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**THE BUNONG CULTURE OF SILENCE:
EXPLORING BUNONG PERSPECTIVES ON PARTICIPATION
AT THE INTERFACE BETWEEN BUNONG CULTURE AND
DEVELOPMENT ORGANISATIONS.**

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Abstract

The Bunong indigenous minority who live in the North-East of Cambodia have experienced rapid change in the last decade. With the arrival of commercialised society has come the development agenda, which has sought the participation of minorities, but with only limited success. Using Long's concept of 'interface analysis', the purpose of this study is to examine how cultural change has effected Bunong people's interaction with NGOs (Non-Government Organisations).

The study has employed qualitative interviews, secondary historical and ethnographic works, and the authors own 4 years of experience to construct an ethnography of change, and an analysis of Bunong-NGO interaction.

Four reinforcing narratives were identified: rapid external change, weak conservatism, knowledge fault-lines, and cultural inferiority. It is argued that these combine to form a Freirian 'Culture of Silence', where the Bunong own the view of the dominant discourse - that their life project is inferior - causing them look to external models of development.

As NGOs act in this environment, they are in danger of perpetuating this problem. While programming suggests that agendas are sensitive to the Bunong environment, the culture of modern Khmer organisations reinforces the perception of cultural inferiority and perpetuates dependency on external knowledge.

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This thesis is dedicated to Vannak, who has graciously put up with my foreign ways as a colleague, friend, and now research assistant. I hope his own struggles find an analog here.

Introduction

The Research Problem

The Bunong people who live in the North-East Highlands of Cambodia have for centuries lived in relative isolation maintaining a way of life in the highland forests based on hunting, foraging, and rice cultivation. Their relationship to other cultures was limited to minor trade excursions and slave raids, but in the 20th Century the relationship to the outside world dramatically shifted. After initial exploratory visits and ‘pacification missions’ by the French, the Khmer began to colonise the highland areas as part of their modern nation-building project driven by King Sihanouk. External relations then changed from one of infrequent trade, to one of governance. While this process was disrupted by war and political upheaval, with the re-establishment of a democratic Khmer government in 1993, the process of ‘developing’ and ‘civilising’ the north-east highlands has begun again. Development in this context can be understood as an interface (Long 2001) or fault-line between global ‘commercialised society’, Khmer culture, and that of the culture of the Bunong.

Drawing from the negative experiences of other indigenous minorities around the world, researchers and NGOs (Non-Government Organisations¹) have called for the participation of highland minorities in development projects, in keeping with indigenous minority rights declarations. Furthermore, the incorporation of indigenous knowledge, through development participation, is expected to result in more relevant and sustainable development intervention (Sillitoe 1998; Kottak 1990), and arguably empowerment (Gow & Vansant 1983). NGOs have been at the forefront of this participatory development movement, but the concept is problematic, both practically and theoretically. Despite attempts to address power relations, the development agenda remains dominant and 'top-down'. While much attention is given to the effect of organisational issues and managerialism, less attention has been paid to the specific contexts of culture and history in which participation is expected to occur. Within this context of cultural interfaces ‘understanding development as a conflict of world views reveals the fundamental limitations of participation as a policy tool’ (Hammer 2009:143).

¹ Both the terms 'development organisations' and Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) are used throughout this paper, the latter being understood as a sub-category of the former.

Purpose and Research Questions

Having spent four and a half years working within development organisations seeking to work the Bunong, one of the biggest challenges I've faced is to know how to involve the Bunong, engage in dialogue, generate participation, and work from a position of local ownership. Many attempts to work with the Bunong succeed or fail seemingly due to the degree and nature of dialogue with Bunong people. In order to explore this issue, this research uses the concept of interface analysis (Long 2001) to analyse the experiences of the Bunong in their interactions with development organisations. Given the issues of change implied in cultural interfaces, this study focuses on how cultural change is effecting Bunong people's participation with development organisations, and how they feed into existing narratives of change. The main research question is therefore:

How do cultural change narratives effect Bunong people's participation with development organisations?

This will be explored through three main areas of questioning, and analysing their connection:

1. How has Bunong culture been changing?
2. What do Bunong people perceive as the cause of this change?
3. What are Bunong perceptions of interaction with NGOs?

The aim of this research is two-fold. Firstly, to help development organisations operating among the Bunong to work in ways which support genuine participation of Bunong people. In this sense the paper attempts to answer the call to 'develop a deeper awareness of what happens when the social orders of western culture, Khmer culture and Indigenous cultures interact' (Hutchinson et al 2008:30-1). Secondly, the paper seeks to demonstrate the importance of historical and cultural change narratives in understanding participation, and therefore help further the debate on development participation.

Thesis Structure

The first part of this thesis discusses the methodology, considering the research design, and the field methods used to collect data. A background theory section then discusses the main concepts used in this paper, and explores existing research on the topic of participation. The analysis is split into two sections, firstly 'An Ethnography of Change' which considers issues

of change and their causes (research questions one and two), followed by 'Bunong Perceptions of NGO Interaction' which explores how these narratives of change effect interaction with NGOs (research question three and building further on question two). These lead to the final conclusion.

Methodology

In a study concerned about interaction between cultural worlds, the way in which the research is conducted (reliability) is essential to avoid being subject to the same problems that the research seeks to explore. This methodology section seeks to describe the various aspects of this study, while reflecting on the problems and limitations with respect to this interaction throughout the methodology.²

Research Design

This research is most closely described as an 'Interpretive study' (Mikkelsen 1995), employing an inductive approach, and borrowing methods from grounded theory and ethnography. I broadly subscribe to an interpretivist epistemological view, in the sense that significance is given to an 'understanding of the social world through the examination of the interpretation of the world by its participants' and a constructionist ontological position 'which implies that social properties are the outcomes of interaction between individuals' (Bryman 2004:266).

The research is divided into two interconnected sections, based upon the research questions. Firstly, ethnography is used to explore the dynamic environment of change. This combines secondary historical and ethnographic sources, with my own four years of experience living and working with Bunong people, and interviews about Bunong traditions which form a contemporary view of the past (Silverman 2009). This enables an understanding of the context from which change has occurred, and the various narratives of change.

The second section is devoted to understanding Bunong perceptions of NGOs and employs methods from grounded theory. Consistent with a constructivist ontology, perceptions are

² The research was conducted in Monduliri province, Cambodia in November and December, 2009.

considered to be an appropriate means to study social reality, and the study explores perspectives of Bunong people from villages and from those who work with NGOs. Given the implied cultural shift, it is expected that Bunong NGO workers will have different experiences and views of NGOs and cultural change than villagers, which I wish to capture. Originally, I had intended to also gain perspectives from non-Bunong NGO workers and local government, in keeping with Long's 'actor oriented approach' (Long 2001), but the limited scope of this research has required me to focus purely on the Bunong perspectives. Given that it is Bunong development and cultural change processes which are in question, this seems to be a reasonable approach.

Sampling

There are a limited number of NGOs working in the province of Mondul Kiri (the site of this research), and those chosen were done so on the grounds that they had Bunong staff who I could interview. Four village locations in different areas of the province were chosen to try and capture geographic heterogeneity, whilst keeping a relative ease of access. In total thirty-two interviews were conducted with forty-eight Bunong participants. Seventeen interviews were conducted out in four villages, and fifteen interviews were conducted with Bunong staff from five NGOs (see Appendix 1: Interview locations for details), all of which espouse the centrality of indigenous knowledge in their interventions, and employ some form of participatory processes.

The original intention was that sampling in villages would be initially determined by existing relationships, as a means to improve access (Bryman 2004:297), moving to theoretical sampling as new categories emerged. However, the period of this research, November-December, is perhaps the worst time of year for meeting Bunong people since most people are scattered far away in their fields harvesting. I intended to overcome this problem by leveraging existing relationships as much as possible and going out to help harvest. This held dual benefits of helping to overcome issues of power relations, and reducing the disturbance to people's way of life.

Unfortunately, success in achieving this was limited, due to difficulties in contacting people. Convenience sampling was then employed to gather data and translate it within the time-frame. This has caused two main concerns. Firstly, some of the informants interviewed, were not necessarily the best informed or most forthcoming regarding Bunong history, culture and

NGO interaction. Secondly, opportunities to meet people I knew, and build on existing relationships, was limited. Thankfully, my research assistant is well known as a vet throughout Monduliri, and his friendly affirming Bunong manner generated positive experiences with all interviewees.

Interviews

Two research assistants were employed in this research, Mariam Smith (my wife) who is fluent in the Bunong language, and a colleague of five years Samorn Vannak (a local Bunong man), who both helped in interview design (along with other Bunong contacts), interviewing, translation, and early analysis. I decided, to let Vannak lead the interviews that we conducted out in the villages, while Mariam translated the conversations for me. While this gave me less control of the interview, it helped create a natural setting where a conversation could develop in the Bunong language, without the interruption of translation. Vannak may still have been perceived as superior, being relatively well educated and having access to NGOs, therefore effecting how respondents answered. This seems unavoidable, but it is hoped that the measures taken have adequately reduced this issue.

The interview centred on three open-ended questions addressing the 'Bunong in the past', perceptions of change, and interaction with NGOs. Consistent with grounded theory, these open-ended interviews attempted to saturate theoretical categories by maintaining a 'constant comparative' linking emerging categories to theoretical sampling and data collection in an iterative process where data collection and analysis proceed together (Creswell 1998; Bryman 2004). The time lag between interviews, transcription and initial analysis, has limited the possibility for this iterative process. However, I was able to conduct 'rough' analysis with my research assistants and these allowed us to identify new categories which were then used in sampling and interview schedules.

Assuming Khmer language competency, interviews with Bunong NGO workers were conducted by myself in Khmer. On later reflection I recognise that these interviews may have been better conducted in Bunong, since answering in Khmer may have reinforced power relations, and the need to answer according to the expectations of NGOs.

All interviews were recorded with permission then translated and transcribed later with Vannak, allowing accurate translation and the opportunity to seek clarification for unusual Bunong concepts.

Ethics

From an understanding built over the four years of living with the Bunong, I hope that through this research I have shown appropriate respect and understanding of Bunong culture and context, and sought to counter-balance power relations. Furthermore, in all cases I tried to explain the purpose of the study, to gain informed consent, and to ensure anonymity and confidentiality in this study; all respondent names have therefore been changed.

Numerous times throughout interviews participants commented on how NGOs and researchers have come to hold meetings and ask questions, they then disappear and life continues; the only impact on the Bunong participants being a disturbance to their subsistence livelihood. As such, I have tried to fit in as much as possible with their patterns of life, including interviewing in the evenings and helping on their farms.

I have been encouraged by Sheyvens (2000) who highlights several examples where research has been therapeutic. While I can not judge this for myself, I can only hope that through the use of the Bunong language, meeting people in their sovereign places, valuing the input of an older generation which is losing respect in a changing society, and reflecting on narratives of identity change, that the process has been encouraging and insightful to those I have interviewed. One old man apologised for not being able to 'raise wine' (drink together), an old Bunong way of receiving friends, which resounded strongly with our desire to find out about the past and traditional Bunong ways. This hopefully gives some indication that the dialogue has been of value.

