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**The uneasy art of
“being together”:
Elaborating transnational
movements against global
production networks in
Cambodia**

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The uneasy art of “being together”: Elaborating transnational movements against global production networks in Cambodia

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Résumé

Les deux dernières décennies ont vu une littérature croissante sur les mouvements transnationaux et leurs rôles importants dans les réseaux de production mondiaux. Force est pourtant de constater que ces partenariats complexes ne sont pas toujours fructueux, comme on le prétend souvent. Cet article examine de manière critique la façon dont les paysans vulnérabilisés, assistés par des organisations de la société civile, coopèrent avec des mouvements transnationaux ciblant les gouvernements et les sociétés transnationales en Asie du Sud-Est. Sur la base de deux études de cas au Cambodge, on se concentre sur les situations de conflits des investissements des sociétés transnationales qui impliquent l'accaparement des terres et qui plus est, ont un impact négatif sur les moyens de subsistance des agriculteurs. Souvent piloté par des organisations non gouvernementales internationales, cet assemblage mondial devient une arme à double tranchant, ainsi qu'il sera expliqué dans le texte. De notre point de vue, il est plus que jamais nécessaire de contrebalancer cette tendance néocoloniale, avec son déséquilibre de pouvoir, à l'ère des organisations communautaires mondialisées. Les mouvements transnationaux soutenant les organisations communautaires locales doivent adopter leur point de vue à travers un véritable processus de collaboration. Sinon, ils sont tenus d'atteindre, au mieux, leurs propres objectifs, mais pas ceux envisagés par les communautés affectées.

Mots-clés

Réseaux de production globaux, mouvements transnationaux, logiques paysannes, Cambodge, déséquilibre de puissance, néocolonialisme.

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Abstract

The last two decades have witnessed a growing literature on transnational movements and their significant roles in global production networks. It remains nevertheless important to observe that these complex partnerships are not always fruitful, as it is often claimed. This paper critically examines the way peasants, assisted by civil society organisations (CSOs), cooperate with transnational movements targeting governments and transnational corporations in Southeast Asia. Based on two Cambodia case-studies, we concentrate on conflict-ridden situations of transnational corporations' investments that involve land-grabs and negatively impact the livelihood of farmers. Being frequently driven by international CSOs, such global assemblage become a double-edged sword, as it will be later explained. There is a need to counterbalance this neo-colonial tendency, with its power imbalance, in the era of globalised CSOs. Transnational movements supporting local CSOs need to embrace their point of view through a genuine collaborative process. If not, they are bound to achieve, at best, their own objectives but not those envisioned by affected communities.

Keywords

Global production networks, transnational movements, peasants voice, Cambodia, power imbalance, neo-colonialism

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Introduction

The present paper addresses conflict ridden situations of transnational corporations' investments that involve land-grabs and negative impacts on the livelihood of farmers. It considers the effects of some established alliances by juxtaposing transnational social movements (supporting the cause of vulnerable rural communities) and the legitimate claims of local civil society organisations (CSOs) in order to recognise the implications they have for each other.

Fieldwork orientation

In this presentation, the following questions are addressed: 1) how, and through what mechanisms, can the peasants and civil society organisations influence actors in global production networks (GPNs); 2) Up to what extent the approaches employed by transnational movements are in phase with peasant and civil society organisations protests and expectations? and 3) More concretely, are civil society organisations supported by some GPNs in a position to follow the same agenda to mitigate a huge land-grabbing program orchestrated by multinational corporations? To this end, the paper draws on cases of peasant movements targeting actors of GPNs in Southeast Asia, with a particular emphasis on Cambodia.

The two cases, a rubber and a sugarcane plantation, were chosen for this study given their lingering process of resisting multinational corporations. The two cases have become 'iconic' resistance projects in Cambodia, with extensive transnational assistance and with local nongovernmental organisations (NGOs) and indigenous activists. Their tactics combine both conventional ones, including protest, and petitions, and innovative ones including the use of local and overseas judicial systems for the sugarcane case and a mediation process for the rubber case. The use of a regulatory framework transforms local legal initiatives, for example filing complaints to the national court, to calling for a neutral arbitration via the World Bank Group. These actions have not previously been practiced in Cambodia. Examining these cases with their drawbacks will provide information that may be useful for other movements concerned with global production networks, and the regulatory compliance of multinational corporations in the era of anti-globalisation.

Methodology

Data used in this paper is based on the authors' long-term field research in Cambodia from 2013. From August 2013-February 2014, the first author conducted fieldwork exploring the case of the sugarcane plantation and its production networks. More than 50 people, including key representatives of grassroots communities, NGOs, companies, government officials, and analysts were interviewed in addition to holding three focus group discussions in the conflict areas. Information acquired from the media was used to update the writing. It was followed by multiple visits from 2016 until 2018. For the case of rubber plantation, the first author conducted two fieldtrips in November 2016 and 2018, interviewing 12 key informants, including NGO staff and concerned officials. The second author conducted an ethnographic research with the early social mobilisation of dispossessed farmers. This occurred in 2010 when the movement developed into an open land conflict in the province of Ratanakiri, northeast of Cambodia. Participant observations and interviews were conducted in eight of the fourteen affected villages inhabited by four dominant ethnic groups (Jarai, Kachoh', Lao, and Tampuan). Other villages (Kreung and a remaining Kachoh') were visited three or four times. Enquiries continued when the mediation initiated under the auspices of the World Bank Group started after 2014. Each fieldtrip lasted from one to two weeks. Results were derived from direct observation, cross-sectional interviews, and informal dialogues. Spontaneous focused discussions relied on key individuals and small groups. Conversations have been regularly updated by phone with some key collaborators. Most enquiries concentrated on traditional and administrative village headmen, middle-aged men and women eager to raise their concerns, affected households, and elected village representatives. The final surveys occurred in late 2018. While provincial (Ratanakiri) and Phnom Penh government officers rarely objected to giving their point of view, the two international/ national NGOs were indisposed to exchange information, particularly when the mediation started. Yet, the three indigenous associations gave their time. The appointed mediator and her national counterpart welcomed discussion and debate. Two Washington-based International Finance Corporation (IFC) members and a consultant from the mediation office kindly replied to our emails.

Based on the fieldwork, along with a literature review related to the topic, this paper develops an approach of tracing retrospectively and prospectively the mechanisms needed to identify, contest and influence actors located at different stages of agro-industrial production networks. Tracing retrospectively helps to develop an understanding of how grassroots communities and transnational organisations leverage influence on those responsible for the operation of a

specific globally distributed product. Tracing prospectively elucidates how grassroots peasant communities and supporting organisations influence actors involved in the distribution of the product to behave with some consideration towards dispossessed peasants. Nonetheless the paper argues, as we will see below, that grassroots organisations risk their self-confidence and their collective concerns. Important claims reflecting socio-territorial and cultural priorities highlighted either by average families or by the representatives of the communities may not be taken into account or recognised as acceptable ‘targets’ elaborated by the supporting NGOs. They are also in danger of losing their autonomy, which is the ability to operate mobilisation with less support from the outsiders, as they become ‘corporatized’ by international civil society, and insidiously delegitimised by the NGOs, the TNCs, and the state.

