought to redistribute the coordinates of the sensible in a particular way: The garden demonstrated legitimacy and participation in the national sufficiency project

but it also served as a comment on the city's rapid growth. Bunma and his neighbor's work in that narrow strip of land placed them inside the national project, even as it allowed them the ability to express an alternative version of that model to which others in the city might aspire. No longer trespassers, the residents of the Rail's Edge felt that their community might become an example of urban sustainability. In this way, sufficiency projects like the garden, the home with its façade made from broken tiles, or Nung's dream of an integrated resort, suggested both new forms of being even as they nestled uncomfortably within the existing uneven forms of belonging.

For all the effort that residents put into sufficiency projects, many residents pointed to the permanent electric meters, which could only be installed in neighborhoods with permanent housing registration cards, as the clearest markers of their legitimacy. In this way, demonstrating belonging occurred in multiple aesthetic registers. Clean, orderly spaces, constructed out of the durable (and therefore "proper") materials—concrete and tile—were one version of aesthetic legitimacy. When built adjacent to projects that suggested alternative sorts of living arrangements in which the city and the desires it produced might be tamed, such projects embodied the hopes of some (small) relief from the Thailand's political and economic uncertainty, even as they offered no fundamental challenge to the sources of that uncertainty. Instead, the diverse range of projects reflects the desires of residents to be seen neither as "villagers" nor as "trespassers," but rather, to be seen as capable of sustaining contradictory modes of being and belonging just like everyone else.

Figure 7.13: House made from reused tiles, Golf Community. Source: N/A

Figure 7.14: Beautification projects along the tracks were common after signing a lease. Source: N/A

Figure 7.15: Garden at the Rail's Edge. Source: N/A

Epilogue

On the last night of my longest stint of fieldwork (in the fall of 2009), Nung and his family threw me a small going away party. We invited friends from up and down the tracks that I had met through my work with the Khon Kaen Slum Revival Network. Nung's wife cooked a delicious pot of spicy chicken soup, we drank beer, sang karaoke, and they performed a small *baisi* string tying ceremony to affirm our bonds. In the middle of the evening, Nung brought out a small hammer and chisel. For some reason, he decided that this was the time to demolish the concrete post standing in the middle of his backyard. The post was the last remaining piece of the back wall of his house during its pre-lease days when the house was in violation of the Railway's spatial regulations.

The whole party stopped while Nung removed the post, alternating between banging it with the hammer and kicking it with his foot. With each successive blow the cracks in the post deepened until the whole thing eventually dislodged and toppled over. Everyone cheered and the party continued. I asked Nung why he stopped the party to get rid of the post. He told me that it "didn't look good" (*mai du di*) and that it made the space "unpleasant" (*mai na yuu*). Indeed, with post gone nothing prevented plates of food from moving easily across the table or glasses from being refilled to their tops, and nothing blocked anyone's view of the singer at the karaoke machine. The only remaining impediment to the evening was the train's groaning engine and clattering wheels. Inevitably as it passed, it paused the action of the party, obscuring all of our voices including the singer's, if only momentarily.

Chapter 8:

Conclusion: Politics in Belonging's Gaps

This dissertation has considered the forms and possibilities of politics among communities previously internal, but invisible, to Thailand's political order. As I have shown, this internal invisibility did not mean that the residents along the tracks could not be seen, but rather they could only be seen in particular ways—as villagers or trespassers. Such circumscribed positions marked them as subjects not yet capable for politics, fixing them in the developmental temporality of "not yet." However, as I have argued throughout this dissertation, these spaces are preeminently political. Their homes became sites of belonging, disagreement, policing, and spaces from which to claim a piece of a good life.

These temporal politics were the result of a long history of government in Thailand that sought to design a new and improved citizenry through development projects. Invariably such designs have proposed that the normative Thai citizen is one who is modern, democratic (but not political), authentic, and moderate. The villager is all of these things, but not yet, demanding more training and more development before being ushered into the autonomous present. Each time the poor failed to embody these traits, experts, NGOs, state planners and bureaucrats had more reasons for development, not less. In this way, the suspended temporality of developmental citizenship did not provoke the displacement of design to the citizen, but rather new versions of citizens yet to be produced.