Analytical Approach

While theory is employed to initially direct this study, most theory has been explored in response to categories grounded in the data. All transcribed data was coded, but breaking from the tradition of grounded theory, this was used to facilitate retrieval for a broader narrative analysis. By connecting emerging narratives I have tried to build theory, but I recognise that this is my own interpretation of others interpretations, and as such is arguably more of a heuristic tool, than a 'substantive theory'.

Silverman (2009) criticises grounded theory as being simplistic induction, arguing that this strategy is dated given the 'omnipresence' of theory, and tendencies towards 'naturalistic inquiry', conflicting with my stated constructivist ontology. While I accept Silverman's criticisms, I assert that there is still validity in building basic theories inductively using principles comparable to a grounded theory approach. This is because firstly, while participation is a subject around which significant research and theories have already been generated, the research occurs in a new context, dealing with specific historical and cultural issues, where transferability of theory may be limited. Secondly, as the research has proceeded, emerging categories have required exploration into new areas of theory.

Capturing the complexity of the data in this research has been a daunting task. In order to provide structure, the analysis section is built around four main narratives which emerged from the coding and narrative analysis. Findings and analysis are then presented together, recognising that choosing to present data already imposes a layer of interpretation, and is therefore a form of analysis in itself.

Background Theory

This section begins by exploring the basic definitions of the Bunong, indigenous minorities, and theory regarding their interaction with 'commercialised' society. Recognising this as a culture and knowledge interface, 'interface analysis' is identified as the analytical tool employed in this research. Existing work on participation aimed at bridging this interface is then explored, highlighting the entry point for this paper.

Definitions of the Bunong

In this paper the indigenous people living in the province of Mondulhiri are termed 'Bunong', the most common term used by themselves, literally meaning the people of 'Nong'. The Khmer commonly refer to this group as the 'Phnong', probably phonologically linked to 'Bunong'. However, like the French term 'Sauvage' and the Vietnamese 'Moi', Phnong holds a derogatory connotation associated with the romantic historical perception of the Bunong being a barbarian, half-animal forest people. Consequently, the term will be avoided in this paper.

Linguistically, the Bunong belong to the Mon-Khmer South-Bahnaric sub-group and are classified as Central Mnong (see ISO 639-3: cmo, Gordon, & Grimes 2009). While related to the national language Khmer, the two languages are not mutually intelligible. The Cambodia 2008 population census report indicates that 37,522 people describe Bunong (Phnong) as being their Mother-tongue (National Institute of Statistics 2009), which gives an indication to their size in Cambodia. This group stretches across most of Mondulkiri province and into the central highlands of Vietnam.



Figure 1: Language map of Cambodia and Southern Vietnam (SIL Dynamic Language Maps 2010). Central Mnong shown in purple.

However, this definition masks a more complex reality. The Bunong divide up into several sub-groups including Biat, Khnong, and Nong, and can not be thought of as an entirely homogenous group (Bequette 2004). However, the turbulent recent history discussed later, has appeared to have had a homogenising affect on identity, and even those of neighbouring minorities may identify themselves now as Bunong.

On the broader level, there is a tendency both academically and politically to group the highland minorities on the Indochinese peninsular under the headings of Proto-indochinese (Boudier 2006 after Condominas), Highlander (Hammer 2009), Khmer leou (coined by King Sihanouk, used within Cambodia), and Montagnard. In this paper I will use the term 'highlander' to describe this broader category inferring the close link between the highland forest environment and indigenous culture which distinguishes the highlanders from their lowland neighbours: the Khmer, Cham, Vietnamese, Thai, and Lao.

It is also worth considering the term 'indigenous minority'. Kymlicka (1995, in Ehrentraut 2009) categorises minority groups within modern multicultural societies, according to their mode of incorporation into the state. This yields a definition of indigenous peoples as those who are involuntarily included in the state, but had no participation in its formation. In this paper the term indigenous minorities is used, categorising them in reference to their relationship with the state in which they are involuntarily governed. While recognising this categorisation is not unproblematic in terms of discourse analysis, it serves the topic of this thesis well as we explore issues related to this interface.

Small Scale and Commercialised Societies

Development in indigenous minority contexts can be seen as both 'exploitation' and 'tragedy' (Hammer 2009), the result of a failure to understand the indigenous 'life project' (Blaser et al 2004). The expansionist policies of colonialisation, modern state building, and now globalisation, have rendered indigenous minorities 'in the way of development' (ibid). The shift to market economy creates a movement from independence and self-sufficiency to dependency, opening up the opportunity for the new power relations to exploit the weak economic position of indigenous minorities (Ironsides 2009). Historically, this has led to land grabbing, extraction of resources, the erosion of cultural identity, and even ethnocide (Bodley 2008).

Bodley (2008) describes these processes in terms of the interaction of three different scales of society and culture: small scale societies, large scale imperial societies, and global scale commercial societies. Small scale societies, such as the Bunong, are characterised by the priority given to processes of humanisation - 'the biological production and maintenance of human beings and/.../the cultural production and maintenance of human societies and cultures.' (p.3). Bodley argues that small scale societies are relatively sustainable, and 'may

be able to enjoy greater democracy, freedom, and equality'(p.3) due to the wide distribution of power at the household level. However, this arguably points to an overly romantic view of small scale society life, a view not always shared with the minority people themselves.

By contrast, in global scale commercially organised societies the economy and accumulation of capital is often prioritised over human considerations, rendering it inherently 'inhuman' (p. 7). Bodley describes how commercial societies have become the dominant cultural process, surpassing the politically organised imperial societies, such as the Khmer in the eleventh to thirteenth century (Chandler 1993), which maintained a dynamic equilibrium between tribes and states. By contrast, the frontier between small scale societies and commercial societies, marked by ethnocentrism, results in much greater intrusion than those of political societies, since commercialisation promotes individualism, commoditisation, and inequality within the market system. Bodley asserts that indigenous peoples' 'cultural heritage of community-level resource management, high levels of local self-sufficiency, and relative social equality is the antithesis of how the commercial world was developed and is currently organised.' (Bodley 2008:7) and estimates that this frontier has claimed 50 million lives through ethnocide and genocide (p.10).

Studying the Interface

In a manner similar to Bodley's theory of cultural frontiers, the Bunong have formerly lived in comparative isolation, but recent events have linked Bunong society to commercialised society and the development paradigm, culminating in rapid social change in the last decade. This has established a fault line between Bunong traditional society and local forms of modern culture.

However, as argued by Long (2001) structuralist theories are intellectually unsatisfying, not well accounting for agency at the local level, and how these structures - external and internal - are translated by local actors. Long therefore calls for the study of 'actor perspectives' on what he terms as the 'interface' between cultures. These interfaces are defined as 'critical points of intersection between different social fields, domains, or lifeworlds, where social discontinuities based upon differences in values, social interests and power are found.' (Long 2001:177) and requires interface analysis 'to elucidate the types of social discontinuities present in such situations and to characterise the different kinds of organisational and cultural

forms that reproduce or transform them' (p.177). Interfaces are characterised by actors trying to bridge, accommodate or resist the different social and cognitive worlds.

Included in these changes is the arrival of development organisations. This paper focuses on the interaction between NGOs and Bunong people at this interface. NGOs have been chosen from an understanding that in response to issues of ethnocide and exploitation, they are attempting to bridge this interface by subscribing to a view of popular participation through the employment of local knowledge: these concepts that are explored later. NGOs with roots (or at least donors) in western countries are understood to originate in the commercialised society, and therefore bring with them the knowledge system of this society; an 'enlightenment' epistemological basis where processes and systems operate in degrees of Weberian rationalisation and routinisation. Financial systems, human resource processes, organisational structure, policy and standard operating procedures underlie all of the NGOs referred to in this study, and give evidence to this.

While these issues are explored throughout the study, I have chosen not to focus on differentiating the ideologies and practices of NGOs in my analysis. It is recognised however, that these assumptions mask a much more complex reality, since NGOs undoubtedly vary in their ideology and practice. As addressed in the methodology, a study consistent with Long's interface analysis would need to give much closer attention to the complexity on both sides of the interface.

As argued by Long the 'critical issue, given these 'multiple realities', potentially conflicting social and normative interests and diverse and fragmented bodies of knowledge, is whose interpretations or models prevail/.../and under what conditions.'(Long 2001:182) This study seeks to explore this critical issue of prevailing interpretations in the context of the cultural change implied by the meeting of Bunong culture and commercialised society and culture.

Understanding Knowledge and Culture

Knowledge is understood in the Foucauldian sense that it is 'not simply something that is possessed, accumulated and unproblematically imposed on others but is socially constructed and therefore inter-connected with social power structures (Long 2001). Implied in the development interface is the distinction between 'modern' forms of knowledge and local, or indigenous forms. Any development action occurs into the context of indigenous knowledge,

which is significant in this study in the way it pertains to how indigenous people have constructed meaning in their context, and will be translated and interpreted by these power and knowledge systems. Geertz describes this by drawing on the thoughts of Weber: 'man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun, I take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore one in search of meaning' (Geertz 1973:5).

In a similar sense Bourdier argues for the 'isometric' nature of culture, where systems operate within systems to create a cultural totality that 'synthesises religious, economic and technical elements' (Bourdier 2006:15). Geertz (1973) highlights the importance therefore of 'thick description'. While recognising the epistemological difficulties involved, this thesis follows Geertz in trying to not simply describe behaviour, but seeking to understand its culturally constructed meaning.

Indigenous knowledge is not a homogenous entity. Different people understand tradition in different ways and are endowed with different areas of knowledge, for example: of plants, tools, spirits, ancestry, and houses (Sillitoe 1998). However, these all pull from a common source described as 'cultural memory' (Nazarea 2006). This cultural memory is embedded in diverse cultural forms such as myths, ancestries, ceremonies and rituals, places, food, music, and language, and is in-acted on a daily basis through a reconstructive process termed 'habit memory'. Nazarea describes the sensitivity of this memory, and how it is often protected from the judgment of 'other' dominant discourses:

Subsistence farmers, indigenous peoples, heirloom seed-savers, and women home-gardeners nurture memory in private, more sovereign places such as sacred groves, tangled plots, and steaming kitchens. In these interior landscapes, cultural memory is not simply articulated or performed; it is materialised (Nazarea 2006:327)

These sovereign places³ described above are significant in this study, as they determine the sites of cultural preservation, which if lost reinforce processes of cultural loss. Furthermore, as important sites of indigenous knowledge construction, they are the points at which, NGOs seeking to understand indigenous knowledge, need to understand.

³ Thanks to Nathaniel Adams for pointing me to the relevance of cultural memory and sovereign places in this thesis.

The Concept of Participation in Development

Sillitoe (1998) highlights that participation has become a central concept in the application of local knowledge in development, arising out of the growth of neo-popularism, and in reaction to top-down development. The following sections explore the origins and ideology of participation.

The roots of participation are found in political science, even as far back as Aristotle who saw that 'participation in the affairs of state as a citizen was essential to the development and fulfilment of the human personality'. (Uphoff & Cohen 1980:214). Theory of democracy provides a useful definition that participation 'consists basically in creating opportunities under suitable conditions for people to influence decisions affecting them. That influence can vary from a little to a lot...' (McGregor 1960 in Pateman 1970:67). The varying influence mentioned being well captured by 'ladders of participation' (Arnstein 1969, Rocha 1997), which describe a continuum of participation from external control through consultation to indigenous ownership.