The remainder of this paper begins with a conceptualisation of how transnational social movements and GPNs are intersected. It will provide a brief overview of the roles of transnational organisations in peasant movements in Southeast Asia’s advanced agricultural countries, and then demonstrates the details of Cambodia’s two transnational movements, employing a tracing retrospective and prospective approach. Finally, a concluding discussion is proposed with the aim to substantiate implications for both GPNs and transnational movement literature.

1 - Contesting global production networks

Within the field of global political economics, many scholars engaged with global production networks (GPNs) have brought to the fore the power and special relations between corporations and statesⁱ. Influential GPN actors, in particular transnational corporations (TNCs), have outdone the power of less developed countries, whose economies and development policies typically rely on corporate capital. This first section is divided in two parts. The first one address the way emblematic studies of GPNs have grossly approached the question. The second part insists on agency, institutions and stable/unstable connections among actors.

Theoretical perspectives

In the context of the Global South, studies of GPNs also tend to focus on the relations between corporations and the state (Coe, Dicken and Hess 2008), exploring their different roles and power within the GPNs’ framework, but leaving behind other actors, such as civil society organisations (CSOs). CSOs are generally seen as part of social movements, but they have also

played a vital role in production networks (Bollhorn and Franz 2015; Cumbers, Nativel and Routledge 2008; Ponte and Sturgeon 2014). Given their unique role and interests within the framework of GPNs they should be considered as a fundamental actor in GPNs. For example, in the realm of business ethics, corporate social responsibility, sustainability, and corporate codes of conduct, scholars have pointed out the effects CSO movements have made on corporate ethical practices (King and Soule 2007; Nickow 2015; Soule 2009). These authors maintain that ethical practices of TNCs and other large corporations are, in part, the consequence of civil society activism, such as collective actions, unionism, and social movements.

At the same time, to avoid attempts to leverage power by unions and activists in local and transnational campaigns, the leading TNCs often move their production to geographical locations where labour is cheap and natural resources are unexploited, creating a complex production network. This has frequently constrained the ability of activist networks to trace, and effectively target, the networks and value chains of a product. As the production networks have multiplied, scattered, and been outsourced, CSOs have likewise begun to advance their agenda, orchestrating not only local but also transnational influencing strategies to geographically target each stage of production. Coe et al. (2004 and 2008) have incorporated social movements, protests, and collective resistance in GPNs. But they have not clearly addressed production networks in which different actors are positioned in different geographical locations. Cumbers et al. (2008) examine how labour agencies and unions can be embedded in GPNs, showing the challenges between local, national and global networks of unions and their interests in GPNs. Although the promotion of labour rights in GPNs is the goal of labour activists, they often encounter challenges related to their positions within the broader process of production (Cumbers et al. 2008). As labour unions are considered part of the production network, protesting against and within the production network, it is thus difficult to achieve their ultimate goals: improving working conditions and pressing corporations to address labour rights.

Franz (2010a) looks at the argument between large corporate retailers and local retailers in India. He suggests that challenges against the expansion of giant retailers are mediated by trade unions, where local retailers join hands with the unions to challenge the larger retailers. Bollhorn and Franz (2015) further employ the framework of GPNs to examine the collective actions of workers in Germany's automotive industry. They argue that understanding production networks, especially the weak points, helps workers to develop influencing strategies to overcome asymmetries in GPNs. While these scholars postulate how collective

actions, especially transnational CSOs, play effective roles, or can be understood within GPNs, they tend to focus on actors who are already involved or embedded within the *GPNs* and *fail to acknowledge the adverse consequences of collective actions*—often led by CSOs—orchestrating against the GPNs. Apparently aware of such a bias, scholars like Gibson-Graham (2008) and Werner (2016), just to quote a few authors, highlight the GPNs process as a whole and do insist on the uneven development generated by the so-called collective actions they came across. In the meantime, other scholars go further in that direction (Alford and Philips 2018; Phelps, Atienza, and Arias 2018) by revealing the antagonistic relations of GPNs and the ‘darker’ readings of their contributions to economic development. Findings made by Alford and Philips in their study on the political economy of state governance in global production networks in the South African fruit sector (2018) shows the importance of focusing on the ‘relational’ understanding of state governance, liable for helping us to reveal how the dynamics of state governance are shaped both by continual political contestation and the competitive commercial context of GPNs. On the other hand, Phelps, Atienza and Arias (2018) enlarge the theoretical debate and urge economic geographers working within several major extant schools of thought to pay greater attention to uneven economic development in general and the dark side of the economic geographies in particular. More recently in 2019, a particular case study in Cambodia (Bourdier 2019) underscores the power imbalance and the heterogeneous objectives of various actors supposed to work together (national/international NGOs, indigenous associations, dispossessed communities). The major consequences of this inextricable situation will be addressed below with the rubber case.

Agency, institutions and connections

The discussion of GPNs lies on the “nexus of interconnected functions and operations by firms and non-firm institutions through which goods and services are produced and distributed” (Coe, Hess, Yeung, Dicken and Henderson 2004: 471). Furthermore, an analysis undertaken via the lenses of a global political economy methodology is extended in order to appreciate how such worldwide interconnected system is consumed in different parts of the world. This emphasis is not only on businesses and nation states, but also on civil society. The interactions among these actors suggests contested space and power relations (Coe et al. 2008; Horne 2017). For state-centric scholarship, it is argued that the state or government is an important facilitator or mediator of GPNs; the role of the state in production networks range from facilitator, regulator, producer, to purchaser (Horner 2017). The roles of the state in GPNs is seen most clearly in developing countries, in which the state often intervenes in market networks (Yeung

2014). In a corporation-centric approach, scholars discuss the role of corporations as a crucial driver in GPNs. From this perspective, Yeung (2014: 83), among others, defines a GPN as “coordinated and controlled by a globally significant TNC and involves a vast network of their overseas affiliates, strategic partners, key customers and non-firm institutions.” These actors are the buyers (retailers, marketers, and traders), (turn-key) suppliers (providing materials or inputs), financiers (national investors, foreign direct investment stakeholders), cross-firm boundaries (operating their production across territories), and consumers/customers acting as end-users (Gereffi, Humphrey, and Sturgeon 2005; Hess 2004). While state and firm centric approaches have been widely discussed, scholars of GPNs have neither sufficiently explained nor conceptualised both non-corporation and non-institutional aspects, especially those represented by CSOs liable to possess power with the framework of GPNs (Coe et al. and 2008).

