

## **Forest cleansing racial oppression in scientific nature conservation**

by Larry Lohmann

Corner House Briefing 13 first published January 1999

### **Contents**

- A Case of Ethnicized Conflict
- Recent Patterns of Scapegoating
- National Park Ideology
- Violence and Its Conditions
- The Role of Conservationists
- Racial Oppression as a Dynamic Process
  - Physical Exclusion
  - Conceptual Exclusion from "the Nation"
  - Division of Minority Groups from Each Other
  - Dissemination of Stereotypes
  - Guerrilla Speech Acts
  - The Transformation of Inclusion into Exclusion
- The Social Nature of Science
- Denying Racism, Obeying "Natural Law"
- Explaining Away Resistance
- Environmental Racism as International
- Notes and references

### **Acknowledgements**

This briefing paper was compiled by Larry Lohmann, who is deeply indebted to the insights and research of Pinkaew Luangaramsri, Kittisak Ruttanakrajangsri, Wirawat Theeraprasat, Komin Thoedphraiphawon, Waiying Thongbue, Nualnoi Thammasathien, Thongchai Winichakul, Anan Ganjanapan, Chayan Wattanaputi, Prasit Leepreecha, Kingkorn Narintarakul Na Ayutthaya, Chris Lang, Sarah Sexton, Nicholas Hildyard and many others, none of whom, however, bear any responsibility for the result.

Racial oppression, like ethnicity itself, is "about the power to name others"<sup>1</sup> and the power to name the self. But it is also much more. Striving to reorganize ethnic groups into discrete, independent, mutually-exclusive entities with simple, enduring characteristics, racial oppression locates the source of social problems in the breaching of the boundaries it has posited and the resulting "contamination", "confusion", "releases of primordial violence", "loss of identity", "cultural homogenization", "disorder", "inefficiency" or "environmental degradation". The way is then open for a dualistic, bureaucratic response to ethnic difference: either assimilation on the one hand or, on the other, exclusion in one of its multiple forms: segregation, resettlement, repatriation, dispossession, eviction, ethnic immigration controls, repression or extermination.

In an environmental variant of racial oppression, certain cultures are sealed off not just from others but also from a "Nature" similarly conceptualized as Other. Here it is ecological discipline, or the identities of trees, wolves or watersheds, which are held to be threatened by the breaching of the imagined frontier, in this case a Human/Nature boundary. The racist double bind applies in this case as well. Certain ethnic groups must either be physically separated from the imagined "Nature" by

other groups who have unilaterally decided what that "Nature" is, or submit to being identified as One with it, as savages, noble or otherwise.<sup>2</sup>

Racial oppression works to ensure that stories of ethnic contamination and purification eclipse other stories about history, power and social relations. Yet the anti-democratic attempt to impose single, rigid ethnic grids on so many social activities is, ultimately, an impossible job, even where the required ethnic boundaries can be physically marked on society (through identity cards, for instance) or on the land. Where states or warlords try to draw territorial boundaries around ethnic groups, they may run up against the obstacle that certain ethnicities remain stubbornly centred rather than bordered, organized around jural, economic or cultural relationships rather than location or landscape, or interpenetrating rather than located geographically.<sup>3</sup> Where attempts are made to lump together different groups, the groups may respond by drawing distinctions among themselves. Where, conversely, attempts are made to emphasize fine ethnological distinctions among groups, new, umbrella ethnicities may emerge to counteract the perceived "divide and rule" strategy.

Unilateral attempts to impose ethnic definitions even of one's own group may be challenged, as when Westerners decrying the inroads of "Western culture" into "unspoiled" rural societies in Asia or Africa find members of those societies contesting whether Westerners have the unilateral right to decide what counts as "Western" or "unspoiled". Similarly, evictees from national parks may ask what gives certain scientists, wildlife conservationists, forestry bureaucrats or Deep Ecologists the unilateral authority to decide what that "Nature" is from which certain types of human influence must be barred, pointing out that forests (to take one example) may also be defined in ways which do not revolve around the idea of "purifying" them by excluding or naturalizing their human co-creators.