Paralleling this history were urban, economic, and political transformations that disrupted this narrative, undermined its claims to truth, and, ultimately, called its social arrangements and interventions into question. The figure of the trespasser emerged here as both a result of economic dislocation and its political effects. Thrust out of the countryside these "villagers out of place" became the object of intervention through the Baan Mankong policy. As innovative as the policy set out to be, it also extended the practice of citizen design into the contested spaces of the city, billing itself as a means of training villagers (and trespassers) to become legitimate citizens capable of improving the city on their own. The Baan Mankong project employed late capitalist technologies of community to stabilize the lives of the urban poor and moderate their desires, reorienting their values towards sufficiency, harmony, and communality. Planners theorized that doing so would create a "strong community" (*chumchon khemkaeng*) as a bulwark against economic and political uncertainty and transform residents of such communities into legitimate citizens.

More than that, Baan Mankong was designed not simply to secure the lives of its participants from the capriciousness of the state and market, but also to secure the state from the insecurities that many felt (and continue to feel) emerged from all of this trespassing. To many Thai conservatives and old left reformist Buddhists, the urban poor in particular seemed essential to the nation's problems. Their misguided values, inability to "return" to the village, claims to urban space, and votes in their own interests, marked them as citizens not yet ready to participate in politics, and as capitalist subjects unable to control their own impulses. For critics, the disruption of the national spatial and temporal landscape was at the heart of the rise of the Thaksin

regime and the Red Shirts' mobilizations. That disruption was exactly what the PAD sought to undo with their "new politics."

Baan Mankong was not a part of that movement, but for many within it, the policy resonated with their goals. Amidst the political turmoil of turn of the 21st century Thailand, Baan Mankong explicitly cast itself as a way to renovate politics from the ground up. The policy's advocates argued that personal development and harmonious communities were precisely the answer to the seemingly intractable divisions within Thai society. Ironically, however, its implementation did not suppress or avoid politics, but rather it incited them.

The history of community along Khon Kaen's Railway tracks reveals this story. Although community operates as a technology of policing in the contemporary moment, it emerged as a way for residents to demand rights from the SRT. In its earliest moment, community was a mode of politics that enabled residents along the tracks to make themselves visible. Mobilizations in the name of community successfully induced the agency to begin formulating a plan for residential rentals. In that case, community was not yet a gentrified spatial arrangement created in the aim of training the poor, but rather a method to wage politics against a powerful state agency.

Once residents began signing leases, however, community became a mode of policing. With lease agreements formed through the language of community and tied to CODI through the Baan Mankong project, community was repurposed as a technology of government. In this framework, not only was land only to be rented communally, but residents had to save communally, plan communally, and continue to organize themselves communally, in order to gain access to upgrade and infrastructure

improvement funds, in order to be able to continue signing leases with the SRT. This framework pushed residents back into the temporal gap of the "not yet" political subject.

Community in this form failed to quell politics. With the splitting of Khon Kaen's powerful local network into two, the schisms between activists and their constituencies increased. Disagreements within communities over boundaries, visions of citizenship, notions of the relationship between rights and development, served to expose the contradictions of the multiple projects of government taking place along the tracks. Yet, these disagreements did not disrupt the foundational design rationale, rooted in developmental trainings that might move villagers *towards* citizenship. Instead, they provided multiple pathways towards new struggles with attendant risks. Although these struggles exposed the fundamental tensions and binds that tethered residents to their secondary status, the disputes themselves exacerbated the existing forms of inequality, leading to new kinds of exclusions and increasing vulnerability for many along the tracks.