In GPNs, scholars suggest three frameworks for analysing the relations between the different actors: embeddedness, value and power (Henderson, Dicken, Hess, Coe and Yeung 2002). The present study focuses on power, and consists of three themes: 1) corporate power, or the extent to which primary corporations influence decision and resource allocation in relation to other firms in the network; 2) institutional power, referring to the power exercised by local governments, nation states, as well as international or interstate treaties or regulations that influence firms or investment; and 3) collective power, namely collective mobilisations staged by those who seek to influence the government and firms at particular locations of GPNs (Henderson et al., 2002). Within this power framework, a GPN can be understood as a contested space, where actors exercise their power spontaneously and asymmetrically for their respective interests (Levy 2008). Subsequently, our study examines the ongoing dynamic of a collective power perceived as a platform for CSOs to exercise their influence through collective (local and international) mobilisations. As it has been shown elsewhere, this is a space where labour unions, CSOs and social movements contest the other actors in GPNs (Nickow 2015). Whether in global value chains or production networks, CSOs and movement organisations have, on the one hand, monitored the performance of the states and business, and, on the other hand, represented the interests of those who are directly or indirectly affected by GPNs. In the Global South, CSOs have mobilised and represented the peasants/grassroots communities to challenge the adverse consequences of production by firms and their subsidiaries. However, the CSOs and social movements employ several distinct approaches which have, so far, been poorly documented and studied by scholars working on GPNs.

This paper, inspired by the framework of GPNs, describes two approaches. One is the use of a retroactive approach, which involves looking more deeply at those actors supporting or investing in operation of certain products, for example those actors that support investment in agricultural land in developing countries. This approach helps organisations to conceptualise and potentially overcome the spatial complexity of production networks located across different regions (Franz 2010a). The targeted actors could be TNCs, financiers, host governments, or the government providing, or linked to, the source of capital. The aim is to leverage influence on these actors to address the concerns of the peasant or marginalised communities whose interests and livelihoods are affected by the production network process. The Global South, where much of the manufacturing takes place, is seen as a central reference of the production network because of the ‘race to the bottom’ for cheap labour and unexploited resources. Cambodia provides us a vivid example of this tendency. Capital, either from the Global North or South, flows in, and outputs/products flow out, especially to the Global North. To exert influence, the affected communities and CSOs can trace backwards to identify the actors involved in investment, as part of determining what part of the production process to challenge so as to leverage for power. This approach alone is not always effective, as we will see below, so movements may also undertake a further step by tracing forward to identify the transnational actors involved in the distribution of products. The intent is to influence those actors involved in the distribution, facilitation, and consumption of outputs or products, with the goal of addressing the concerns of the communities and CSOs in the Global South.

Protesting GPNs has been possible as a result of the globalising economy, in which the means of communication and access to information has expanded. This includes the use of smartphones, the internet, the use of English as a global language and a globalised mass and social media. Cheap airline ticket and trains have also facilitated this process which has enabled communities, activists, and organisations from diverse geographic areas and walks of life to connect across huge distances (Tarrow 2005). Some Cambodian indigenous and Khmer actors have recently started taking advantage of such opportunities. Best seen as networks of actors which are organised at local, national, and international levels, transnational movements mobilise people with shared goals and interests across boundaries, to leverage influence on targets (Smith 2013). In the 1970s and 1980s, transnational movements targeted national governments and transnational organisations, such as the UN, to apply pressure in order to achieve their goals, such as banning land mines, creating an international court of justice, and protecting human rights (Smith 2013). While these traditional approaches are still

implemented, in this era of globalisation new transnational actors, such as multinational corporations and financiers are being targeted. This new type of transnational social movement, which includes anti-globalisation, anti-corporatisation and environmental movements (Borras 2010; Dauvergne and Le Baron 2014), targets governments to pressure them to regulate corporations, but also to exercise their collective influence and achieve their specific demands directly targets the corporations, (Soule 2009). But as production networks have multiplied across wider territories, the capability of activists and social movement organisations, already constrained by limited resources, has been frequently hampered (Gellert 2015; Ponte and Sturgeon 2014).

Two decades ago, the concept of transnational advocacy networks (TANs) emerged in conjunction with transnational social movements. These addressed the challenges local activists were facing in the emergence of globalisation. TANs are defined as “those actors working internationally on an issue, who are bound together by shared values, a common discourse, and dense exchange of information and services” (Keck and Sikkink 1999: 89). Within the conceptualisation of TANs are four suggested procedures: (i) information politics, or the ability to share and move politically useable information to where it will have the most impact; (ii) symbolic politics, or the collective stories and actions that legitimise claims; (iii) accountability politics, or the ability to compel influential actors to take action on the policies that they endorsed; and (iv) leverage politics, which is a tactic to enrol powerful actors to affect a situation with weaker networks (Keck and Sikkink 1999). The last procedure, also known as a ‘boomerang and bounce-back’ approach, has important implications for the outcomes of action by TANs. The domestic actors/activists with limited resources and networks, which are unable to influence their national governments, can seek international alliances with actors inclined to broadcast their local grievances to international communities. Although this concept of TANs is increasingly cited and adopted by scholars (Shawki 2011; Smith 2004), it was originally employed to target institutions or entities of the government, state, or international organisations in different locations. It provides no specific focus on actors at each stage of production networks, but does take into consideration interconnected actors, like private firms and the state. Nonetheless, this boomerang concept can be beneficial, particularly with respect to information sharing, which can be drawn upon for tracing backwards and forwards to leverage influence on actors in GPNs.

2 - Transnational peasant movements in Southeast Asia and Cambodia

It has been demonstrated that the principal adversaries of territorial and land claims throughout the world, and in this Cambodia is not an exception, are the protagonists of a neo-liberal economic model that has impoverished and dispossessed major sectors of rural societies, blocked the improvement of locally based production (subsistence and commercial agriculture), and promoted capitalist expansion by excluding local populations (Scott 1976; Akram-Lodhi, 2007; Li 2014). Similar to issues previously experienced in Africa, Southeast Asian peasants and indigenous communities have seen their property and land appropriated by large corporations for agricultural purposes, with the complicity of the host states (Borras and Franco 2011). Anthropologists have revealed struggles and displayed various mechanisms of resistance in Southeast Asia (Li 2014; Scott 1976). Incidentally, the global food crisis in 2008/2009 has exacerbated the rush to secure unexploited land and resources in the developing South, all of which are funded by financial corporations, banks, and TNCs. Through their local partners, namely contractors and subsidiaries, they have made investments in land resources in developing countries, instituting a so-called global land grab environment (Deininger and Byerlee 2011). Such investments have caused deleterious social, economic, and environmental impacts on marginalised communities. These communities, supported by Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), have challenged both corporations and the implicated nation-states, employing both domestic approaches and transnational strategies (Borras and Edelman 2016). Assisted by NGOs, transnational grassroots peasant movements have started spreading in Cambodia and elsewhere in Southeast Asia, with the aim to influence national governments and corporate actors to comply with their objectives, including reclaiming land and developing equitable land reform policies.