In his seminal work 'Pedagogy of the oppressed' Freire (1970) argues that 'praxis', the process of action and reflection, can be lost through the dehumanising fear of dominant powers, or oppressors. This results in the oppressed harbouring the view of the oppressor; that they are illiterate and ignorant, and incapable of participating in decision making and dialogue. This he describes as a 'culture of silence' (Freire 1970). In order to overcome this self-deprecating behaviour Freire described a participatory pedagogy for literacy education which encouraged local analysis of the political environment to achieve 'consciencisation'. The right to self-determination can be seen as central to Freire's thinking, that for development to be humanising people must be the subjects in, not objects of, development.

Freire's thinking is arguably the ideological foundation to the participatory development agenda, including the popular methodology 'Participatory Rural Appraisal' (PRA) (Phnuyal 1998). Chambers saw a need to overcome the urban expert biases in planning he saw resulting from 'rural development tourism', and therefore called for a pluralist ideology in research and development intervention which seeks out local knowledge and analysis through the use of participatory methods. This method seeks to prioritise indigenous knowledge by 'handing over the stick', and an attitude which might be described as anti-ethnocentric; 'putting the last first' (Chambers 1983).

The broad aims of participation within development rhetoric is to incorporate local knowledge into the development process, leading to more relevant and sustainable development intervention (Kothari 2001; Sillitoe 1998; Kottak 1990), and arguably empowerment (Gow, & Vansant 1983; Lyons et al 2001), a distinction which Oakley (1991) describes as participation as a means or an end. Based on the substantive 'means' arguments for participation - that it maximises efficiency, effectiveness, self-reliance, coverage and sustainability - participation has seen an 'inexorable spread' into development rhetoric (Cooke, & Kothari 2001). However, its growth has resulted in a loss of meaning, where now the only consensus around the concept is its obscurity (Uphoff & Cohen 1980; 2001; Chambers, & Pettit 2004), which has led to co-option, tokenism, and its de-radicalisation (Clever 2001).

Critiques of Participation

Excluding conservative critiques of participation, which maintain that externally imposed development agendas are acceptable, critique of participation has taken two main forms: technical, how to improve methods; and paradigmatic, claiming that participatory development does not actually increase local participation.

Within participatory development there has been an ideological commitment to 'self-critical epistemological awareness' (Cooke & Kothari 2001:15) which has generated a large body of work on the prerequisite 'suitable environment' for participation. Language usage is clearly a central issue in developing real dialogue (Freire 1970, Marsden 2004), and the use of group participation opens up critique on the grounds of group psychology (Cooke 2001). In response to the opening gap between participation rhetoric and practice, Chambers and Pettit (2004), and Owusu (2004), highlight how organisations need to address issues of power relations, and the ways in which they are perpetuated through organisational procedure, structure, policy, and personal agency.

Linking to Long's actor perspectives, further critique of participation is found on the grounds of how development is translated into action by local actors. Participation is criticised as naive due to a 'myth of community', an assumption of 'epistemic communities' who share a common knowledge and agenda (Long 2001:179). As such participation overlooks the varying agendas of individuals, and perpetuates local power structures (Clever 2001). Furthermore, Bastiaensen (2004) argues that participation is controlled by development

brokers who 'make strategic use of the interface', and it is in their interests to preserve the cultural discontinuity which they are benefiting from.

The 'dual logics' (Mosse 2001) and 'contradictory tensions' (Scott-Villiers 2004) between the rationalist world view of development intervention and participatory approaches, suggest inherent compatibility problems. Mosse argues that participative technologies have undergone a process of Weberian routinisation and rationalisation of process. De-radicalised as managerialist tools to legitimise projects by symbolically representing good planning, participatory tools simply mirror the agenda of the agency (Mosse 2001), masking 'centralisation in the name of decentralisation' (Cooke, & Kothari 2001:7).

Even more fundamentally, Long (2001) argues a 'paradox of participation', where the assumed need for external knowledge and intervention questions the whole ideology of participation and empowerment. This issue is taken up by Hammer (2009) who explores the case of the Asia Development Bank's policy on indigenous minorities in Cambodia. The bank justifies intervention through a rhetoric of 'exclusion', arguing that indigenous minorities in the North-East of Cambodia are excluded from, and missing out on, the benefits of development. What this system of internal justification fails to recognise is the fundamentally different 'life project' (Blaser et al 2004) that the indigenous minorities have been trying to achieve. As Hammer succinctly puts it, 'What is the fundamental use of roads, trade and integration into the national and international economy for a people who have historically defined themselves in terms of their isolation, independence and self-sufficiency?' (p.147). Henkel (2001) argues, if people are simply being empowered to take part in the commercialised societies, as consumers and capital producing labour in global markets, then empowerment is tantamount to what Foucault describes as 'subjection'. A mistaken set of modernist beliefs lies behind the bank's policy and 'understanding development as a conflict of world views reveals the fundamental limitations of participation as a policy tool' (Hammer 2009:143).

Interventionism Revisited

While recognising the significance of Hammer's arguments, the current frontier between indigenous minorities and commercialised societies is today rarely dichotomous. Much change has already occurred with indigenous minorities adopting commercialised life projects. Bourdier (2006) argues that 'identity is constantly reaffirmed according to new

points of reference and evolves with the transformations that are occurring in society' (p. 184). This opens the possibility of critical evaluation of culture, which is deemed vital in maintaining a culture's viability in establishing meaning (Gyekye 1997; Köker 2008). Furthermore, while the danger of interventionism 'colonising' social change appears to be very real, 'our common subjugation to global material forces and the possibility of transformative dialogues - make the need and likelihood of collaborative alternatives more urgent and pressing' (Mohan 2001:167).

There appears to be a legitimate need to establish dialogue with indigenous people, enabling them to reevaluate their culture, and choose how and if they wish to develop, while building a richer understanding of functional life projects. This brings us back full circle to the problem of interaction at the interface and the question: Can relations be negotiated at this cultural interface without requiring or implying the subjugation and assimilation of one culture into another?

The criticisms of interaction examined here have focused mainly on the political and organisational side of the interface. However, central to the idea of interaction at interfaces is cultural change. Whilst recognising the significance of power relations, this study therefore seeks to consider how the dynamic environment of change might be effecting participation, and therefore shed further light on this difficult dilemma.

Analysis Part 1: An Ethnography of Change

This section presents findings and analysis together. Through the process of analysis, four main narratives stood out:

- a narrative of rapid external change
- a narrative of knowledge fault-lines
- a narrative of weak traditionalism
- a narrative of cultural inferiority

These are used as a heuristic tool for understanding the complexity of the data, and help form the structure of this analysis section. The narratives are described in two sections corresponding to the research design: an 'Ethnography of Change', and 'Bunong Perceptions

of NGO Interaction'. This first section seeks to explore how the Bunong have experienced processes of cultural change and what has caused them. It begins by describing the traditional Bunong life project, and plots a basic history of how the external environment surrounding the Bunong has changed. This is not just to provide contextual background, but to provide grounds for the first argument, that the Bunong have witnessed a very rapid change fuelled by external forces.

Traditional Bunong Livelihood

Drawing on the work of Levi-Strauss, Bourdier (2006) argues that the understanding of social logics requires an understanding of how the society socialises nature. The discussion of Bunong culture begins then at this point, as clearly expressed by Kirsch:

The upland peoples of Southeast Asia have developed a sociocultural system that is optimally suited to their ecological situation. They see this ecological niche as a place in which a total style of life - including religious, political, and economic dimensions - has been worked out and can be maintained.' (Tomas Kirsch quoted in *Condominas* 1957:xxi)

The majority of Bunong grow highland rice varieties practicing slash-and-burn, or swidden farming on what they call the 'mir'. The 'mir' are plots of land, often on valley slopes, located up to 5km from the village. Travel has traditionally been assisted by elephants, captured and tamed from the wild, for which the Bunong are famous. Rice growing forms the centre of the Bunong pattern of life, with songs reciting the pattern of clearing, planting, weeding, harvesting and resting before beginning the cycle again, in keeping with the cycle of changes in the forest and climate. Plots are used for three to five years depending on soil fertility, at which point a new plot is chosen. Old plots are left to grow back into forest, a process through which the fertility of the plot is recovered, and may be returned to in the future. The Bunong supplement their rice cultivation with hunting, fishing, and gathering other forest products such as honey, vegetables and roots, and tree-resin for lighting.

Bourdier (2006) describes this as 'a sedentary life-style within a delimited territory' (p.154) aiming to 'domesticate without conquering or dominating nature' (p.94). The highlanders have a view of the resources of the forest being infinite, and while population levels have remained low, has enabled them to create a 'sustainable' life project. Within this life project,

reciprocity has been central to village relations, with established norms of shared labour on farms and house building.

The Bunong describe how choose a plot with a combination of material and spiritual reasoning they look for a certain type of forest, then the head of the house goes to sleep on the site of the new plot, and interprets the images in the dreams as good or bad omens. If the signs are favourable then the spirits⁴ are assumed to be hospitable and the new site can be used. In the event of many sudden and inexplicable deaths, the Bunong understand that a spirit in the area has become 'hot' (White 1996), unhappy at the presence of humans, and it is therefore time to move on, resulting in a pattern of villages moving every 15-20 years.

Highlander ownership of land can be regarded as tenancy (Bourdier 2006). Common to highlander beliefs is a chief god (Prah Ndu) who delegates the responsibility for watching over land to spirits who inhabit water ways, forests, rocks, and hills. The decision by a highlander group to use a plot of land is therefore a negotiation between the family group and the local spirits. Root causality of any tragic occurrences such as violent death (as opposed to natural death, see Pewitt 2007) is attributed to the spiritual realm and so the importance of checking the temperament of the local spirits, and maintaining them, is paramount.

Early History

Earliest descriptions from second century Chinese records suggest that people have been practicing similar life projects in the highlands for over 2000 years, and until recently, have exhibited very little change (Hickey 1982a). Mythology describes how the Khmer and the highlanders share a common ancestry (White 1996), but by the tenth century the Khmer (Chenla and Funan) had established a growing kingdom, and vied for power with the Vietnamese (Lac Viet), Thai (Siam) and Cham (Chandler 1993). As these kingdoms expanded slave industries were established leading to slave raids by neighbouring highland tribes and tribal warfare, forcing the Bunong further into the forest where they built fortification around their villages (Schrock et al 1966).

The neighbouring Jarai and Rhade had connection with the surrounding cultures, based on tributary relationships with both the Vietnamese and Khmer (Hickey 1982a). By contrast, the Bunong appear to have maintained a greater degree of isolation. However, since at least the

⁴ The use of the term 'spirit' here is used with caution, since the Bunong tend to address the object itself, for example they 'ask the rice'. There is no distinction drawn between the object and the spirit animating it.

seventeenth century, the Bunong are known to have travelled the three month journey to Sambok, the eastern most town in the historical Khmer Kingdom (Chandler 1993), buying salt and gongs in exchange for forest products such as Ivory, Elephants, Eaglewood and resin (Hickey 1982a); practices which respondents still described occurring in the last century.