Challenges may also be mounted to attempts to halt inquiry into the causes of social problems at the "ethnic" level of explanation. Los Angeles or London police who cite arrest statistics as evidence that blacks are more criminally inclined than whites will inevitably be confronted by anti-racists insisting that the same statistics are evidence of institutionalized discrimination. Pundits attempting to explain anti-Irish racism in England by axiomatizing cultural differences will be contradicted by historians who point out the political advantages to colonizing groups of "reducing all members of an oppressed group to one undifferentiated social status, a status beneath that of any member of any social class within the colonizing population".<sup>4</sup> Meanwhile, attempts to associate particular ethnic groups with a limited set of unexplained attributes will be attacked as stereotyping.

Partly because of this irrepressible flux of contributions and counter-contributions to the project of ethnic definition, the work of racial oppression is never done. Fresh resources must constantly be found and mined to shore up each new attempt to exert unilateral control over processes of ethnic definition as they begin to crumble, and new means devised to block democratic probing of the foundations of the walls erected either between ethnic groups or between certain ethnic groups and "Nature". Nearly any sort of material may be called into service, depending on availability and circumstances: phenotypical differences; visible differences of religion, agricultural practices, gender relations or government; latent prejudices, associations and stereotypes; facts, statistics and theories from biology, history, agronomy, medicine, hydrology, phrenology, forestry, archaeology and anthropology; environmentalism;

the discourses of "rights", "identity", "fairness", "equality" and "local autonomy"; as well as nationalisms, liberalisms and globalisms of various kinds.

Hence the mobile, heterogeneous quality of racial oppression, which can never be reduced to any one set of biological claims, cultural theories, statistical concepts, individual feelings, or even essentialist ideas. Racism is neither a theory nor a collection of beliefs, sentiments or intentions; to say so is analogous to confusing symptom with disease. Rather, it is a strategy and a process of social control which functions to block inquiry and the attempt to live with difference, in which theory, science and mental states play a derivative part. To assume that rejecting or abjuring these beliefs or sentiments is by itself an adequate response to racism is likely only to strengthen it.

## A Case of Ethnicized Conflict

One prominent world terrain of racial oppression stretches between the lowlands and highlands of South-East Asia, where valley-based states have regularly attempted to sedentarize or repress hill-dwelling ethnic minorities. Recently, racist patterns and processes in the region have been sustained and strengthened through the activities of international environmentalists and developmentalists. In a scheme which would affect 60 million people in China, Laos, Burma, Thailand, Cambodia and Vietnam, for example, the Asian Development Bank has proposed to "reduce the population of people in mountainous areas and bring them to normal life".<sup>5</sup> In Thailand, more than half a million hill dwellers scapegoated for deforestation have faced official resettlement threats for decades, with the theories of international agencies such as the Food and Agriculture Organization about the destructiveness of swidden agriculture often providing backup.<sup>6</sup>

The potential for racial violence in the region is exemplified by a current conflict over water and forests in Chom Thong, a district of 1736 square kilometres in Chiang Mai province of Northern Thailand encompassing some 106 villages, half lowland, half upland or highland. Here, over the past decade, elite conservationists, state bureaucracies and politicians have helped each other exploit, rework and augment a legacy of highland-lowland ethnic tensions in the course of pressing for resettlement of mountain communities on "environmental" grounds and for greater elite and state control over mountain resources. On 22 March 1998, a lowland "green" group advocating relocation of highlanders as a way of solving water shortages, accompanied by National Park officials, invaded a mountain village, tore down pavilions sheltering Buddha images, and removed two images.<sup>7</sup> In April, May and June, roads leading to the highlands were blocked by lowlanders demanding immediate removal of highland dwellers, causing considerable hardship in the hills, with the offenders enjoying immunity from police action.<sup>8</sup> On 24 June, a group of lowlanders including the chief of Doi Inthanon National Park ascended to a royal development project in the hills and attempted to destroy agricultural pipes and canals.<sup>9</sup> Amid a well-orchestrated atmosphere of anti-highlander emotion, the Thai cabinet resolved in June to relocate highland communities living in ecologically "sensitive" areas, reversing the previous government's undertaking to respect the land rights of communities established before protected areas were gazetted and to explore environmental solutions which would allow many mountain communities to remain in national parks and wildlife sanctuaries.<sup>10</sup>