Even if the purpose of this paper is not to comment the most recent land-grab literatureⁱⁱ, what remains important here is to consider that Southeast Asian local peasant movements have also joined and networked with larger peasant movement organisations, like La Vía Campesina (LVC) and International Land Coalition (ILC) that have farmer members and local associations/unions around the world (Borras 2010). Officially starting in the 1993 following an international conference held in Brussels (Belgium), LVC is the world's largest representative network of millions of peasants from both the Global North and South. It has been recognised by many as a legitimate, and extremely important, transnational peasant movement (Borras and Edelman 2016), contributing to global trade talks and negotiations,

addressing world-wide food and agricultural genetic issues, and generally putting peasant communities' interests at the forefront of discussions. In part, because of its effective non-violent collective resistance to corporate-led agriculture and the globalisation of agricultural production networks, many peasants from the Global North and South have joined this movement (Martinez-Torres and Rosset 2010). ILC in Southeast Asia has, likewise, played a prominent role in supporting peasants and affected communities to leverage influence on corporations and the state in Bangladesh, Cambodia, India, Indonesia, Nepal and the Philippines. With more than 207 member associations, the ILC group employs three tactics: (i) connecting members to join in actions; (ii) mobilising through facilitation of informed and effective action, and (iii) trying to counteract key actors, including governments, corporations, and investors (Coalition 2016). Both LVC and ILC have been described as the most successful transnational peasant movements to protect peasant interests, including reclaiming land, price negotiations, local and international agricultural policies, land reform, gender issues in agriculture, terms and conditions of international treaties, and environmental protection (Borras 2008; Borras and Edelman, 2016; Martinez-Torres and Rosset 2010). One of their successes in Southeast Asia is the case of Filipino and Indonesian peasant movements (Gellert 2015; Peluso, Afiff and Rachman 2008).

What about Cambodia? Presently, despite punctual attempts to establish links with the two peasant movement organisations, neither LVC nor ILC “footprints” are to be found in Cambodia. Following the demise of the Khmer Rouge regime in 1979, and more particularly after the Vietnamese occupation in 1989, the Kingdom has progressively adopted free market economic reforms (Un 2009). The inflow of foreign capital since the early 2000s has increased markedly, despite a number of international organisations, including international financial corporations, describing the national investment climate as risky. The increase in foreign investment has been due in part to the government's economic development policies designed to attract foreign capital in addition to foreign aid. For the agricultural and natural resources-related sectors, the government in 2005 issued sub-decree 146 on Economic Land Concession (ELCs), by which both national and foreign investors could obtain (easy) access to land or natural resource concessions for up to 99 years (now reduced to 50 years). By 2013, approximately 2.6 million hectares of land had been granted to foreign, domestic and/or joint venture companies under this ELC scheme (Neth, Rith and Yokohari 2013). These investments have caused adverse rather than favourable social, economic and environmental impacts for grassroots communities. Another source mentions that approximately 0.77 million people

(ADHOC 2014), including forestry and indigenous communities (Prachvuthy 2011), have suffered adverse impacts like land loss, natural resource depletion and housing deprivation. In 2012, the government issued a moratorium to put an end to ELC licenses, but unsolved territorial and legal consequences attributed by the license holder companies remain. To demand accountability for these unfavourable impacts, a number of mobilisations—protests, road blockages, campaigns, advocacy, and petitions—have been staged by affected grassroots communities with the assistance of NGOs. A certain visibility has therefore been obtained through such engagements, but it is not difficult to presume that broader political actions are needed to sustain and monitor their implementation.

3- Case one: Tracing backward (when an Indigenous movement find allies)

Among hundreds of ELCs granted given by the Cambodian government was one awarded to one of Vietnam’s largest privately-owned companies, Hoang Anh Gia Lai (HAGL). It included six, non-contiguous, concession areas, totalling 47,370 hectares, in north-eastern Cambodia (Global Witness 2013). Stretching across the indigenous dominated province of Ratanakiri, these investments in agriculture, especially rubber plantations, have adversely impacted seventeen indigenous communities. These communities have witnessed negative consequences in their forest land, farmland, traditional burial grounds and other sacred sites, as well as water and fish resources. The indigenous communities faced human rights issues and were concerned about the environmental conditions of their land and how to safeguard it for future generations (Bugalski and Thuon 2015). After commercial operations began in late 2009, resistance by the affected communities was provoked against the government’s endorsement and the company’s project. From early 2009 until 2013, the communities began their self-mobilisation against the adverse impacts, with limited support by community-based organisations in the province. A real social mobilisation was there, but the long-lasting movement of the affected people did not achieve too much significant results (besides hasty localised resistances in a few villages) as the HAGL and the provincial government did not acknowledge the claims of the communitiesⁱⁱⁱ. David could not defeat Goliath. Later, once the damage was already done, when cut forests had been replaced by rubber trees, the disabused indigenous communities welcomed the promises made by four local associations guided by a powerful American NGO. Altogether they staged international movements tracing backward that identified and influenced actors behind this transnational investment and production network, at a time when the investment

had not yet produced any products/outputs. The purposes of the movement were to demand cash compensation, to reclaim lands and get back related resources from the company and the government. The Figure 01 illustrates the targeted actors identified by the movements.