French Colonialism

By the end of the 19th century the French colonialisation of south-east asia had begun to penetrate the highland areas between Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos, with the intention that 'all 'savage populations' would be grouped under a French protectorate' (Hickey 1982a:216). These changes however, arrived relatively late in the Mnong⁵ region, who were known as 'independent savages'. With small war bands the Mnong actively resisted the French, who by the early thirties were trying to build penetration routes and establish posts⁶ in the region. This stalled the French penetration into the area, and although the French responded with sweeping 'pacification missions', the region was still not considered 'pacified' by the time the French presence began weakening due to the second world war (Hickey 1982a).

In 1945 the Japanese swept through the region, effectively ending the French rule of Indochina. Through the ensuing political and military struggles Cambodia gained independence in 1953 under king Sihanouk, when the borders of North-Eastern Cambodia and Vietnam were drawn through the highland region (Hickey 1982a; Chandler 1993).

Early Khmer Democracy - the Sangkhum Period

In 1955 Sihanouk abdicated as King and won the first Cambodian election, marking the beginning of the Sangkhum period (Chandler 1993), and a significant change in Khmer-highlander relations. Monduliri province was formed in 1960 and building on the penetration achieved by the French, Sihanouk developed integration policies to bring the highland regions of Cambodia under state control. Sihanouk coined the term 'khmer leou' literally 'khmer above', suggesting a natural re-connection between the 'disinherited brothers' of the highlands and the lowland Khmer. The new policy sought to modernise agriculture and Bunong cultural practices, following the French understanding that swidden agriculture was destructive. Clothes were delivered into the region in favour of the traditionally woven loin

⁵ Mnong is the category for the wider ethnolinguistic group covering the Bunong, see Background theory.

⁶ These posts included Poste Le Rolland - modern day Ralang, Poste Deshayes - De'e, Poste Gatille - Kati, and Haut Chhlong - Senmonorom.

clothes and skirts, markets and schools established, and 250 Khmer soldiers and their families were moved in to Mondulkiri to implement the integration policy (White 1996). While these changes were made in an attempt to improve living standards, they were also driven by the political need to establish ownership of the highland region and peoples, seen as strategic in maintaining the border with Vietnam. Highland youth were targeted to ‘persuade their elders to transform their archaic way of life’ with an aim of ‘national consciousness replacing the group or clan spirit’ (Cambodia Today 1959:5; 1962:43 quoted in White 1996:34). While there was no direct pressure on the Bunong to change their way of life, they were shown how they could ‘follow the Khmer’, a statement which still resounds through the Bunong responses in interviews.

The Vietnam War and Khmer Rouge Period

Before the Sangkhum integration policy could have much traction, the region was once again caught in between warring nations. The Viet Minh crossed through the North-eastern areas of Cambodia, leading to several US air-strikes on Mondulkiri. Older villagers still recall the sound of bombs falling near their villages and how they ran into the forest to seek safety⁷.

During this period, the Khmer Rouge, under the leader Pol Pot, were establishing a presence in Koh Nhek, in the north of Mondulkiri. Highlander groups were among the first to be brought into the communist regime, and were arguably favoured by the Khmer Rouge since they were not indoctrinated with western education, and practiced communal living practices which resembled the communist ideal. Respondents describe how they were forcibly moved from their villages to work on low-land rice farms in Koh Nhek, while many villages along the border fled into Vietnam. The Khmer Rouge systematically destroyed Bunong cultural artefacts: gongs, jars, clothing, and jewellery. The only items that survive today are those that were buried by elders in the forest. Furthermore, indigenous languages, hair styles, rituals and religion were all outlawed by the Khmer rouge (White 1996). While the Bunong did not experience the genocide experienced later by Khmer city dwellers, they were still subject to harsh conditions and minimal food. Those who complained were accused of having ‘a khmer body and a vietnamese head’ and were executed.

⁷ In Vietnam 85% of Highlanders were displaced and some 200,000 were thought to have been killed (Hickey 1982b), but the extent of the effects of the Vietnam war in Cambodia are not well documented.

With the Vietnamese 'liberation' from the Khmer Rouge, most Bunong returned to their old village locations, and tried to return to their original life projects. However, under the instruction of the government, they were gathered into larger villages near roads for their protection from the Khmer Rouge forces which still hid in the forests and regularly raided villages⁸. This village restructuring also facilitated the reinstatement of the Khmer political system of village and commune chiefs reporting to provincial authorities.

Modern Democracy

The first elections were held in Cambodia in 1993, at which point the country also opened up to international assistance, and trade. By the late 90's Monduliri was still relatively quiet. Logging companies were brought into Monduliri logging large tracts to the west of the province, and improving the road link to Phnom Penh. Development organisations were limited to a few pioneering NGOs and the UNHCR who were assisting with highlander refugees fleeing from Vietnam. However, during the following decade Monduliri has undergone an overwhelming rate of change.

During this period major concessions have been made for pine tree and rubber tree plantations, gold mining, bauxite exploration, and tourism. Several large tracts of forest have been set aside as protected wildlife conservation areas. Schools are being built in villages, with education up to grade 12 available in the provincial capital. Health services have been extended to almost all villages, with a central referral hospital established in the provincial capital. Tourism has grown in the area, mostly from middle-class Khmer coming from Phnom Penh, fuelling the construction of over twenty guest houses. Population has almost doubled from 32,407 in 1998 to 61,107 in 2008 (National Institute of Statistics 2009:29), mainly due to Khmer immigration. Land markets have generated speculation which has driven land prices from \$25/m head, to over \$3000/m head in the small provincial capital. Hydro-electricity, mobile phones, and fibre-optic high-speed internet are now available in the provincial capital and are being extended to neighbouring villages. Over 20 NGOs are established in the province operating projects in health, education, rights, conservation, natural resource management, agriculture and micro-enterprise.

⁸ Vannak, my research assistant, was recruited into the army during this period and tells of how fighting between government forces and pockets of Khmer Rouge continued in Monduliri well into the 90's.

Within this context of change indigenous minorities are being encouraged to assert their rights: to land, political participation, health, and education. NGOs and governments are being called to ‘allow populations to participate in their own future and let them decide in the last instance’ (Bourdier 2006:187). But as shall be explored, operation in this society can be seen to be functionally different from the past, requiring different knowledge and priorities, which must be interpreted from the local forms of modernity in which they are presented; a process which is subject to the influence of historical narratives and power relations.

A Narrative of Rapid External Change

While change has been brewing in Mondulkiri since the late 19th Century, the arrival of Bodely's Frontier of commercialism didn't arrive with any force until the turn of the 21st century. While, as argued by Bourdier (1995) complete isolation is not an accurate analysis of Bunong history, interactions with the outside world which occurred through trade were mediated by those who could afford the elephants to make the journey into the 'land of the Khmer' (See figure 2 ‘Past’).

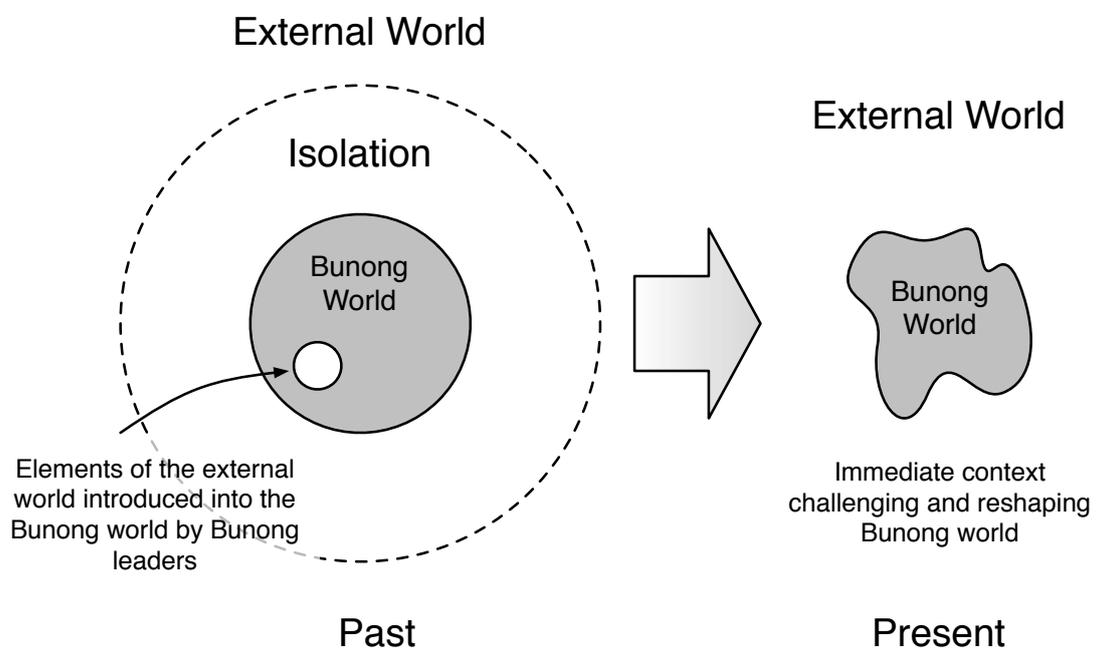


Figure 2: Model showing change in interface with external world

These wealthier Bunong acted as intermediaries between the Bunong and other cultures, through which new knowledge and technology could be absorbed into Bunong culture; gongs, iron working, rice wine jars serve as examples of historical externally induced cultural change. However, this isolation existed not just with outsiders, but between the Bunong themselves. Interviewees described how the Bunong lived separate from each other having 10-50km between villages, with villagers barely knowing, or even being aware of other villages. One old man interviewed, who claimed to be 100 years old, talked of the surprise he felt to see so many other Bunong villages, when the French took him to build roads, presumably as part of their 'corvée' system of taxation. With the arrival of the French and later the Khmer, this frontier, was gradually brought closer to the Bunong, until today where it is located even within the Bunong village (Figure 2 'Present').

While these processes of state-building and commercialisation, form powerful external influences over the Bunong, a purely structuralist theory of change is theoretically unsatisfying, as argued by Long, 'all forms of external intervention enter the existing lifeworlds of the individuals and social groups affected, and in this way they are mediated and transformed by these same actors and structures' (Long 2001:13). This next section begins to explore the diverse factors, internal and external, involved in change.

'Pholah Hoey' - Knowledge Fault-lines and Weak Traditionalism

In keeping with the Bunong habit of providing terse answers, questions about tradition and the Bunong in the past were regularly met with 'pholah hoey' - a term of resignation implying futility. Respondents highlighted a wealth of change narratives, any of which could form an interesting basis for exploring change:

- increases in alcohol consumption, gambling and prostitution with market availability
- effects of land privatisation and sale
- decline in traditional dress and cultural markers
- reduced demand (by Bunong) for Bunong cultural artefacts due to convenient and cheaper alternatives in the market
- changes in wedding practices to follow Khmer methods of generating money;
- dominance of Khmer culture in inter-ethnic marriage
- changes in practice from traditional to modern medicine
- how availability of foreign rice varieties has undermined Bunong religious ritual

- changes in wealth symbology - from rice wine jars, buffalo and elephants, to wooden houses, motorbikes, and karaoke rigs
- how tensions between traditional religion and market relations is fuelling a shift to Christianity
- how the role of Buffaloes is changing from religious necessity (sacrifice) to productive husbandry
- the change to Khmer style housing

The point here is not to comprehensively cover these changes, but through Bunong perceptions of these changes show how the process of incorporating and translating these external changes into Bunong society has undermined confidence in traditional knowledge and leadership. This has prompted Bunong people to look to external knowledge to help them enter into the engulfing commercialised society. Space determines that only two issues are explored in the next section: the movement to market relations and the change in leadership (a third is included in Appendix 2: Housing - From Bunong to 'Khmodern'). These two issues were frequently recounted and were therefore well described by respondents.