Economic and ecological changes have provided the opportunity, and international environmentalism much of the ammunition, for this reshaping of ethnic conflict. Until fairly recently, highland and lowland economies in many regions of North Thailand, including Chom Thong, were linked in ways which reproduced ethnicity and a certain degree of ethnic tension, but which also militated against extreme ethnic violence. For example, lowlanders and highlanders cooperated for mutual benefit in the opium business. Traders acting for the state Opium Monopoly (set up in 1852 following British prodding) profited from official promotion of domestic poppy cultivation in the hills after 1947.<sup>11</sup> Lowlanders took part in cultivation, harvest, trade, and provision of fertilisers and pesticides, while highlanders of several ethnic groups were attracted to poppy-growing as a way of fostering egalitarianism and independence.<sup>12</sup> Karen hill-dwellers, to take another example, contracted to raise lowlanders' cattle and buffaloes in return for calves, with periodic friendly visits between the two parties enlivened by common hunting and gathering expeditions.<sup>13</sup>

Symbiotic lowland-highland trade relations have also been important, and officials' sense that highlanders' ethnicity can be marketed as a tourist commodity may have moderated pressures to concentrate them in reservations.<sup>14</sup> On a more general cultural level, lowland and state demands that languages and ethnic categories be arranged in a hierarchy privileging Central Thai and lowland urban cultural norms have been partially accommodated within a system in which multiple, overlapping, unbordered ethnic identities are possible, and in which reducing "divisiveness of language difference" is not felt to entail extinguishing non-Tai languages.<sup>15</sup> Speaking Karen, Northern Thai and "Standard" (Central) Thai in the space of a few minutes on an urban street, or being Karen in behaviour in one context and Northern Thai in another, have not ordinarily been regarded, particularly by those on the lower end of the hierarchy, as signs of either deception, identity confusion or "hybridity".<sup>16</sup>

Such modes of coexistence have nonetheless been accompanied by longstanding patterns of oppression and insult whose impact has often been underestimated by even the most sympathetic members of dominant lowland ethnic groups.<sup>17</sup> As lowland farmers, developers and bureaucrats alike have encroached into the hills with mining, logging, resort and other projects, state agencies' insistence on hierarchy and a superior position within it have been exacerbated by official attempts to recast ethnic identity, religion and language as sharply bounded, either/or categories.

The elision of Thai ethnicity and Thai nationality -- a process exemplified in the transformation of Siam into "Thai-land" in 1939 and in the way Thai-ness continues to be constructed partly in opposition to the image of various ethnically non-Thai "Others Within"<sup>18</sup> -- has also disadvantaged mountain peoples. On the legal level, even some long-term mountain residents of Thailand have had much more difficulty than other groups in attaining citizenship and land rights. Mountain minorities are also routinely tagged by lowlanders with a number of negative stereotypes, including dirtiness,<sup>19</sup> primitiveness, and "free sex", a portmanteau category of immorality which includes promiscuity and prostitution in addition to the perceived licence accorded to young courting couples among some highland groups.<sup>20</sup>

## Recent Patterns of Scapegoating

For several decades, in the course of their work in staking claims to contested resources, battling insurgency, responding to the concerns of other countries, centralizing administrative control and fortifying their image as problem-solvers in

the hills of Northern Thailand, state agencies have been attempting to draw new territorial boundaries on the land and new ethnic boundaries on the body of society. These boundaries have the effect of scapegoating mountain minorities for a variety of ills. Placing the neologism *chao khao* (which translates as either "hilltribes" or "them people") in a punning, rhyming binary opposition with *chao rao* ("us people"), officials have often managed to stifle discussion of the deeper causes of social problems.<sup>21</sup>

For example, after official authorization for opium commerce was withdrawn in 1958 under international pressure, blame for the new "opium problem" was often attached to highland minorities, whose newfound innate "cultural affinity" for the crop became a focus of solemn analysis even by officials and non-minorities profiting directly from the drug trade.<sup>22</sup> The fact that many highland minority communities, particularly Hmong, joined, or were pushed by government persecution into, the ill-fated movement of the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT) in the 1960s and 1970s added new edge to official stereotypes of mountain dwellers as outlaws. At the same time, a number of Hmong communities who had supported the government side and been persuaded to act as bulwarks against the CPT by settling and farming alongside new strategic roads punched into the forest were accused of forest encroachment and dispossessed as soon as the Communist movement collapsed in 1982.<sup>23</sup>