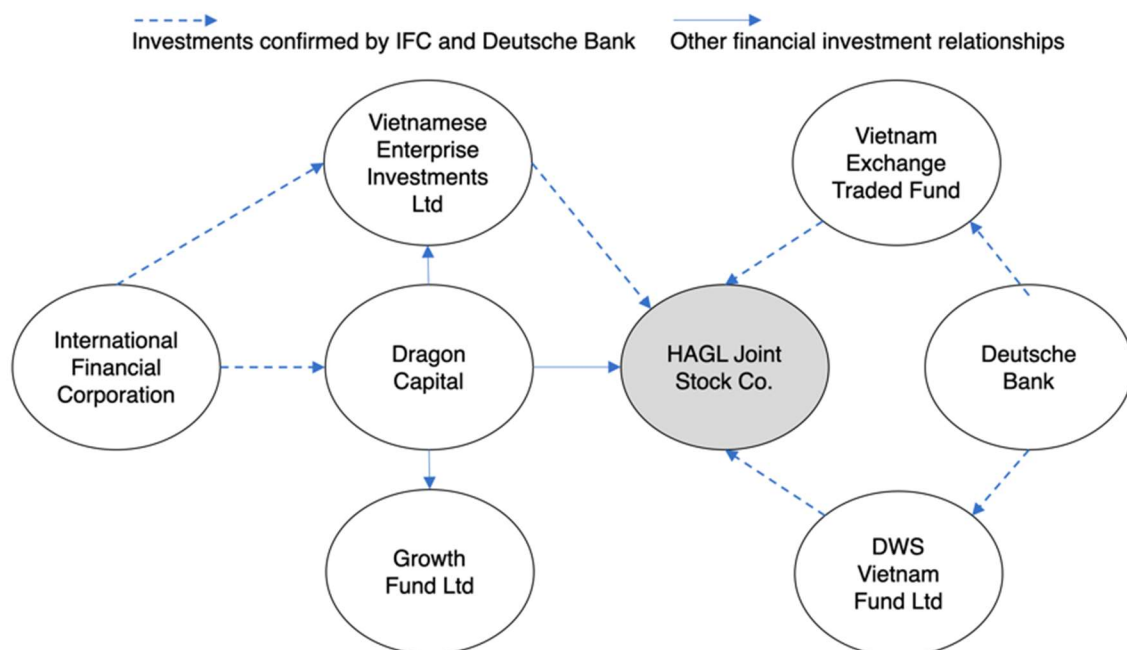


Figure 01: Main engaged non-public actors, rubber case

HAGL (or HAGL Joint Stock Co. ltd) was set up in 1990 as a small furniture-producing factory in Pleiku, Gia Lai province in the central highlands of Vietnam. It was registered as a joint stock company in 2006, listed on the Ho Chi Minh Stock Exchange in 2008, and by 2011 was the country's second largest property developer, worth US\$258 million. For the large-scale investment in Cambodia, Global Witness (2013) found that HAGL was backed by two large financial institutions connected to several other companies also behind HAGL (see figure 01). IFC, a private lending arm of the World Bank, which claims to have the most sophisticated and widely recognised social and environmental standards for every investment, partly financed HAGL through Dragon Capital Group (DCG), and Vietnamese Enterprise Investment Ltd (VEIL), which is also owned by DCG. Since 2002, the IFC has been a shareholder in DCG, holding an 8.8% share in the company. In 2003, the IFC also invested US\$8 million directly in VEIL. By 2006, the IFC's share with VEIL increased by US\$6.95 million, to 5% of VEIL shares. Listed on the Irish Stock Exchange, VEIL holds somewhere around 4% and 0.64% shares respectively of HAGL and HAGL Rubber (a subsidy of HAGL). DCG also holds a

1.54% interest in HAGL through its Vietnam Growth Fund Ltd (VGF) (Global Witness 2013). The other financing entity is Deutsche Bank, a German global banking and financial services company. A member of the UN Principle Responsible Investment, the UN Global Compact, and the Banking of Environment Initiative, Deutsche Bank also funded HAGL through the Vietnam Exchange Trade Fund and DWS Vietnam Fund Ltd, according to Global Witness (2013). Deutsche Bank, through DWS Vietnam Fund, holds about 3.4 million shares of HAGL (worth approximately US\$4.5 million). In 2011, by using Deutsche Bank Trust Company America as its depository bank, HAGL became the first Vietnamese company listed on the London Stock Exchange's Professional Securities Market.

With information concerning the financiers involved in HAGL's venture in Cambodia, Global Witness (an international NGOs based in the UK) gave the information to the local NGO Equitable Cambodia (EC) through its US-based patron, Inclusive Development International (IDI) to conduct a thorough human rights impact study and other assessments in order to effectively advocate to the concerned stakeholders and investors (Work 2016). With existing information about IFC's accountability mechanisms, especially the Compliance Advisor Ombudsman (CAO), the NGOs and affected communities approached IFC to file a complaint. Under the supervision of EC and IDI, local associations including Highlanders Association, Cambodian Indigenous Youth Association, and Indigenous Rights Active Members, which claim to be representatives of the indigenous communities in the province, joined these international movements to exert their collective influence on HAGL, through their financiers. In February 2014, indigenous communities of fifteen villages (more than 6000 inhabitants) in Ratanakiri province—guided by local/international NGOs—lodged a complaint with the CAO. The complaint concerned a range of negative environmental and social impacts caused by HAGL's Cambodia operation. The CAO office from the World Bank accepted the complaint and assessed the situation with the recommendation of employing its voluntary dispute resolution process. The CAO agreed to mediate between HAGL and the communities and NGOs (CAO 2014). In April 2014, the CAO secured the participation of HAGL, and later on the support of the Cambodian government in November 2014. As a result, a tripartite meeting was initiated in Siem Reap province. At the meeting HAGL made a series of commitments, including a promise not to engage in any further clearance or development of its concession lands. The agreement led to a plan to conduct joint boundary demarcations in order to clearly identify the overlapping areas claimed by both HAGL and the communities. The company also agreed to either compensate or return some of the grabbed land and to support the communities to get official land titles from the government (CAO 2016), while HAGL obtained their

concession land registered with the ministry of land in Cambodia. The company diplomatically apologised to indigenous communities for the adverse impacts caused by their operations (territorial enclosure, overall deforestation, land monopolizing, burial ground destruction).

To identify the overlapping areas between the two parties, the government established a technical working group in June 2016. In collaboration with the CAO mediator, who was orchestrating the process, the five supporting NGOs finally demarcated 740 hectares in 2018, consisting of mountain spirits, heritage sites, river sides, water and swamp areas. All well and good, but anthropological investigations by one of the two authors of this paper in affected villages showed that, apart from exceptional cases in two or three villages,^{iv} all the previously cultivated and forested land grabbed previously was not taken into account. Repeated conversations with elders, local chiefs, women and men indicated that this demarcation did not satisfy the affected villagers^v, given that most communities tend to claim an area of customary land (swidden areas, reserved land, burial ground, sacred forest) of up to 5,000 hectares per village^{vi}. At the best, the mediation process was nothing more than a sticking plaster over a major wound. The area claimed by each village was considered much larger than the regulations on traditional land occupation that the government established in 2009, and none of the supporting NGOs ever tried to advocate and challenge this controversial governmental decision. Deprived villagers were, once again, left to themselves.

On the other hand, the two leading NGOs keep on claiming to have achieved significant impacts due to their involvement, such as capacity building of local associations and indigenous communities, empowering communities' voices, advocating strategies of approach, providing knowledge about indigenous rights and land rights as well as other information sharing, and promoting communities' participation in research and data collection^{vii}. They also argue that they have impacted the company to temporarily suspend some areas of land clearance, to negotiate and dialogue with the communities and NGOs, and to relinquish some of their land, based on the government's 2012 directive providing a moratorium on new land concession and reallocating land from concession areas to affected communities^{viii}. Despite these 'glorious' achievements, the major demand of the communities—restitution of their lands—has not yet occurred and is still an uncertain venture.