The Movement to Market Relations

As with many indigenous minorities around the world, central to the changes among the Bunong is the opening up of the market economy, bringing the privatisation of land and its exploitation (Bodley 2008, Blaser et al 2004). Land sale and commercial ventures have limited the Bunong in space, forcing changes in the way the society socialises nature, which as established is central in shaping the culture. By limiting their ability to move, the immediate environment is depleted of resources, expressed by the Bunong in terms of decreased agricultural yield, fewer hunting, fishing and foraging opportunities, and limited access to building material; issues also well documented elsewhere (Evans et al 2003, McAndrew 2001, 2003 and 2004).

The opportunity of markets, and the decline in the ability of the Bunong life project to provide sustenance has pushed the Bunong to engage with the market economy. The Bunong consistently pointed to the introduction of markets as being central to changes in their way of life, described in both positive and negative terms. They describe how life with the market is easier; many products are cheaper, more hard wearing, are less labour intensive to obtain, and during times of hardship paid labour allows food to be bought. But there is also an increasing

awareness that to access these benefits requires a different approach to life and new knowledge, which entails leaving Bunong tradition.

Attempts to enter into the market are met with mixed success. Respondents described their struggle in accessing markets where poor terms of trade generate minimal returns on their agricultural and forest products, while interactions are further complicated by the language barrier and poor numeracy. However, the need for salt makes market interaction a basic necessity. The Bunong have found a few niches, however these are linked to the unsustainable, and often illegal, extraction of resources with very little added value.

Respondents recognised how increased intensity in patterns of foraging, hunting and logging for sale rather than personal consumption are leading to a decline in resources, and the destruction of the very environment which their original life project has been based.

However, other options for employment are limited due to low levels of education among the Bunong, which is beginning to be recognised as a problem in some villages.

In the Bunong context markets appear to be synonymous with the Khmer. Khmer immigrants are the producers and traders who have the knowledge of how to succeed in the market economy, a narrative which links back to the trade of raw forest materials exchanged for technological advancements such as iron tools, pottery, and bronze working. The Bunong life project, predicated on subsistence, provides little knowledge on how to access markets.

Conversely, Khmer society presents itself as a model of successful integration into the market economy, and therefore a model of modernization. Informants frequently described how they 'follow the Khmer', communicating a sense of reluctance but necessity:

We see that they are rich and we want to be rich too! (Me Kon Ok, 40)

Khmer ways are good ways - finding work. It's better than the Bunong. (Ou La, 50)

The resources for the old way of living are gone, and if we don't do like [the Khmer] ways, then we don't have anything to eat for our families. That's why we need to follow the ways of doing business. (Ur Get, 30)

The reason we follow them, is that our families are poor, and doing according to our own traditions costs a lot of money/.../ We want to do according to some of their ways, so that we can live easier lives. (Me Liep, 45)

However, this process of 'Khmerisation' is problematic, since the Bunong find they are not able to be competently Khmer, which as explored later, creates a perception of their inferiority. Of particular regret in the movement towards market relations is the implied loss of reciprocity, described as 'convincing' people to help. Formerly, the Bunong had strong systems of formal and informal reciprocity, where all forms of labour and forest products were shared between the group on the understanding that it will be returned to them at a later date. This helped to maintain the relative equity between the group. Respondents described how this habit is almost lost, forest products are sold, and farm labour requires payment. The construction of houses has also traditionally been accepted in the 'convincing' reciprocal culture of the Bunong, but the construction of wooden houses requiring outside knowledge and capital implies a break with tradition, and therefore remuneration is required. Respondents talked of regret at how increased individualism and motivation by money is generating wider gaps between rich and poor:

It's all individual. If you don't know have the knowledge to get income, then you stay poor. (Mbiq Kon Ok, 65)

The Bunong appear to be caught in a dilemma: on the one hand their is a recognition of a need to change, and even a desire on the part of some to leave behind costly tradition, and enter more fully into the commercialised society by copying the Khmer. However, on the other hand, they are also afraid to lose Bunong culture, a contradictory source of both pride and shame as they enter in their relations with Khmer. As described by one respondent:

We live in two lands. (Mbiq Chek, 32)

A Change in Leadership - A Forest Cut-down

A common theme that arose from the interviews was the lack of traditional leadership today. While some elders are still recognised, especially relating to health issues, they were not perceived as having the knowledge and authority of those in the past. This section looks briefly at the role of traditional leadership, the processes which have contributed to its loss, and its effect on Bunong culture.

The Form of Traditional Leadership

In traditional Bunong society the 'Karanh Bon' was the most significant figure in Bunong village leadership, beyond which the Bunong had no higher level of political organisation

(Bourdier 2006), except for brief war leaders gathering support against a common enemy (e.g. the French, see Hickey 1982a).

The 'Karanh Bon' is appointed by a process of consensual meritocracy: a person's ability to identify problems, explain their origin and provide solutions is tested and proven over time, whereby the community elevates them into a position of leadership, without any voting or formal system of appointment. The Karanh Bon had the ability to perform rituals to divine knowledge from the spirits, and a remarkable memory of the history of village movements and genealogy, and taboos associated with the local spirits. This knowledge was essential in determining who could marry, where village and farm plots could be located, the cause of illness and disasters, mediating inter and intra-village conflict, and the sacrifices and rituals needed to mend spiritual relations and keep spirits appeased. Of specific importance was the ability to determine 'Chyaks', soul eating demons who take the form of people and are the cause of most illness and death (See Appendix 3: Souls and 'Chyaks' for more detail). Chyaks are identified through genealogy and divining ceremonies, and upon their discovery they are either killed or enslaved.

Decision making processes among the Bunong have revolved around the tradition of rice-wine. Respondents recalled how they would sit together around a fire, chatting and sharing rice wine, and as discussion would develop between villagers, issues would be raised which the elders would listen to and resolve through reference to their memory of space and genealogy:

The elders speak, describing a lot, relating to different things so that it sounds like a song. (Get, 35, NGO staff).

Decisions were ultimately taken by the Karanh Bon after much dialogue with the whole village, some respondents recalled three days and nights for serious issues, at which point sacrifices and cleansing would also require the participation of the whole village.

The Loss of Traditional Leadership

These leaders garnered significant trust among the villagers, but the upheaval during the late 20th century resulted in significant loss of the older generation, and the loss of traditional authority:

They were real old people [in the past], they had loin clothes, necklaces and tusks in their ears/.../ [we trusted them] 100%, but we don't have them today, the people who survived after the Khmer Rouge are like me, and we don't know so much. (Ou Ranh Chek, 70)

Our house was really good at doing according Bunong ways, but not so much now, because my father was killed by the Khmer Rouge./.../It's like a forest that has been totally cut down and all that is left is fields. Like small seedlings, we were not around when the old people were still alive. (Me Liep, 45)

The process of village grouping and restructuring after the Khmer rouge left the Bunong struggling to cope with these larger physical village structures. Around the same time the national political system was also introduced, creating a level of political structure above the village, beyond the realm of traditional leadership. These leaders are required to have Khmer language and literacy, which has resulted in a demographic shift in leadership (Mallow 2002), marked by a change in knowledge paradigm; from the elders awareness of genealogies and spirits, to the younger generation with its awareness of Khmer language and culture, political systems and scientific knowledge. As summarised by one elder:

They think that the old people don't have any value. It's like the older people don't know much.(Mbiq Top, 50)

In the past the Karanh Bon led with reference to a coherent life project, their knowledge was critical in creating this life project, but was also legitimised by it. With the arrival of the markets and state political system, the economic, political, social and religious aspects of leadership have been separated. Today, the elders, where they still exist, are no longer deemed to have relevant knowledge for accessing these new systems of thinking, and have been marginalised to dealing with Bunong religious issues, and those issues which fall between the cracks of enlightenment thinking.

As the relevance of traditional knowledge is called into question by the younger generation, a generational discontinuity is created. The younger generation no longer recognises the significance of the rituals and ceremonies which served as performative acts of memory (Nazarea 2006), which further fuels the undermining of traditional knowledge and leadership, as suggested by how the Bunong have interacted with the Market.

Unopposed change

The arrival of the commercialised society has established a knowledge fault line. As Bunong people are moving into the commercialised life project - by both necessity and choice, traditional knowledge is no longer valued. People are therefore looking to external sources for knowledge and models of how to succeed in the new life project.

Strong external forces of change have been met by weakening conserving forces, due to the physical loss of traditional leaders, and changes to the terms by which leadership is evaluated, to the extent that it is deemed irrelevant in the commercialised society. Traditional leadership could have acted to resist change, providing a counter-narrative to the dominant imperatives of change (Nazarea 2006) enabling critical evaluation of both the traditional culture and the imposed change. In its absence, change has occurred largely unquestioned, even though many respondents also expressed the desire to remain Bunong, wanting to hold on to their identity as expressed in language, weaving, religion, receiving guests and social etiquette, sense of humour, non-hierarchical society, and informal communication style.

While calls for the revitalisation of respect for traditional leadership (Hutchinson et al 2008) find good standing here, it seems that in the context of the Bunong such an endeavour is no longer possible.

A problem of this unevaluated change is the way in which it has imitated the local forms of modernity. Gyekye argues that even 'modern' european cultures have elements of tradition and can not therefore be seen as purely 'modern' (Gyekye 1997). Assuming therefore that all forms of modernity contain elements of tradition presents a problem to the adapting culture which sees local forms of modernity as a model for their own process of change. Without critical evaluation there is a danger of adopting the cultural traditions of the local form of modernity, in this case the 'Khmodern', rather than modifying its own cultural forms; issues which become even more apparent in analysing Bunong interaction with NGOs.

Analysis part 2: Bunong perceptions of NGO interaction

This section analyses five different responses to NGOs. An understanding of these responses is then explored through the perceptions of dialogue and interaction, creating a case for a

narrative of cultural inferiority. Finally, the four narratives explored in this analysis are drawn together in a heuristic model, creating an argument for a Bunong 'culture of silence'.

Bunong Responses to NGOs:

This next section explores five different responses to participation with NGOs identified in the interviews:

- NGOs are irrelevant and participation is not prioritised;
- NGOs are benefactors and local participation can be bought;
- Participation with NGOs relies on external knowledge - mirroring;
- Participation with NGOs requires, or results in, assimilation;
- Participation with NGOs is problematic - critical evaluation.

NGOs were generally seen as a positive force in preserving culture, but as explored later, NGOs can also be understood to be undermining the very cultural identity they are seeking to preserve, further feeding narratives of cultural inferiority.