Later, responsibility for resource conflicts which were partly the result of extensive state-sanctioned commercial deforestation -- the Royal Forest Department leased approximately half Thailand's land area to commercial logging concessionaires between 1969 and 1979 alone -- was attributed to "hilltribes", the group least able to defend itself against the charge. Here the Thai state drew strength from longstanding official international biases against swidden cultivation, mobile populations and highlanders' forestry practices. During the 1980s, for example, although mountain minorities' activities were the proximate cause of perhaps five per cent of annual deforestation, and were restricted to the northern and western parts of the country, they were regularly named by officials and technocrats as the primary cause of the entire country's deforestation problem.<sup>24</sup> In Chom Thong, such practices of blame helped gloss over a history of state-promoted teak logging by British companies from the 1930s as well as extraction of hardwoods for tobacco curing and timber from the 1940s through the 1970s.<sup>25</sup>

## National Park Ideology

The establishment by Thai elites, under the tutelage of US and other international conservationists, of parks and wildlife reserves helped to entrench further this crude ethnic grid. A simplified people-*vs.*-trees narrative of forest decline was superimposed on the realities of forest history, making it possible to reinterpret the character and persistence of highland forests as a result of the relative absence of human influence rather than of human stewardship or commercial inaccessibility. In an irony often noted by minority observers, the disproportionate survival of good forest in minority-occupied areas was transformed into a reason for evicting minorities.

In line with this narrative, land was dichotomized into permanent agricultural fields and forests in which no agriculture was supposed to be practised. No room was left for intermediate or temporary forms such as forest fallows. All types of swidden agricultural systems were lumped together, stigmatized as irrational, destructive *rai luean loy* (literally, "drifting" dryland agriculture) and claimed to be the invention and

property of an abstract group called "hill tribes".<sup>26</sup> In 1986, one forestry official even went so far as to justify relocation of minority highlanders by saying that the "Hmong entered Thailand deliberately to destroy the forest and ethnic Thai practice slash-and-burn agriculture only because of the example of the hill tribes".<sup>27</sup>

The practice of some upland or highland inhabitants such as certain Karen communities of themselves keeping some areas permanently off limits to cultivation was rendered largely invisible. Admitting the existence of such areas would have meant acknowledging the possibility of limiting the role of the state in forest protection; and because such areas were usually unposted, unfenced, and governed through orally-transmitted rules rather than official written documents, they tended in any case to be "unreadable" by office-based officials.

As minority-defined agriculture became outlaw, minority-defined forests, as community spaces, were legislated into eclipse. The landscape itself was redefined in a way which made it possible to join up both sides of the classic racist double bind. Exclusion from the forests, which were to be regarded as empty, non-human spaces, became one with assimilation in the form of adoption of permanent agriculture. A system of ethnic and class exclusion became the default position for highland forest "conservation". Forests devoid of field systems or visible community stewardship became aesthetically-valuable exhibits symbolizing control, hierarchy, and ecological value to agency chiefs (*jao naai*)<sup>28</sup> and city-based conservationists alike. The fact that such approaches to conservation are increasingly recognized internationally as scientifically obsolete<sup>29</sup> has had limited impact in this political context. In Chom Thong, where Doi Inthanon National Park, established in 1972, now encloses over three dozen villages, and Ob Luang National Park, gazetted in 1991, encroaches on still more, expansion of state territorial control through national park management, besides criminalizing cultivation on fallow lands, use of forest commons, and unregistered land use, has entailed uncertainty, harassment and threats for highland minorities.

In addition to violating the new "non-human" space of the forest, swidden systems have also been seen as disorderly, un-Tai pursuits. They are thus subject to moral and legal strictures from which other, often more invasive activities practised by lowlanders -- mining, construction of dams, roads, tourist resorts, and plantations, all regarded as disciplined "development" activities -- are often exempt. In fact, at the same time that the protected area system redefined the use and management of highlands by underprivileged non-Tai groups as a conservation problem, it left unmarked or invisible many of the uses of the same areas by dominant ethnic groups and classes. Today, forests worked over by state officials, middle-class conservationists, tourists, plantation workers, scientific researchers, road-builders, royal palace personnel and so forth, and influenced by the distinctive fire and erosion regimes they introduce, are frequently characterized as "undisturbed" or "restored", whereas forests under the fire and agricultural stewardship of highland farmers are viewed as "degraded" or "endangered" by definition. When large fires broke out in Doi Inthanon National Park during March 1998, for example, it was immediately reported in Thai newspapers and by some government officials that the culprits were highland minority communities. Subsequent investigation revealed that this was a reflex reaction,<sup>30</sup> the fires having been battled day after day by some of the very minority villagers accused of setting them.<sup>31</sup>