4 - Case two: Tracing backward and forward (global action with less influence from the peasant movement itself)

In 2006, a Cambodian, Thai, and Taiwanese joint venture company invested in a company involved in the agro-sugar industry in Koh Kong Province, south-western part of Cambodia. Endorsed by the Cambodian government, the investment converted 20,000 hectares of land into a large sugarcane plantation and involved the construction of a sugar processing factory. This harmed the livelihoods of about 500 households in the Chikor Leu communities, as their land was illegally confiscated by the company. Having occupied this territory in 1979, the communities have challenged the company since mid-2006 to demand reasonable cash compensation, restitution of their land, and/or a land swap. From 2006 to 2010, the communities, with the support of NGOs, have employed various tactics locally, such as protests, road blocks, petitioning concerned ministries (agriculture, land, environment), the national assembly, the Prime Minister's office, and filing a court complaint against the company. But they received no satisfactory results, only a meagre cash compensation from the company, which increased from US\$50 in 2006 to US\$2,000 in 2009, but was far less than the land price at that time. They also suffered repressive responses, such as violently dispersing peaceful protests and other intimidation activities undertaken by the police and private guards hired by the company. Most poor families were forced by desperation to accept cash from the company, but the remaining 300 or so families, with better livelihoods and the support of NGOs, have resorted to a range of tactics aimed at the company directly and at the government indirectly to address their grievances. In order to do this, they traced backward to determine the key stakeholders behind the investment and traced forward to identify those actors benefitting from the sugar production (see Figure 02).

The peasant communities and NGOs targeted those stakeholders, including those involved in financing, manufacturing, transporting and distributing to end consumers and trade facilitators^{ix}. In 2010, local NGOs determined that unrefined sugar was being exported from Cambodia to the parent company in Thailand, Khon Kaen Sugar Limited (KSL), for final processing. The sugar was then exported to the UK through the European Union's *Everything But Arms* (EBA) scheme^x. The sugar was sold to Tate and Lyle (T&L) in the UK, which signed a five-year contract with KSL to buy sugar from Cambodia, Thailand and Laos. Given this information, the peasant communities and NGOs filed complaints with the National Human

Rights Commission of Thailand (NHRC-T)^{xi}. In February 2010, after investigating the case, the NHRC-T confirmed that KSL’s subsidiary company had breached the communities’ rights. The NHRC-T invited KSL to explain the negative impacts and human rights violations. KSL claimed that its Cambodian partner had already remedied the issues, despite the fact that they had provided no significant compensation to the peasant communities. However, in late 2010, the company did increase the amount of cash compensation offered to US\$2500, and twelve long-suffering families accepted the offer, even though it remained a low level of compensation. In the same year, the company established a Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) department to address all issues pertaining to business activities, but not the demands of the peasant communities and NGOs.

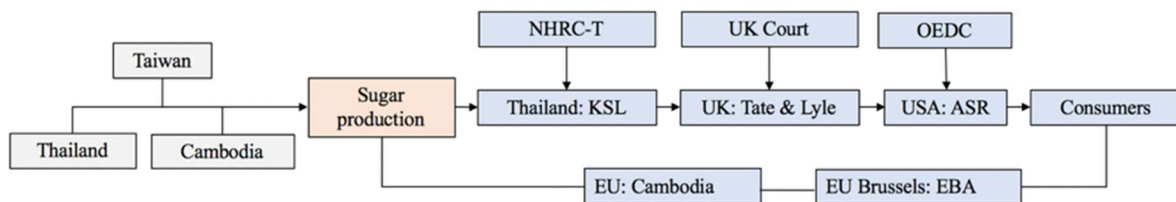


Figure 02: Tracing Production Network

In response, the NGOs, on behalf of the communities, wrote letters to T&L to complain about the adverse impacts of its sugarcane suppliers in Cambodia^{xii}. T&L failed to investigate these allegations and denied responsibility for any adverse impacts of its suppliers. In May 2012, 200 families from within the communities, with the assistance of NGOs, filed complaints against T&L with a UK court^{xiii}. The purpose of the complaint was to demand that T&L and its suppliers address the concerns of the communities^{xiv}. After several failed attempts (October 2014 and early 2015), due to myriad reasons, no trial has yet been organised. Since T&L was at the time a member of Bonsucro^{xv}, the NGOs wrote a letter to Bonsucro to complain about T&L purchasing sugar linked with human rights violations and harming grassroots communities in Cambodia. After questioning T&L, Bonsucro terminated T&L from its membership in 2012^{xvi} after it failed to acknowledge and address the allegations. At this point, T&L sold its sugar business to the American Sugar Refinery (ASR). The communities and NGOs, in collaboration with the US-based Earth Rights International, complained to ASR, but there was no positive response. The communities and NGOs then complained to the OECD

regarding the misconduct of ASR and its sugar suppliers in Cambodia. ASR responded by advising the NGOs that they should not file two separate complaints (to the UK court and to the OECD), otherwise ASR would not participate in the case. The OECD was unable to proceed because ASR refused to be involved in the process^{xvii}. As of late 2012, the cash compensation offered to the communities increased to US\$3120 per household, a still marginal sum compared to the losses incurred. This offer was given in order to try to persuade the affected communities to accept cash in return for terminating their transnational protests and complaints^{xviii}. Twenty-one households later opted for this cash compensation. As of late 2013, the cash compensation was again increased to more than US\$3120 per family, but none of the affected families have accepted the offer, as the communities were now confident that further action would be taken in the UK court.

In 2012, the communities, through the local NGOs, filed a complaint about the adverse impacts of the EU's EBA to the EU delegation in Cambodia and in Brussels. Although international donor aid plays an important development role in Cambodia, the extent to which it influences the government of Cambodia remains controversial^{xix}. In land reform and large-scale land dispute issues, the role of international aid and donors is ambiguous. In this case, seeking intervention from a large donor and trade facilitator, such as the EU (by far the largest donor to Cambodia at that time), to influence the government and the company involved was not an effective measure. In January 2014, the EU parliament finally passed a resolution calling on its executive body to act on the EBA preferential trading scheme, which was found to carry a high risk of human rights violations in Cambodia. Following the resolution, an EU Member of Parliament officially visited Cambodia to conduct a preliminary investigation. The mission uncovered serious impacts of the sugar-producing company in Cambodia (EC and IDI 2013), including human rights abuses, forced evictions, and adverse environmental and economic impacts.