When measured against the notion of community as harmony essential to the Baan Mankong project, it would seem these efforts at organizing have failed. Disagreements blossomed where unity and community should have taken root. For the architects, planners and NGO activists I worked with, however, these disagreements were not signs of the project's flawed logic, but they were more evidence that the residents were still not ready to govern on their own behalf, or on the behalf of others. In short, they felt that residents required further development before being proper political subjects. This insight is one that echoes those found in the work of both James

Ferguson (1994) and Tania Li (2007) who have argued similarly that the technical implementation of development projects disarms the politics in which such projects inevitably intervene while also recursively serving as the justification for future interventions.

For their part, the residents along the tracks have strategically engaged in multiple projects of belonging. As I have shown, they have participated in networks where it served their interests, formed and dissolved communities, and protested with and against each other. They work together to administer projects and then they work against those same projects. These efforts appear incoherent and disordered, but they speak most loudly to the interests among residents to belong in a way that is neither circumscribed nor secondary. From one perspective this is not a revolutionary claim— to belong in the current order is simply to reinscribe its unevenness. Yet, the current order will no longer be the same once these people come to occupy it. The pervasive "double-standards" that Red Shirt protesters have highlighted cannot be sustained once the villager is included as legitimately political precisely because it is that exclusion that organizes the present unevenness. This change will not occur because Thai society will suddenly become equal, or, as Rancière might suggest, result in a perfect count. Instead, it will occur because disagreements have both exposed the formulation and made it such that the contemporary arrangement can no longer sustain itself. Yet, this new era will not produce an harmonious polity, rather it will merely transform the practice of politics and the frameworks it responds to, no doubt producing new grounds for disagreements. Nevertheless, the fundamental insight here is that for those wishing to transform society, engaging such disputes is not simply important, but absolutely necessary. Only

by turning towards the disagreement, can such frameworks be uncovered and transformed.

Between the Entrenched and the Insurgent

This research has shown that the disagreements were not just perversions, pathologies, or anathemas of democratic practice but a critical component of it. The description I offer throughout this dissertation calls attention to a kind of incipient politics that does not presage any particular outcome, but highlights the unfolding of politics itself and the uneven ways in which social orders come together and break apart at different moments through different kinds of disputes. Such disagreements shake social foundations but do not always break them. Instead, they are claims to political legitimacy made through the conflicted and contradictory conditions available to those that take them up.

Along the tracks this meant that contestations are waged through, and in tension with, notions of community and villager. There conflicts arose as such frameworks and their disjunctions became apparent (sometimes in part and sometimes in whole) as residents along the tracks attempted to gain access to rights to their land and to material resources associated with Baan Mankong. Such divisions, I argue, were evidence of the specific binds residents had to navigate in their claims to be legitimate participants in the contradictory, incomplete process of politics itself. Attention to these disagreements revealed both the prevailing binds facing residents and the methods, techniques, and conflicts produced by doing politics amidst such constraints.

This dissertation demonstrates that an ethnographic focus on the formulation and dissolution of such disagreements offers a window into the question of how power structures change and get re-established. What is entailed in the move from its state of entrenched inequality towards the contemporary mode of "insurgent citizenship," as Holston (2008) would call it? What is it that fills the gap between these two modalities of belonging? This is the terrain of politics itself.

As Holston argues, citizenship is a tense relation between historical forms of inequality and insurgent challenges to such forms. The practice of politics—disagreement—fills this gap. I have shown that the movement from the entrenched towards the insurgent along the tracks has not been linear. Instead the politics I document have been partial and piecemeal, revealing the frameworks and binds of uneven belonging in small bits and scraps. Such disagreements were productive of both new conceptualizations of citizenship and new instantiations of dominance. Yet, even as new forms of dominance and exclusion were propagated along the tracks, they produced their own splinters and fragments. Like a wedge driven into a block of wood, communities did not split evenly, without some uncomfortable force. It was in the torsion of politics and policing that fragments of future disagreements were produced.