NGOs - A Question of Priorities

The first response to NGOs reflects the incompatibility of the indigenous life project compared to that presented by the NGO, as suggested by Hammer (2009). The relevance of the NGO intervention is not understood, and therefore it is considered irrelevant to their life project, expressed by both villagers and NGO workers:

I'm a pure Bunong and I don't understand. I just go to the 'mir' and back (Me Nim, 37)

When we ask them to come, they think that it's not so valuable, but it's because they don't understand. (Duen, 25, NGO staff)

The views expressed in the interviews provide strong evidence that development intervention only begins to make sense with a degree of indoctrination into the development paradigm. Those who are pure Bunong do not prioritise participation in development, because it is irrelevant within their paradigm. As suggested in the previous section, those in this group were mainly older and lived in more remote villages; those who have had little exposure to the commercialised society and whose knowledge is centred on the original life project. Adding complexity to this issue, most people are aware of the alternative life project

presented and the declining feasibility of the Bunong life project, but felt they were unable or too old to access this way of life. The Bunong have often said that by thirty, they are too old to learn.

Respondents also expressed frustration at how development projects lack coordination with several NGOs calling meetings each week, and through the creation of unmet expectations. This appears to be further feeding the 'deprioritisation' of participation. This has generated some feelings of apathy towards interaction with NGOs. While coordination seems to be the central problem here, it also suggests a problem as to what degree have NGOs applied their understanding of the Bunong life project?

The Benevolent Tiger

The tiger is very big and really dares and the deer just sits there to become food. The deer sits there and the tiger decides whatever he wants until it's accomplished. The NGOs quickly get what they want. (Mbiq Blau, 34)

Some come and give soap, some make porridge for kids who are malnourished, that's all. I don't understand so much about their work. (Ou Ngep, 70)

Most commonly, NGOs were regarded by those in the villages as a positive force of change, with respondents highlighting a unidirectional relationship where NGOs give out chickens and seedlings, and teach how to feed their children, take care of pigs and chickens, make communities, build cooperation, and understand the land-law. However, as suggested above, the agendas of NGO and villagers are not clearly aligned, and interaction can be seen to take two different forms: subversion and mirroring.

Firstly, some informants suggest that project activities are subverted by people in order to maintain their original life project. Households send a representative, often someone who is housebound, to sit in meetings and receive any 'gifts', and NGOs are strategically used to

cover capital investment costs, such as wells, so that whatever small income they do find can be kept to cover basic living expenses.⁹

In the context of declining natural resources described earlier, this can be seen as a rational response, and can be likened to the empowering subversion of participation described by Kothari (2001). Furthermore, NGOs are creating an employment strategy for the Bunong, one that is especially useful for those who are physically unable to engage in other forms of work. However, these responses, although of benefit to the Bunong, are presumably not the intention of the NGOs. The image of the benevolent tiger does not speak of sustainable interventions which avoid establishing dependency.

Mirroring the NGO

As suggested in the first part of the analysis, there is a growing awareness among the Bunong that their knowledge and traditions are not productive in the commercialised society, which has led to a reliance on external knowledge. This issue extends into their relations with NGOs.

They think that they are people who don't know anything, but that we are people who 'know' and so they become embarrassed. (Ntach, 23, NGO staff)

Recognising that NGO staff are (relatively) educated, and 'know' about the commercialised society, villagers perceive that they have little to contribute, are 'afraid' or 'embarrassed' and so mirror the view of the NGO, as suggested here:

When we ask people, they think that we have a deeper vision than they have, so they just agree to everything we say. But when we implement it, they don't participate/.../ because they don't understand what we have asked. We quickly make decisions according to them, too quickly/.../They say, 'OK, we want to have a literacy class here.' and we hear only how they 'OK', and so we 'OK' according to that, but what we don't recognise is that they are only 'OKing' because they think that we know

⁹ It is interesting to consider the story of changing houses again at this point (for detail see Appendix 2: Housing - From Bunong to 'Khmodern'); that the construction of khmer houses is seen as part of a commercialised life project whose subscribers can afford to buy labour, and therefore can no longer invoke the cultural traditions of reciprocity. If this is true for those within Bunong society, it seems reasonable to assume that affluent NGOs trying to tap into cultural reciprocity as part of their participation strategies will also face this discontinuity. The frustration expressed by NGOs (in personal experience) of the necessity of paying stipends and per diems in order to ensure participation in activities that are for 'their own good', and associated fears of increasing dependency, are therefore inevitable.

more than them, and we think it's good!.../we haven't tried to dig into to ask for clarity. (Mbiq Nap, 31, NGO staff)

What this informant seems to be suggesting is an abdication of the people's right to participate on the grounds that development organisations know better. This corresponds to my own experience in management of Bunong people (but arguably applies more broadly); initial agreement is easy to reach, but with experience I came to recognise that if I wished to gain the 'real views' of staff, I needed to keep the discussion open, and wait for their 'real' opinions to emerge.

In addition to the devaluing of indigenous knowledge in the context of commercial society, Cooke's critique of participation using group psychology theory is also interesting to apply here. Cooke argues that group discourse can be affected by what is known as the Abilene paradox where agreement is reached based on assumptions regarding what others want, with the outcome of 'false consensus'. This can be seen as a risk avoidance strategy caused by anxiety of 'real risk' and 'negative fantasies' of any confrontation of accepted wisdom (Cooke 2001). In this context 'accepted wisdom' has two manifestations, Bunong and NGO (commercialised), so for those not well versed in the accepted wisdom of NGOs, agreement presents itself as a strategy for avoiding exposing their 'ignorance', but ultimately only creates a 'false consensus', or a 'mirroring of the NGO'.

Assimilation

A strong contrast existed between Bunong who were interviewed in villages, and Bunong who worked for NGOs. It was interesting to notice how Bunong who work for NGOs typically described the Bunong using the third person, creating a sharp contrast between the 'Bunong in the village' and the Bunong who 'Know'. This was taken a step further by some who more readily described themselves as 'we Khmer'. This group emphasised the need to teach villagers so that they 'know': the external knowledge 'cargo' (Long 2001) needed for them to participate in the commercialised society. However, this position appears to be preceded by an unconscious process assimilation into Khmer culture. This problem is perhaps best expressed by a story from one respondent:

I know the Principle of the school, we used to study together.../he tried to convince me, 'let's go and study at the university.../so that no-one from the outside calls us

ignorant'. But I replied 'what about language?'. 'We'll use their language, we are Bunong, and when we know how to use their language, we will have meaning'. I didn't oppose him, I was quiet.

Later, when students came to him, he suddenly stopped using Bunong. He just used Khmer to speak with his students; technical words, beautiful sounds, which he learned from the university. Then suddenly, someone said, 'Speak Bunong! When you speak Khmer, I don't understand.' So I told him 'Do you see, if you study a long time, then you forget that you are Bunong.' and he replied 'Oh, right! What do you do when you use Khmer more than Bunong?'/.../Do you see, if you study a long time, then you forget that you are Bunong. (Mbiq Nap, 31, NGO staff)

There appears to be a link between the extent of education and the degree to which Bunong people separate themselves from their Bunong identity. The education system in Cambodia is only just beginning to recognize cultural difference, and so education has tended to indoctrinate into the commercial 'khmodern' society, and out of the Bunong. It is these few more educated people that work for NGOs, supporting Bourdiers view that since 'these interculators are always chosen from among those who support the imposed norm' (Bourdier 2006:128) intervention has an inevitable bias towards change.

Critical Evaluation

After recalling the story above Mbiq Nap went on to explain about his concern regarding his own assimilation into Khmer culture:

I'm regretful. When I was still Bunong, there were many who participated, and they encouraged us to find whatever we could from the outside and bring it back to them. But when we tried hard to bring from the outside to give to them, then we became someone from the outside. (Mbiq Nap, 31, NGO staff)

It would therefore not be an accurate picture to say that all people fit into the uncritical categories above; Mbiq Nap's statement above demonstrates a degree of awareness of the problems in engaging with NGOs and 'the outside'. What was apparent through many of the interviews, and in my own experience, was that this kind of awareness was unusual. As interviews proceeded and conversation established, informants gradually became more critical, but only a few questioned the dominance of the prevailing khmer and development

cultures. Of course I can not escape the possibility that this is an artefact of the research, that I am an outsider and may have not accessed people's criticism. Furthermore, the assumption that cultural abandonment is uncritical is of course in itself, questionable.

Whither Dialogue?

Given the expressed commitment by NGOs to indigenous knowledge, it was surprising to hear that the majority of responses focus on a unidirectional relationship with NGOs. This conspicuous absence of dialogue in respondents may of course be an artefact of the interview process, where respondents have only considered certain forms of interaction, e.g. group meetings and workshops, as being participation with NGOs, while more informal one-to-one interaction has not been considered. The form of NGO interaction, however, appears to be an obstacle for the Bunong to really participate, suggesting that genuine dialogue is rare. As established a knowledge fault-line has undermined traditional leadership, and leaves the Bunong dependent on outside knowledge, or early adopters. This section seeks to understand the causes behind the responses of 'mirroring' and explores how NGOs, with Khmer and Modern cultural forms, further disadvantage the Bunong in their interactions, which feeds into a cycle of perceived cultural inferiority and weak participation.

Struggles with Managerialism

The problem of dual-logics within NGOs (Mosse 2005) impose several problems in how NGOs relate to the Bunong. Policy relating to time, alcohol consumption, and formal rationalised relations were given as examples by respondents:

Some NGOs study [the Bunong] before they work, but others they don't want to study, they just want to work (Get, 35, NGO staff)

In the village, we can do whatever we want, and if we don't want to do something we rest, so that is a change with the NGO/.../we need to know about rules.(Nteh, 23, NGO staff)

When we meet them they always have rice wine, a chicken, and things in order to welcome us; so that we have the feeling to talk intimately with them. But we are not allowed to join in drinking with them - so they think we don't want to join in with them, it separates us from them and it means that they don't want to join in with us either. (Mbiq Nap, 31, NGO staff)

While policy on alcohol consumption is in place for understandable reasons, gathering around the rice-wine jar is symbolically significant to the Bunong, and represents one Bunong sovereign space into which outsiders are openly invited. Refusing this offer is culturally significant, indicating a refusal of hospitality and friendship. This difference in culture, and the enforcement of organisational conceptions of acceptable practice, all act to communicate that Bunong cultural forms and autonomy are not acceptable in development participation, and need to be changed.

Language as a Barrier

While it seems axiomatic to state that a common language must be used in order to establish communication, language remains a fundamental barrier to genuine dialogue. While many NGOs appear to be trying to use Bunong language, many interviewees still asserted that they struggle with language issues related to NGOs:

They don't know how to speak Bunong, they only speak Khmer.(Goem, 47)

One strategy employed by NGOs is to use translators, but this inevitably results in a reinterpretation of what is said, often with doubtful accuracy, and the time taken for translation then also begins to be a barrier to dialogue. Furthermore, despite calls by elders for NGOs to employ indigenous people in order to break down language barriers (Hutchinson et al 2008) relatively few Bunong are employed in NGOs and even fewer in government, ensuring that the halls of decision-making in Mondulkiri, both organisational and political, echo to the sounds of Khmer, not Bunong.