While these provided hope to the peasants as well as the NGOs, no fruitful results followed. In the election 2013 the opposition party [Cambodian National Rescue Party] claimed a surprisingly high proportion of electoral support and came close to defeating the ruling party (the Cambodian People's Party). As a consequence, the situation of NGOs and communities' collective actions became fraught because the government started accusing them of supporting the opposition party, and accused them of staging "colour revolution", more exactly a counter-revolution against the legitimate government. In 2014, the Law on Association and NGOs, which was known as a horrific tool to suppress NGOs and associations, was passed by the national assembly. International NGOs such as International Republican Institute, and National

Democratic Institute were expelled from the country. The leading NGO supporting the sugarcane movements became then targeted by the government and had their license suspended by the Ministry of Interior in September 2017. The NGO was alleged of breaching of the Law on Associations and NGOs and its own by-laws, but was then left in limbo until February 2018^{xx}.

Before June 2018, prior to the upcoming election in July the same year, the Ministry of Land Management moved forward by providing a solution to the 175 families who agreed to accept three hectares of land, and a compensation of US\$2,500 per household. The land is located about 40-50 km away from the sugarcane plantation areas, and the ministry, together with provincial office of Koh Kong, promised clearing the forest land, infrastructure, and offering official land title^{xxi}. While this was welcome by NGOs and observers, another group of 500 farmers, representing about 1,317 families, from the same area marched towards Phnom Penh and the Ministry to protest for the same compensation and land return^{xxii}. The return of these families created issues for the Ministry, and the concerned stakeholders to address the complaints. The ministry rejected the claim and argued that these families had already received compensation from the sugarcane companies almost a decade ago. When asked why they protested, even though they were repeatedly reported of receiving compensation at the early state of their protests (sometimes in early 2010s), they claimed that they were scared of not receiving anything, so accepted a paltry cash compensation^{xxiii}. This illustrates that the intervention of NGOs in the process broke solidarity of the affected communities in the sugarcane case: while some of them belatedly followed NGOs^{xxiv} and international supply chain movements, others remained in the village. Ethnographic testimonies collected late 2018 show that social cohesion did not exist anymore.

Discussion

In this paper, we have argued that quite a few previous studies of GPNs have neglected transnational social movements and protests of CSOs which, antagonistically occupy space and power within the framework of GPNs. Under these circumstances, we have illustrated how two very particular transnational social movements played roles in understanding GPNs. As each of the actors possesses unique powers to contest from their respective interests, we came to identify that the real demands of the affected villagers (to get their land back) was not taken into consideration by the NGOs supporting their cause. With regard to the case one, the American NGO managed to reveal the financial tracking of the Vietnamese company and contributed to lobby its financial backers like the Deutsche Bank, the Credit Suisse and the

Dragon Capital. While the NGO group forced these investors to suspend their contractual relation with the incriminated company, this performance did not reflect the concrete expectations of the dispossessed villagers who still remain... dispossessed.

With the case two, mainly characterised by a long-term international advocacy, affected villagers' demands are still in the pipeline and one may wonder whether they will be met one of these days. NGOs' abilities to build a coalition with a group of farmers from the same case created complexity which turned to be difficult to deal with, particularly turning some of the community members away. The situation worsened when the later (dissident voices) provoked protests not only for their perceived priorities but also against those who partake in the NGOs coalition for international movements targeting multinational corporations.

Paradoxically, in spite of a deep uncertainty encountered in nearly each community and every village, in both cases supporting actors and NGOs claim "innovative action", "achievement", "victory", and "success". Of course, none of these CSO's allies are totally satisfied with the ongoing evolution of the process that they launched, but such deceptions become justifications to continue (endlessly?) their actions and to launch new projects as long as they get funding to persevere. The main challenge persists: how to act appropriately, and to engage in a sincere collaboration with peasant communities? Contrary to the NGOs, indigenous villages cannot wait endlessly for a hypothetical positive outcome. "How to survive and live with dignity without land?" was the motto that we constantly received during our fieldwork. This means that, so far, the expected collaboration has not been translated into a real dialogue. Undoubtedly, NGOs have removed the affected communities from their relative isolation and made them aware of the worldwide scene. They also proposed new tools and strategies for creating multiple alliances but nowhere through these alliances, could we observe a proper consideration of local concerns stipulating that an indigenous farmer without land is like a 'dead man walking'. Any other material and symbolic returns he may get (financial, technical awareness, empowerment, participation, etc.) are culturally perceived as minor compensations. While other transnational CSOs, such as LVC and ILC, have adopted more comprehensive attitudes with some of Southeast Asia's peasant movements in terms of reclaiming land, impacting TNC behaviour, and influencing government land policies and reforms, the two transnational movements occurring in Cambodia followed different directions. Right from the start, even if belatedly, they arrived with their ready-made strategies, decided the content and the extent of their advocacy, and organised their campaign and promotion accordingly. After being convinced, villagers accepted the advice of the *bang thom* (important persons) but at the same time they progressively lose their autonomy, the one which animated them during their

prior struggle (territorial rights) when they were still alone. For indigenous peoples in Ratanakiri who traditionally practised swidden agriculture, occupying people's land means depriving villagers from land tenure, but more fundamentally it treats with disdain a socio-territorial order, negotiated rules and social fabric, all historically constructed, on which local citizenship relies to regulate access to land. Through this vernacular, holistic, conception, the recovered 740 hectares—most of them already deforested by the Vietnamese company, and anyway not yet officially returned to the villagers^{xxv}—are just a first-aid kit for the affected villages.

In the sugarcane case, while the latest solution was welcomed by the 175 families, it appears that NGO led movements have contributed to increase the fragmentation of the social organization of the villages. The relative sociocultural cohesion of the affected peasants has been challenged, creating different coalitions nowadays unwilling to join together. Some peoples have aligned with NGOs, while other ordinary peasants did not accept the conditions proposed by the NGOs. As illustrated earlier, the latter returned to protest (but in a different way) after the NGO led campaign succeeded in reclaiming land for others. The movement of these affected communities, as a whole, has lost its autonomy and coherence, and its ability to advocate and bargain with the government since the beginning of the protests in 2006, and 2012. Besides, the NGO led movements, particularly the villagers who followed them, have been systematically accused by government bodies of being incited by the “foreign” NGOs rather than following their own initiatives^{xxvi}.