In another move which uses a scientific justification for claiming the highlands for the exclusive use of a particular ethnic group, areas occupied by non-Tai ethnic groups have also become prime targets for "watershed protection". In the mid-1980s, the National Watershed Classification applied special 1A protected status to many highland areas. This move again had the effect of both criminalizing highland agriculture and implicitly licensing, *ex post facto*, the exploitation of now-degraded or already-converted lowland forests, which have been categorized as having few hydrological functions and cast in the role of a "naturally" suitable substrate for agriculture.<sup>32</sup> The simplified forest/human dichotomy of national park and "watershed" ideology has thus tended to mystify different historical patterns of forest clearance in highlands and lowlands.

## Violence and Its Conditions

Physical violence against mountain minorities, much of it unreported, has been an integral part of their increased stigmatization and scapegoating. The violence is directed, again following the standard racist dualism, at either removal or assimilation. In February 1986, for example, a programme to relocate "hill tribes" in six provinces in Northern Thailand was launched by the Third Army Command, the Ranger Command, the Border Patrol Police, the Suppression Division and the Royal Forestry Department under the banner of suppressing forest destruction, shifting cultivation and opium growing.<sup>33</sup> "Hill tribes" were portrayed on radio and TV and in newspapers as "wicked" and as a threat to the country. As the commander of the Third Army sternly put it, "those who destroy the nation are not the ones who illegally cut down 20 or 30 trees, but the hill tribes". The Deputy Director-General of the Royal Forestry Department opined that the solution to the "hilltribe problem" was to "sterilize them by force so that they cannot increase their numbers any further".<sup>34</sup>

In September 1987, Thai troops rounded up hundreds of Akha from 13 villages and sent them across the border to Burma, burning houses and killing livestock to prevent their return. Many had long legally resided within Thailand's borders.<sup>35</sup> In 1994, eight Ho Chinese, Lisu, Mien and Lahu communities were forcibly evicted from Doi Luang National Park and settled on forest reserve land in Lampang.<sup>36</sup> In March 1998, as part of his efforts to make a quick reputation as a forest-fire-fighter, Deputy Agriculture Minister Newin Chidchob ordered a summary, semi-random roundup of 56 Paluang and other people on arson charges. (He was later embarrassed when it was pointed out that the two square kilometres of fires they had been charged with starting had occurred alongside an unauthorized forest road used for transporting illegal logs and built by associates of Newin's father-in-law, who is involved in rock-blasting in the area.)<sup>37</sup> A few days later, forestry officials allegedly threatened to burn down a nearby village if its residents did not move out within three days, and in May destroyed mango trees and torched farm shelters in another settlement. The previous year, Border Police patrols had shaved villagers' heads at a Karen settlement in a protected area in western Thailand and forced children to wear school uniforms.<sup>38</sup>

The ground for recent ethnic violence in Chom Thong in particular has been prepared both by an unravelling of economic, political and cultural relationships between highlands and lowlands and by more extensive resource use in both lowlands and highlands. Efforts to break up the opium economy, for example, have cut one economic link between highland and lowland interests, with foreign, multilateral and national anti-drug funds being poured not only into Thai military operations but also into crop-substitution programmes introducing cabbages, fruit trees and other cash

crops to highlanders. For instance, the Thai-Norwegian Church Aid Highland Development Project has promoted commercial, chemical-intensive monocultures of cabbages among local Hmong villages.

Many lowlanders, meanwhile, have participated in independent commercialization processes, turning rice fields and degraded forest areas into longan orchards, soybean plots and pig farms, and producing charcoal from remaining forested areas. With official backing, lowland cultivation has expanded to the base of the hills and beyond.<sup>39</sup> Both patterns of commercialization have had far-reaching unintended consequences. Pushing highlanders into cash cropping has meant neglecting the potential for building on other, better-established patterns of agriculture, has contaminated streams with chemicals, and is perceived by many conservationists as having resulted in increased forest clearance.<sup>40</sup> Meanwhile, with a quadrupling of lowland double-cropping within the last quarter-century, and the spread of commercial longan orchards, water consumption in the lowlands has multiplied many-fold, particularly in the dry season.<sup>41</sup> When water supplies are squeezed during a drought, as during 1998, and politicians seeking lowlanders' votes join officials in scapegoating highland minorities,<sup>42</sup> the stage is set for intractable highland-lowland strife. Tentative efforts dating from the early 1990s by highland minorities and traditional lowland irrigation groups to work out new agreements over water use have not been enough to mend the ruptured connections.