According to a baseline literacy survey in 2003 only 4% of Bunong men and 1% of Bunong women could read and write competently in Khmer, and only 50% of men and 25% of women felt competent in speaking Khmer (Hiatt 2003). While Khmer language proficiency may have improved since the time of the ICC survey, the idea that all the Bunong can speak Khmer suggested by some government and NGO workers appears to be more of indication of who they have had access to, and the topics they have discussed, since the interviews can not support the idea that the Bunong operate on a 'level playing field' when needing to communicate in Khmer:

If they talk about giving t-shirts, washing, then I understand, but if it's deep and important I don't understand. I don't understand their language. (Ou Ranh Chek, 70)

I want to ask people, but when they are all Khmer, then we don't really dare to speak. (Me Liep, 45)

Women and older people are put at a distinct disadvantage in negotiating with NGOs when having to speak Khmer, reinforcing a shift towards younger males in village leadership as suggested by other researchers (Mallow 2002; Hutchinson et al 2008). This problem appears to exist predominantly among those who fled to Vietnam, having had less exposure to Khmer language through its enforced usage during the Khmer Rouge period.

A common concept expressed by the interviewees however, was that they 'did not know how to talk'. There appears to be two problems implied in this: firstly as discussed the content of the discourse is not within the Bunong realm of sense-making, the knowledge fault-line, and secondly that even with competence in Khmer, the embedded cultural barriers in the language serve as an additional barrier. This issue was clearly expressed by three competent Bunong Khmer-speakers:

I go to meetings. I'm not so afraid, but I'm not able to speak Khmer. (Kao, 55)

How can we participate when they have higher cultures and they speak more correctly than us? (Mbiq Nap, 31, NGO staff)

It's difficult for us to participate because we also don't know how we should greet and behave properly. (Mbiq Blau, 34)

As a Northern European I can to some extent understand the struggle that the Bunong have in relating to the Khmer language, since relative to the Khmer our cultures are both relatively egalitarian. While I can not claim to be an expert on Khmer culture, one is immediately struck with how the societal hierarchy is embedded in the language, for example Khmer has at least seven verbs for eating, which are used depending on the relative social status between the speaker and the object. This hierarchy permits different social interaction in such a complex way that most foreigners (myself included) never really understand. It seems the Bunong have little exception in this either. But while I as a foreigner have the benefit of power relations working in my favour, and thus am largely forgiven for my cultural ignorance, the same is not true for the Bunong, who are then labelled uneducated and ignorant - the word for the Bunong, Phnong, in Khmer is synonymous with barbarian. It is

therefore not just language that forms this barrier to dialogue, but also the embedded cultural content.

NGOs - Culturally Khmodern?

The Bunong themselves perceive that Khmer culture is held as superior and describe its hegemony with some passion:

If we don't do it [the Khmer] way, they say we are wrong/.../That's right, we don't know much. They say we Bunong don't know (Mbiq Nkraish, 30)

The Bunong culture they can't be bothered about. (Kao, 55)

[the Khmer] don't want to receive much advice from us. They are quiet and they look down on us even from just looking at the clothes we wear. They don't want to participate with us and listen to us. (Me Nkraish, 31, NGO staff)

It is significant to note that the above quotes are spoken of in the the context of interaction with NGOs, suggesting that a 'Khmodern' cultural form is dominant in NGOs, feeding into historical narratives of inferiority and presenting a problem to both those who work within the NGO and those who relate to it. Of particular difficulty appears to be the differences in societal hierarchy between Bunong and Khmer culture. Respondents described the Khmer habit of 'Tha', to reprimand in a pejorative style which is justified by differences of status within khmer culture, as expressed here:

If they go to the communities and they see the communities not participating, then they just 'tha' (reprimand). They are using the idea of their status to tell the community off. (Mbiq Nap, 31, NGO staff)

The Bunong appear to have no equivalent hierarchy since authority has traditionally been derived by merit, not social status. Informants described there discomfort with the formal relations in terms of feeling fear and shame in participation, effectively silencing them in meetings taking a Khmer form:

'[their Bunong culture] causes them not to participate so much in society, because society wants them to participate in a certain manner, fashion, and appropriately, like the leaders, like the Khmer. (Mbiq Nap, 31, NGO staff)

Observing these cultural strategies, and recognising that these are the dominant forms, Bunong people themselves begin to adopt the cultural forms, as both a participation strategy, but also as a process of assimilation into Khmer culture:

Everything should be important really, their knowledge is different from ours. We all have different cultures/.../But since we don't think that they will receive our culture, we do according to their culture. (Kao, 55)

There are some people like that who act so important, they come to the village, and they don't even want to speak Bunong with their parents/.../they pretend like they can't even speak Bunong.(Me Liep, 45)

The Sangkum period portrayed the Bunong as undeveloped and inferior (White 1996) through narratives of trade, Bunong illiteracy and lack of a writing system¹⁰, by living in the un-socialised forest, and generally living in a development paradigm concept of poverty - a view implied by interventionism (Long 2001). Furthermore, The Khmer have developed many myths about these mystical people: that they have tails, a hole through their chests, and feed their children to guests! Khmer working in Mondulkiri today speak of the ridiculousness of these myths and argue that the Bunong are just the same as Khmer. However, this failure to recognise the 'otherness' of the Bunong, which arguably results in them being perceived merely as second-rate 'unevolved' Khmer (Bourdier 2006, p. 205).

A Narrative of Cultural Inferiority

In the Bunong world even the gods come to them in Bunong form 'carrying a cross bow and quiver, and a bag of cooked rice' (Pewitt 2007, p. 9) Is it therefore any surprise that they struggle with the foreign (Khmer and international) cultural forms introduced through development organisations?

Given the rhetoric of engaging with indigenous knowledge, and the emphasis on respect for indigenous ways, seeking dialogue for the mutual benefit of both parties, it seems somewhat disjointed that the Bunong have developed a perception that they must 'sacrifice/cut away the things that make participation difficult so that we can know' (Top, 22). Unconsciously the

¹⁰ A Bunong writing system based on the Khmer script was approved by the Royal Government of Cambodia in 2003 and is currently being taught.

onus has moved from the participatory development mandate of outsiders adopting insider approaches, to insiders feeling obligated to follow the cultural rules of the outsider.

The NGO culture of planning and efficiency, leaves little room for the flexible and spontaneous life of the Bunong, while narratives of Khmer cultural superiority inherent in the 'khmodern' form of NGOs, leave the Bunong questioning and even abandoning their own culture. This further feeds into a cycle of perceived cultural inferiority and dependance on external thinking. The Bunong enter into interaction with NGOs with a sense of cultural inferiority, which is often reinforced by that interaction.

A 'Culture of Silence'

Interaction between the Bunong and development organisations comes at the nexus of several reinforcing narratives. These four narratives combine to form a Freirian 'Culture of Silence', where the dominant discourse of commercialisation and development effectively 'oppresses' that of the Bunong life project, to the point where Bunong own the view of the dominant elite: that their life project is inferior.

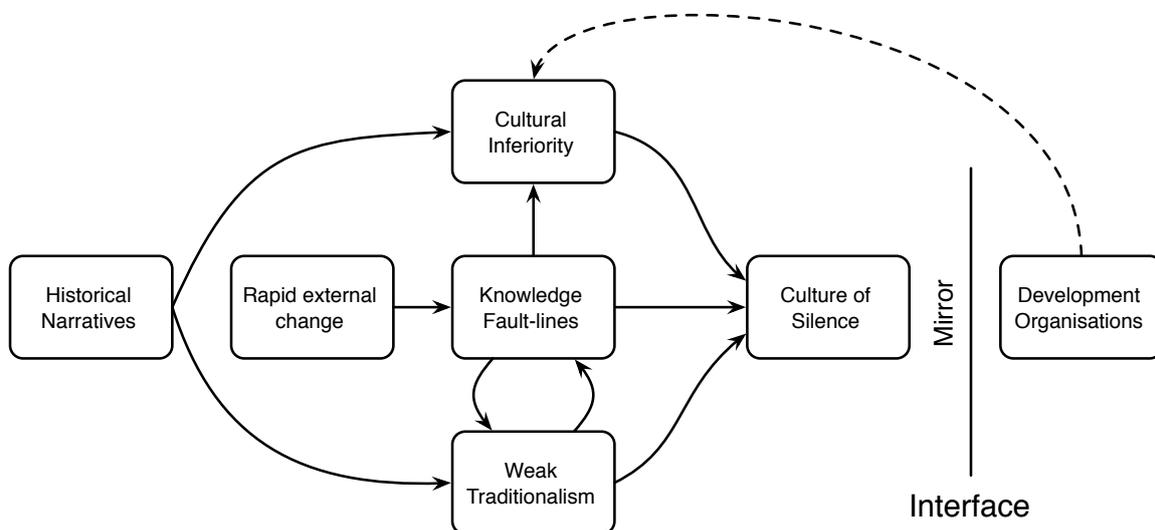


Figure 3: Model of Bunong interactions with Development organisations.

The arrival of the commercialised society has arrived in Mondulkiri after a series of historic events weakening Bunong conservatism, allowing rapid, and often unevaluated change. As explored in the narratives of knowledge fault-lines, a clear distinction now exists between those who 'know' and those who don't; this knowledge referring to external cultural systems

of explanation and meaning within a commercialised society. While change is a natural process of cultural evolution, the narratives of weakened traditionalism and cultural inferiority present a serious challenge. Participants appear unwilling to draw on their own knowledge in a process of cultural evaluation, preferring to use the cultural frame of the outsider. This outsider knowledge takes the form of 'Khmodern' culture', which still contains many elements of khmer tradition. As the Bunong look to the Khmer as a model for change, the cultural traditions of the Bunong are exchanged for those of the Khmer.

Even though NGOs are seeking to engage with Bunong indigenous knowledge, the Khmer and modern forms of NGOs reinforce these patterns of inferiority and lead to behaviour at the interface of mirroring and assimilation. Cultural domination occurs then not just systematically (through a biased aid system), but also less consciously through the habits and values of those intervening at the interface; processes similar to Freire's 'harbouring of the oppressor'. This silencing of Bunong culture bearing many similarities to a Freirian 'culture of silence'.

Conclusion

As suggested Hammer (2009), the difference in world-views, between local and development knowledge systems, serves to limit participation as a policy tool. However, a sharp dichotomy can not be drawn, and this struggle is better understood as an issue of competing priorities between two life projects. The Bunong have already begun interaction with the development paradigm, indeed there remains little other choice, but in seeking balance with the priorities of their livelihoods, participation is often regarded as a lower priority, a scenario which is exacerbated by a lack of NGO coordination, and unfulfilled expectations.

The low priority given to participation raises questions as to the extent to which NGOs are reliably accessing and applying indigenous knowledge. While the issue of participation and the application of indigenous knowledge is well problematised, this research suggests the dominance of the development agenda is not just a product of internal power relations in the development system itself, but are also, caused by historical and cultural narratives, reinforced by the development agenda - even when it seeks to 'reverse' power relations.