This focus on incipient politics sheds light on the broader struggles for citizenship and visibility in Thai society because the conflicts along the tracks in Khon Kaen were laced with the binds of Thai citizenship. As I described at the beginning of the dissertation Thaksin and his supporters offered a new political voice to subjects who had been outside of politics. Thaksin brought them into the political fold and directed numerous policies in their direction. In doing so, he mobilized new visions of inclusion

and new aspirations for belonging. His removal by coup in 2006 underscored the complexity and depth of the changes his government had wrought, highlighting the persistent sense among his constituency that a great many so-called "proper" citizens did not yet see them fit for belonging or to participate in politics.

The coup also brought to light the way development itself produced this uneven structure. While participation became a ubiquitous part of training poor citizens to moderate their desires and become comfortable with "enough," these same subjects were shut out of the voting booth as not just Thaksin, but also his surrogates Samak Sundravej and Somchai Wongsawat, were removed via judicial coups during the protracted Yellow Shirt mobilization of 2008. Participation became an exceptional form of political practice as democracy itself was put on ice.

The inherent contradictions in the Baan Mankong process then were not simply analogous to the ones in that the Red Shirts highlighted, but they were in fact one and the same. Yet, on the ground in Khon Kaen, the processes of managing contradictions were much more apparent. Indeed, attention to the unfolding of political disagreements in Khon Kaen, gives depth to the actions taking place in Bangkok. As I describe below, the charged frustrations felt along the tracks were precisely rooted in the aspirations ignited by Thaksin and still smoldering in his wake. It was not empty space and time that filled the gap between the coup and the Red Shirt mobilization (which caught many off guard in its size and scope), but rather constant disagreements being waged at multiple levels.

Aspirations, Being, and Politics in Motion

In the previous chapter, I argued that aesthetics was another way in which residents attempted to make themselves visible. Their choices of home improvement materials and aspirations to multiple forms of belonging demonstrated that the demand to be visible does not fit an easy ideological program. Rather, the desires that I documented along the tracks showed how the forms of house and community became bound up in varied assertions of political legitimacy that attempt to speak in multiple registers. Such aspirations for belonging are internal to existing arrangements while also revealing the inequalities found within those very orders. Residents did this by using home construction and design processes that employed various aesthetic reference points to demonstrate their membership. For residents, aesthetics became a language to assert their social position and "redistribute" the sensible in such a way that they became visible and perhaps intelligible as legitimate citizens.

CODI architects and NGO facilitators often wrestled with aesthetics as a problem. In their opinion, the desires of the poor to demonstrate their belonging through particular aesthetic forms was proof that these villagers needed more instruction in order to see their way back to lives as self-sufficient villagers. These desires also disrupted the goals of architects and planners who hoped that the slums might work as laboratories to produce spatial, social, and political alternatives to the capitalist developmental quandaries. Residents' desire's to be and belong "like everyone else" (*taotriam kap khon eun*), as they eloquently put it, stymied the imagining that the poor might imagine, build and populate a new Thailand, simultaneously ushering in a new politics, economy, and city at the same time. This was not only unreasonable, but

fundamentally misunderstood the outcomes and trajectories of political change because it was a vision of the poor on the bottom *moved* to a new politics. This formulation again, resonated with the previous one that did not mark these subjects as autonomous equals, but rather subordinate subjects on the way towards politics but not quite there yet.

Although much of my attention has cast these aesthetic choices in light of political frameworks of belonging, I want to conclude this discussion by returning to Nung's dream of self-sufficiency that I described in Chapter 7. For residents, the home was not merely a potent space from which to make political assertions, it was also a site of being. Nung's dream offered a portal into just this sense of the house. It is true that he described an aesthetic arrangement that asserted a particular form of membership. However, his vision was more than that. It was also a claim to a certain mode of being beyond the dilemmas of secondary citizenship, of poverty, of capitalist exclusion, and of near constant politics. Although he phrased his ideal through income stability, he did not assert that money was the end, but rather an existence beyond the dilemmas posed by money and by belonging. His musing on independence, on a fish pond to fish, and a garden to till resonates beyond the tracks, because within it is a claim to simplified moral life that does not entail the production of deeper inequality, the reinforcing of hegemonic orders, and the propagation of more politics.