## The Role of Conservationists

The unusual degree of racialization of resource conflict in Chom Thong is due partly to the work of conservationist organizations. Particularly prominent is the Dhammanaat Foundation. Set up in the mid-1980s by a charismatic Buddhist abbot, *phra ajaan* Pongsak Techadhammo, and granted a hill concession by the Royal Forest Department, Dhammanaat, in addition to its plantation and fire-prevention activities, has vigorously campaigned for an "urgent termination of settlement" in what it calls "upper watershed" or "headwater" forests. The foundation argues, plausibly, that it is reasonable to assume, given the special soil and other characteristics of these forests, that they act as a giant "sponge" holding and slowly releasing water to the rivers below. Several conclusions are then drawn from this assumption: first, that exploitation of these forests is what explains recent lowland water shortages; second, that these forests ensure the "survival of everyone in the nation";<sup>43</sup> and third, that it follows that agriculture must cease there. Dhammanaat is particularly incensed by the highland forest destruction and agricultural water use it sees as associated with commercial cabbage-growing promoted by foreign and national agencies, and the drying up of streams which it regards as the result. The foundation itself has made efforts to secure a resettlement site for the Hmong communities it wishes to be "voluntarily" relocated -- a site which, it asserts, will not be subject to the failures which have dogged other resettlement efforts.<sup>44</sup>

Currently led by *mom rachawong* Smansanid Svasti, a minor member of the Thai royal family, Dhammanaat has a number of powerful allies. Forestry department personnel and military officers alike have responded enthusiastically to an approach stressing the importance of official control of well-marked conservation territories.<sup>45</sup> In the highlands, Dhammanaat personnel have been seen to cooperate closely with armed military Rangers, Third Army personnel and Forest Department officers.<sup>46</sup> Many urban-based middle-class nature lovers are meanwhile attracted to this particular conservationist banner by a vision of a strictly-bounded, modernized, non-

human, Buddhist-sanctioned, contemplable "nature" under secure hierarchical state (i.e., lowland) management and out of the control of "primitive" tribes,<sup>47</sup> while some UN agencies, foreign government bodies and foreign environmental NGOs applaud Dhammaaat as an exemplar of indigenous environmentalism.<sup>48</sup>

Dhammaaat's simple message also appeals to many ordinary lowlanders who are not only suffering water shortages and economic hardship at a time of financial crisis, but are also finding it harder to maintain their social status as "more developed" than highland minorities, and are receptive to strategies which might make their membership in the dominant ethnic group count for more. One Dhammaaat activity, critics charge, is inciting mob violence by both lowland villagers and state officials.<sup>49</sup> Members of the Chom Thong Headwater Forest and Environment Conservation Club, for example, an organization closely advised by Dhammaaat, not only organized roadblocks and the March 1998 Buddha-image confiscation but also a demonstration on 21 April in which Chiang Mai University anthropologists supportive of indigenous rights were burned in effigy and accused of lying about deforestation.<sup>50</sup>

In July 1997, a Bangkok journalist, in a series of inflammatory newspaper articles, wrote revealingly of the logic of resentment which makes Hmong highlanders a special "target of animosity from the lowlands":<sup>51</sup>

"[I]t is not just because the ... Hmongs clear watershed forest areas for cultivation ... It's probably because the Hmongs are getting richer than the lowland farmers. Traditionally, the lowland farmers have looked down on the minority tribes. Now, the tables are turned ... In Baan Paa Kluay, [Hmong villagers] buy pickup trucks,<sup>52</sup> deposit cash in banks and buy longan orchards... the formerly migrant minorities are building an increasing number of permanent houses ... The money comes from the sale of cabbages and flowers.

"Dr Suchira Prayoonpitak [a Dhammaaat spokesperson and Payap University sociologist] explained how the highland farmers have increased their needs for material goods. Highlanders used to farm for self-support. Now, they're into commercial farming, she explained ... 'They change their farming methods to increase their earnings, without considering possibly negative repercussions on the environment and on human health.' Local sales of electrical appliances, farm equipment, personal luxuries and modern conveniences have been slowly but steadily increasing, as seen in their houses ... Dr Suchira said over 130 Hmong families of nearly 800 members are presently living in Chom Thong district. 'They have damaged four to five streams and rivers that feed lowland farms,' she said."