Historical narratives of rapid rates of external change and weak traditionalism, have established an environment in which the Bunong are not in a strong position to critically evaluate their culture and the changes which are occurring. As the context of the Bunong life project has shifted, with the introduction of markets and commoditisation, the Bunong are finding that indeed:

Their cultural heritage of community-level resource management, high levels of local self-sufficiency, and relative social equality is the antithesis of how the commercial world was developed and is currently organised. (Bodley 2008:7)

This can be described as a knowledge fault-line. Weakened traditionalism and cultural inferiority act together at this fault-line causing Bunong people to feel impelled to imitate external cultural forms in order to better operate in this commercialised society. As NGOs act in this environment, they are in danger of contributing to a tragic process of 'unintentional ethnocide'. While programming suggests that agendas are sensitive to the Bunong environment, the manner of 'khmodern' organisation undermines this sensitivity, and reinforces the established perception of the Bunong that their own cultural forms are inferior. Given that these local 'khmodern' forms of modernisation contain traditions not indigenous to the Bunong, the rhetorical question must be raised as to why the Bunong would benefit from adopting another culture's traditions.

Consistent with criticisms of 'myths of community', a romantic view of the Bunong life project can not be sustained. Oppressive structures, such as the belief in 'Chjak', within Bunong society suggest a need for critical evaluation and change. But as argued by Henkel (2001) a process of dialogue and critical evaluation is necessary to assure that the Bunong do not simply trade one system of oppression for another, with participation being a form of Foucauldian subjection within the commercialised society.

As argued by Chambers there is a need to 'shift power to make a difference' (Chambers & Pettit 2004), in order to open up the organisational space to allow for the 'inefficient' processes of learning the Bunong language and establishing dialogue on Bunong terms, respectfully entering into the sovereign places of the Bunong: in the field, the smokey 'Chey', walking through the forest, or around the fire at night, in an attempt to move closer toward a more balanced dialogue.

The Bunong have described the need for encouragement in order to establish fruitful dialogue, but this needs to stem from the belief that dialogue with the Bunong can produce relevant hybrid knowledge and that they genuinely have the right to self-determination, rather than the patronising inclusion of indigenous knowledge for the efficiency and effectiveness of development programming.

A further step in this direction will be to attempt to change the face of development. As called for by elders in Ratanakiri, more indigenous minorities need to be employed in development organisations (Hutchinson et al 2008). However, unless organisational priorities of routinisation in the name of 'efficiency above all' are addressed, there is a danger that this employment will continue to contribute to further cultural assimilation. This is an area requiring further investigation, but I would suggest here, that in order to avoid this problem more space in the rationalist logical systems of organisations are required in order that the Bunong can experiment with their own organisational forms. NGOs are in a unique position here, not being market dependent they can to some extent avoid the tension between needing the 'freedom to fail' (Freire & Ramos 1987) while not unethically abandoning them to be taught by the market (Sillitoe 1998:225).

This may of course be a romantic vision especially given the risk implied: that control must be relinquished while quantitative measures, upon which most NGOs are judged by donor agencies, be sacrificed for less measurable qualitative ones. But this is perhaps the price NGOs and donors will need to pay if they are really committed to seeing development on Bunong terms in keeping with the right to self-determination, and to subvert the social structures that cause the mirroring of development ideology caused by a Bunong 'silence of culture'.

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Maps:

Dynamic Language Maps 2.0, Unknown scale, SIL International (2010)

Appendices

Appendix 1: Interview Locations

Interviews were conducted in the following villages:

- Busra village five,
- Dakdam (Buraleh and Buchap),
- Lower Buretang,
- Laoka.

Interviews with Bunong NGO staff were conducted at the following NGOs (including their relation to indigenous knowledge):

- ICC (International Cooperation Cambodia)- draws on mother tongue language as a tool in education and literacy.
- WWF (World Wildlife Federation) - draw upon indigenous knowledge for conservation and natural resource management.
- Nomad - holds to a medical pluralist ideology and seeks to combine indigenous and modern practices into its interventions.
- MVI (My Village International) - seeks to raise awareness of land rights through local forms of organisation.
- Health Unlimited, seeks to work with health rights and employes participatory tools and action research as central components of it's programming.

The research focuses on non-indigenous forms of organisation simply because there are no indigenously organised groups beyond the level of the village, except arguably for the Christian Churches, and these are a relatively modern construct. As indigenous organisations may begin to form, it will be interesting to see how the findings of this research apply in the new context.

Appendix 2: Housing - From Bunong to 'Khmodern'

The change of Bunong housing provides a good example of how material culture has changed significantly in the last few decades, and the impact this has had on Bunong social structure and relations, demonstrating the isomorphic nature of culture. While I try to

establish some sense of causality it is difficult to establish 'what came first' since this change appears to come at the nexus of several factors acting over a period of time.

The Bunong traditionally lived in what they refer to as 'Chey Roat' (Condominas 1957; Schrock et al 1966). These were long houses up to 50-100m long, although traditionally measured out in 'lays', the length of a person. This building housed all the families in one family group and thus served as the living quarters for the entire village. The buildings are close to the ground, a significant diversion from common highlander practice (Hickey 1982a), but as explained:

In the past, you couldn't [build high houses], then the lightening would strike. It was like the spirits would get upset! (Mbiq Kon Ok, 65)

The houses are skilfully built with wood, ratan, bamboo and grass thatching. More than just sleeping quarters, the 'Chey Roat' formed an intimate part of the Bunong lifestyle, serving as a centre of ritual, ceremony and decision-making (Condominas 1957), as the rice granary (and therefore the house for the 'spirit' of the rice), and had areas built for the reception of guests (Schrock et al 1966).

The Bunong describe living in 'Chey Roat' as common practice up until the 60s when many fled due to the disruption of the war and the Khmer Rouge. On returning to their village locations a change of behaviour is described. Since all houses needed to be rebuilt, people decided to build their own individual houses, rather than the long Chey Roat, possibly following models that they had been exposed to during the Bunong diaspora in the Khmer lowlands and Vietnam, and as the Khmer established political posts in Mondulkiri. As Khmer immigration increased and markets were established, the availability of wood (by modern machinery) and tin roofing increased. The Khmer built their traditional style of houses in Mondulkiri which presumably weakened the fear of building on pilings and enabling the Bunong to witness the relative robustness of this type of house. Bunong houses require frequent repairing and rebuilding every 2-3 years. Wooden houses quickly became admired as described:

They do whatever is easy, and also in this modern era, they have lots of money/.../
We saw them make a house for a year, and then live in it for 9/10 years. Wood

doesn't get bad so quickly. That's why we have almost lost the old Bunong ways.
(Mbiq Bau, 37)

Further fuelling this change has been the decline in natural resources. The government policies of creating a sedentary Bunong by forming centralised villages, have halted their practice of moving to new village locations as resources are depleted. Consequently, roofing grass is now increasingly difficult to find, and informants described the distances which now have to be travelled to find the grass. This exacerbates an already difficult task, and serves to strengthen the preference for wooden houses.

Given the manner in which the housing style is so closely attached to other aspects of their culture, the change in housing has further repercussions. The construction of expensive housing has challenged the ritual of burning the house after a death to cleanse sin and maintain relations with the spirits. Now the tradition is 'stepped on' and people either do nothing about cleansing the house after death, or they sell the house creating a discontinuity between practice and Bunong religion. Furthermore, the construction of houses has always been one accepted in the 'convincing' reciprocal culture of the Bunong, but the construction of wooden houses requiring outside knowledge and capital implies a break with tradition, and therefore remuneration is required:

You can't convince people, because everyone is following money. 'If you have money, you hire people' /.../ But they will still help in making 'chey'. (Mbiq Bau, 37)

Due to a lack of experience in building houses from wood, the Bunong have adopted a simple khmer architectural style: building houses on posts in a land that never floods. This breaks the Bunong identity attached to the original design of the Chey Roat, and forms another step of khmerisation. Furthermore, it removes the communal space from the village which was originally found in the centre of the Chey Roat. Communal meetings now must take place in the culturally khmer 'Salaa', no longer in the sovereign place of the Bunong 'Chey Roat' - reinforcing the perception that they must behave in a culturally different way.

Appendix 3: Souls and 'Chyaks'

NGOs they go to the villages and they see that people are all the same, so how can they know because chyaks look like people too/.../these internal things of the Bunong, they don't know. (Tiep, 31)

Perhaps the most feared spiritual being among the Bunong is the 'Chyak'. This belief informs many of the discussions considered throughout this analysis and so it is necessary to include this discussion here. While some researchers have given the label 'sorcerer' to Chjak (e.g. Condominas 1957), this does not seem to be an adequate gloss of the Bunong concept. The Bunong describe Chyaks as beings who, through being able to change form, appear as normal people and live among the Bunong, but live by eating the souls of ordinary people. It is important to stress that Chjak are not seen as people. As described by Pewitt (2007):

Normal people have three souls: a buffalo soul, a spider soul, and a 'Phan' (spirit that walks the wind)...souls can be captured by different types of spirits. Often a person gets sick when their spider soul is captured. But they don't die unless their buffalo soul gets eaten. Then their Phan flies to the underworld. (Pewitt 2007)

By contrast a Chyak has a cow soul, a lizard soul and 'phan'. Chyaks have special abilities, including sorcery, and can leave their bodies at night when they are able to see the 'souls' of ordinary people. The souls look like buffalos to the Chyak, which it eats as meat, and as established, the capturing and eating of souls is the cause of death and illness.

While being a Chyak is hereditary, it seems that it is not purely determined by this, i.e. not all children of Chyaks are themselves Chyaks. Furthermore, not all Chyaks eat people, they can be appealed to and asked not to eat more people. Determining who is a bad Chyak is therefore critical in Bunong culture, but determining a Chyak is a difficult and destructive process.

In the event of death or severe illness, someone may be accused of being a Chjak. At this point the elders (specifically the Koranh Bon, see below) will conduct a series of tests, together with a volunteer (Pewitt 2007) to determine whether the person is a Chyak. These tests include pouring molten lead through the hand, holding underwater, and eating uncooked rice. If the test proved that the person was a Chyak then they were asked to testify, if the person refused to confess, then they were killed. If however, they confessed then negotiations

might be made and the person given over to become a slave. It is interesting psychologically (if not a little disturbing) to note that people come to the point where they agree that they are in fact a Chyak. However, if an enslaved Chyak was deemed to be causing further illness in the village then they were often killed:

My grandmother bought one [Chyak] that wasn't good and then she did bad things to us, ate us. Then when they found that it was her, then my grandparents killed her...They compared it to killing our own buffalo or cow. She didn't have value. She was our slave. (Me Nim, 37)

Chyaks can be seen to be one of the ways the Bunong seek to make sense of illness and death, and it can also be understood as a way in which behaviour is regulated in Bunong culture; since violence, cursing, the inability to forgive are all traits of Chyaks, and thus to be avoided for fear of accusations. However, this belief has many further consequences in how it shapes social interaction, and upon the knowledge which is most valued among the Bunong.

If my father has said, 'this person, you can't speak unthoughtfully towards. Then he will cause you to have problems' /.../like you and me talking here, I say some things that are correct and some things that aren't, and we can argue or whatever, and with normal people that is OK, you solve it and you become friends again, but if you do that with a Chyak, the Chyak can't do that. He will curse you, wanting to harm you.' (Tiep, 31)

So that is why we worry, even when we go to the villages, we don't know who we can speak with freely, because we don't know their genealogies, but the elders tell us not to argue with or tell off anyone of whom we don't know their genealogies. (Tiep, 31)

It is therefore easy to understand why an important ability of the elders (especially Koranh Bon) is the ability to recite genealogies, and to know rituals to test for the Chyak.