The home is a particularly potent site for these kinds of aspirations as the domestic space is a significant physical embodiment of a person's claim to living a "good" life. It is not simply that that space is symbolic of that claim, but rather the home in its arrangements is a vessel for living just that life. And yet, neither the

physicality nor the aesthetic production of the home is sufficient to allow the occupant

of the house to arrive at that life. As Naeng's dream demonstrates, consumption and

home improvement might be a means to stake a claim to a particular sort of being, but

they are not sufficient to actualize it. In this way, the home is its own space of "not yet."

The "not yet" of the home is different from the "not yet" of developmentalism.

The latter is the "not yet" of permanently deferred belonging, a product of policing that

is reproduced through the structured narrative of historicism and practices and

institutions of development. It serves to emplace rather than to move. The former,

although here tied to domesticity and consumption, is a site of the "not yet" of politics.

The not yet of the home produces a sticky dissatisfaction with the present that provokes

an action. Holston reminds us that in contemporary Brazil it is the *oikos* and its small

concerns—day care, electricity, plumbing, housing—that "not only construct a vast new

city, but on that basis also constitute it as a *polis* with a different order of citizenship"

(2008: 331).[77] In forging a moral space of being within the city and forcing its residents

to reckon with existing kinds of unevenness within the current order of belonging,

Holston argues, urban migrants forge a new city and a new politics. This city is not of

the order that planners and activists imagine because its new arrangement includes those

members as a part of the *demos* where they were previously unwelcome. That inclusion

is substantive transformation even if its outcomes are unknown.

Throughout this dissertation I have tried to attend to the ways in which the

sticky binds facing the residents along Khon Kaen's tracks produced multiple uneven

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[77] Nikhil Anand's (2011) analysis of the Mumbai water system also argues how infrastucture becomes a
site in which politics and new forms of citizenship are enacted in India.

responses mostly aimed at finding a space in the city and a place in the nation. While buying new tiles for a home may have limited political resonances—more potently felt along the tracks than in Southern California, to be sure—I would argue it is that same sense of dissatisfaction that provokes politics itself.

Much has been written about the relationship between late-capitalism and the production of new senses, emotions, desires, and aspirations, (Appadurai 2004; Wilson 2004; Rofel 2007; Zhang 2008; Tran 2012). These scholars—working primarily in Asia—have argued that market liberalization has created new possibilities for aspiration and self-fashioning through consumption and the expanded possibilities of being in emergent market economies. Such processes of being are not the simple emergence of freedom, but rather are laden with anxieties (see Tran 2012). In this sense, desire and aspiration are powerful sites, but are not without their complications. As Nikhil Anand and Anne Rademacher (2011) point out, aspirations to belong are not the same as aspirations for equality. They argue that the desire to belong is frequently rooted in an aim to carve out a space within the existing unequal order, but this is nevertheless, a potent form of political engagement.

Although, the sorts of politics I describe in much of this dissertation are not of the revolutionary order, they do make a difference. I, like many of the activists and architects I worked with, often hoped the residents along the tracks would adopt a more critical stance towards consumption, the market, and the economic orders of inequality foundational to their status as trespassers. Such feelings provoked an unexpected and disquieting melancholy within me when lease agreements were signed as my friends traded the critical purchase of being a trespasser for a putative form of inclusion.

Instead of producing a more just society, these transformations seemed to me to portend yet more unevenness. Indeed, my feeling of loss was response to a substantive event— that is, an identifiable shift in the calculus of politics—but ultimately it was rooted in my own very privileged expectations that the poor could and would do something that I could not; that is, sacrifice my stake within the order to make something new.