Our analysis of the two cases differs from the position of Cumbers et al (2008), Franz (2010a, 2010b), and Bollhorn and Franz (2015) who suggested only the effectiveness of collective actions. At some point, our analysis reveal similar (but not homogenous) dysfunctions already revealed by Alford and Philips (2018) and Phelps, Atienza, and Arias (2018). From our point of view, in phase with these quoted authors' reflections, both favourable and unfavourable outcomes need to be accounted for, because within the contested space and power relations of GPNs, each actor takes a different stance to defend its respective interests. As defined by Coe et al. (2008: 274), a GPN “is one whose interconnected nodes and links extend spatially across national boundaries...” The interconnected nodes and links, as echoed in the framework of space and power relation of these authors, as well as in this Cambodian study, are the intersections where the different actors' power within the GPNs strike each other. The nature of GPNs suggests for the quoted authors that neither of these actors' power overrides another legitimate claim. Unfortunately, the two Cambodian cases are tainted by a power imbalance,

asymmetric relations and unilateral guidance, as Werner (2016) clearly pointed out by using the concept of “uneven development” in other settings. Inexorably in the two case studies under scrutiny in Cambodia, the expected fulfilment of the dispossessed farmers is incomplete—not to say neglected—as most actions led by supporting actors tends to focus on the interaction between corporations and the involved states, but much less on what has been achieved for the affected communities. And this is what matters more than anything else for the dispossessed villagers.

Concluding remarks

In order to ensure greater success of transnational movements within the frameworks of GPNs, as well as from an ethical point of view, the movement organisations have to manoeuvre themselves in a rhetorical approach that would not undermine grassroots’ vision and autonomy—all aspects of movements that are of significance to contest TNCs and states. Strongly imposing transnational CSOs’ rhetoric of ‘success’ will otherwise, as our empirical case studies suggest, delegitimise the communities’ historical heritage, claims, rights and power. Meanwhile, to ensure sustainable operation of their complex production networks, TNCs would do well to cooperate not only with the states as regulators and mediators (Horner 2017) but also with transnational CSOs provided the latter take time to understand the problem, which is where the real human consequences of the massive land encroachment which took place in Cambodia occurred. This multi-centred approach implies “strategic coupling”, as suggested by Yeung (2014: 72 and *passim*), as an analytical approach of the GPN framework. Yeung suggests that, in the context of developmental states and the neo-liberalised global economy, domestic or international firms employ de-coupling approaches to dis-embed themselves from the states, and re-couple with international and lead corporations. As this study suggests, especially with the rubber plantation in Ratanakiri, the coupling approach should not be limited to the discussion of firm-to-firm, or firm-to-state relations. Also under consideration should be whether, and how, lead firms/TNCs strategically couple with, or co-opt, transnational or local CSOs. This can be considered to be a new type of corporate activism (Dauvergne and Le Baron 2014). Such kind of ‘corporatised assemblage’, if we adopt an expression inspired by Bruno Latour’s theoretical framework (2005) oscillates within the bottom and the top, and forces the local/global civil society to confront not only the states but also the TNCs.

With regards to the two depicted cases, we do assume that a so-called global civil society which does not give the opportunity to the affected peoples to orient, to control and—if circumstances allow—to lead major interventions supposed to benefit them, is bound to be uncompleted. Otherwise, not only dispossessed peoples' objectives will not be met, but a certain defeatism, mixed with resignation, may threaten to percolate into most aspects of the peasants lives. This is exactly what happened in the two Cambodian cases: the grassroots communities' vivacity was eroded and most villagers became less active and confrontational after feeling that, according to various testimonies, "*Angkar* (NGOs) know what to do", "We (villagers) just wait and see what they (NGOs) promise to bring us". Although some NGOs can be proud to get this social recognition, where is the societal empowerment they are supposed to bring and what about people's dignity and autonomy?

Notes

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- ⁱ GPN is a concept in development literature which refers to the nexus of interconnected functions, operations and transactions through which a specific product or service is produced, distributed, and consumed. By extension, GPN is one whose interconnected nodes and links extend spatially across national boundaries and, in doing so, integrates parts of disparate national and subnational territories.
- ⁱⁱ Among the latest, see: Borrás and Edelman (2016).
- ⁱⁱⁱ Field enquiries, from 2011 to 2013.
- ^{iv} Field enquiries, February to June 2017.
- ^v Field enquiries, *ibid.*
- ^{vi} Interview with an NGO officer (04 April 2016)
- ^{vii} Source: press release (<https://www.inclusivedevelopment.net/cambodian-indigenous-communities-win-back-their-sacred-land-from-vietnamese-rubber-developer/>), confirmed by personal interviews (January 2019).
- ^{viii} Interviews with local Indigenous organisations, December 2018/January 2019)
- ^{ix} We did not investigate how the NGOs lobbied the consumers.
- ^x EU's EBA emerged in 2001 to give Least Developing Countries full duty-free and quota-free access to the EU for all their exports, with the exception of arms and armaments. Cambodia is one of the 49 countries. The objectives of EBA trade preferences include 'the promotion of sustainable development and good governance in the developing countries' according to EU regulations.
- ^{xi} An independent non-for-profit organisation based in Bangkok, Thailand, whose work protects and promotes human rights in the country and the region.
- ^{xii} Interview with a lawyer (20 December 2013). The representatives in Koh Kong, Kampong Speu, and Oddar Meanchey provinces signed the letter of complaint.
- ^{xiii} The complaint process was assisted by Jones Day, a pro bono lawyer in the UK, and a Cambodian lawyer.
- ^{xiv} Interview with NGO executive director (03 December 2013).
- ^{xv} Bonsucro is an association in the UK that provides certificates to member companies to prove that their sugar has been bought with no link to human rights abuses or adverse impacts.
- ^{xvi} Interview with a lawyer.
- ^{xvii} According to its procedures, the OECD cannot take further action until all parties agree to continue the case. In the situation described here, because ASR declined to continue with the OECD, the case was finally dropped.
- ^{xviii} A villager representative (01 November 2013), villager representative (02 November 2013), and villager representative (01 November 2013).
- ^{xix} There is no place in this short paper to examine carefully this point but we must be aware of the veiled critics on NGOs submissive relationships to their donors as it has been highlighted in the extensive literature that critiques the NGO mode. These critics deserve to be fleshed out with better reference to a long scholarly debate associated with arguments put forwards by, for instance, Edwards and Hulme (1998) and Banks, Hulme and Edwards (2015).
- ^{xx} Equitable Cambodia allowed to reopen; <https://www.phnompenhpost.com/national/equitable-cambodia-allowed-reopen> (access 19 August 2019)
- ^{xxi} Land dispute settled in Koh Kong; <https://www.khmertimeskh.com/507031/land-dispute-settled-in-koh-kong/> (accessed 19 August 2019)
- ^{xxii} More than 500 Koh Kong villagers Protest at Land Ministry; <https://en.vodhotnews.com/more-than-500-koh-kong-villagers-protest-at-land-ministry/> (accessed 19 August 2019)
- ^{xxiii} Interview with a protester (12 Nov 2018).
- ^{xxiv} It is worth mentioning that NGOs came in a later date, once the damage was done.
- ^{xxv} In Cambodia, any land retroceded by the company automatically belongs to the government (not to the previous users). The latter has the sovereignty to decide whether he will transfer it to the villages who are the historical inhabitants.
- ^{xxvi} Interview with a member of parliament and former minister (17 Dec 2013).

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