This disjuncture between my expectations of who I thought these subjects should be and who they are was powerfully instructive. That gap made me aware of the way in which my expectations of a certain kind of appropriate political subjectivity among the poor mirrored that of the activists and experts I worked with. This constructed visio of massive social change achieved through the altruistic sacfice of poor citizens, ignored their aspirations and bound them to another homogenous subject position, limiting their ability to occupy the contradictory political lives that we had all adopted. Where residents' actions deviated from this political programmatic and asserted their own forms of belonging through the market and in the very system I occupied, it became clear to me that I did not understand my own contradictions very well either. Indeed, I became aware of the unmarked privilege to simply hold contradictions in tension without inspiring any kind of intervention at all. At times, residents' desires to belong within capitalism and to make the city sustainable, to forge a democratic order and to retreat from local participation, to hope for equality and to reproduce inequality seemed to be irreconcilable contradictions. Yet, to imagine that these subjects would simultaneously imagine and produce an alternate mode of being as they simultaneously struggle to transform to make themselves visible within a system

that includes them, but cannot see them, is to forget the unmarked privilege associated with being able to hold onto inconsistent and contradictory aspirations

More fundamentally, this perception is to misunderstand the nature of political change entirely. Politics produces a world to come because it includes the parts that had previously been invisible in previous formations. Inclusion cannot be substantive if it is not also transformative. Thus, if political change only enables to the poor to continue to occupy certain circumscribed positions within the police order then it is not political change at all. Either politics and more potently inclusion makes a world to come new and unknown or it is not politics at all.

The apparent contradiction between consumption and politics was exactly what was enacted on May 19th, 2010. As the Thai military dispersed the Red Shirt encampment on Ratchaprasong Avenue in Bangkok, protesters fanned out across the city and country, most looking to escape an increasingly violent situation. As the day progressed, several of Bangkok's high-end shopping malls, which had served as the backdrop for the protest, were set on fire. At the same time across the Northeast, eleven provincial halls were torched. These are very different sites, but on that day they were brought into an uncomfortable political juxtaposition. On the one hand, their simultaneous burning served as a reminder that, until Thaksin, much of the country was excluded from both political and the economic belonging. On the other hand, the day offered a bold demonstration of the way in which aspirations themselves, be they for things, or politics, or both simultaneously, can become the ignition for action. These dual sites underscored the close relationship between the sticky "not yet" of economic deprivation and the "not yet" of political exclusion (See also Sopranzetti 2012). It is not

simply the aspiration for belonging that mobilizes, but its short-circuiting in frustrations and failed attempts that provokes disagreement.

The Red Shirt mobilization underscored the related frustrations of being unwelcome at both the shopping mall and the voting booth. These events and their contradictions became potent enactments of the way desires to be, and desires to belong, are always related and embedded in the dissatisfying and unequal present that eludes us. This dissertation has demonstrated that such contradictions find expression through politics, even as the outcomes of such expressions remain undecided. It is this sense of risk-ladden openness that marks the contemporary Thai political order. The residual has emerged by claiming their part in politics; what this means in practice is uncertain.

That undecidable outcome comes with its own costs. As residents were securing their land through leases, bureaucratic practices geared towards physical development, and actual home improvements, the SRT was seeking funding to construct a second train track through Khon Kaen city and, perhaps, build a high-speed rail line next to that one. With these projects on the horizon, it appears that the rail line has once again demonstrated its remarkable ability to translate macro-economic shifts into micro-spatial politics. Even as many residents have gained a legitimate claim to the land through leases, and as many more residents sought to stake claims to legitimacy by improving the forms of their homes and communities, these new projects raise important new questions about the durability of these claims.

For those communities that have yet to sign leases, these new Railway endeavors highlight the failures of the projects of personal development and moderation

to do anything about the growing fantasy of an interconnected ASEAN tied together by new forms of economic exchange and transportation. While the KKSR communities have remobilized, it remains to be seen how durable their "strong communities" can be in the face of a return to the territorial fantasies of speed and efficiency cast firmly within a strengthening discourse that links the Railway with sustainability. In either case, understanding the transformation in the incipient forms of politics that I have documented here will be critical to the next phase of this process. New mobilizations might stop these projects as trespassers emerge to reclaim the land. Or perhaps this shift will simply result in a renewed effort to manage the problem of the villager through participatory dispossession and relocation schemes. In either case, another call to politics is the only outcome that remains inevitable.

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