The Dhammaaat spokesperson goes on to allege a pattern of systematic deceit in highland minorities' activities:

"[Hilltribes] use various tactics to exploit watershed forests without being punished,' [Dr Suchira] said ... The villagers avoid cutting down trees, as the tell-tale evidence of such an activity is too difficult to hide. 'For instance, they remove the bark of a tree and leave it to die,' she said. They cut down the dead tree the following year when it burns more easily. Others encroach fertile watershed forests from behind the trails or observation points of national forest reserves, national parks and wildlife sanctuaries."

The journalist then adds this extraordinarily prejudicial coda:

"While the highlanders continue to consider the mountain slopes their private fiefdom, shrugging off lowland rules and regulations, they only have stubbornness and inaccessibility on their side. The authorities are lowlanders, so the lowland

farmers have an edge in this battle of wills ... Will the highlanders meekly go to relocation areas? Will the natural balance be restored soon enough for the lowlanders to be happy? Or will there be war?"

It is difficult to judge from such passages whether it is the breaching of supposed ecological limits or the breaching of the boundaries of what is considered suitable behaviour for particular ethnic groups that arouses the greater consternation, or indeed to what extent the two are distinguishable.

Where more direct expressions of outrage against hill minorities are impolitic, resentment is often displaced onto certain members of dominant groups, who are portrayed as manipulating peoples who would otherwise be more docile into unreasonable actions. Thus Dhammanaat Foundation has attributed the reluctance of Hmong communities to be removed from the highlands to the incitements of biologically-illiterate domestic non-government organizations or academics or to foreign development agencies who, ignoring the greater national good, have promised the highland minorities that they will make the highlands a "paradise" for them.<sup>53</sup> The tactic is familiar from a range of other 20th-century examples in which, for example, anti-racist movements in the Southern US are attacked as stemming from white, "nigger-loving outside agitators";<sup>54</sup> state poverty programmes are assaulted as spawning feckless black "welfare queens" or freeloading immigrants; or feminists or aboriginal advocates are tagged as "sexist" or "racist" because they are seen to be demanding "special privileges" or an "uneven playing field" for women or aboriginals.

The backlash which has resulted from the success of some Chom Thong Hmong in playing the state's own game of "development" and adopting new, permanent-field cash crops such as cabbages -- a success for which extension officials used to hold them up as a model to other ethnic communities -- constitutes an irony which is not lost on highland minority groups. "You can't win, no matter what you do," noted one local Hmong village head wryly as early as 1990.<sup>55</sup> A further irony observed by many highlanders is that they are still accused of concealing illicit activities even though, with the expansion of state activity in the hills, their every move has long been under surveillance by local officials.

## **Racial Oppression as a Dynamic Process**

For social and environmental activists committed to combating racial oppression, it is worth taking a careful look at the strategies which a few conservation organizations active on the Chom Thong issue have followed in mobilizing and remobilizing ethnic divisions in the service of "forest conservation" and centralization. Equally worthy of analysis is the success of Dhammanaat Foundation in particular in attracting support from Western greens who profess surprise and disbelief at the charges of racism which have been levelled against the organization. Both phenomena reaffirm the importance of studying racial oppression as a dynamic process rather than as flowing merely from a preconceived theory, a set of fixed tactics, or a cluster of primordial prejudices. Especially notable is the flexibility certain conservation organizations display in using whatever resources are available in their efforts to divide ethnic groups from each other, both in practice and in theory, along the lines of an ethnic management grid whose shape and dimensions the organizations themselves attempt to determine.

### **Physical Exclusion**

First, attempts are made in a crude physical way to enforce exclusionary ethnic divisions between lowlanders and highlanders and between highlanders and "Nature". In 1985, for example, Dhammanaat Foundation set up an 18-kilometre, ten-strand barbed wire fence around the mountain ridges in the area of Paa Kluay village. Erected to prevent Hmong villagers from destroying forest, it blocked them from entering their fallow land, 150-odd hectares of rice swidden and cabbage cultivation areas, and from carrying out fire-prevention and other forest-protection activities. The fence, which violated the National Forest Reserve Law, was protested by the governor of Chiang Mai province, but to no avail.<sup>56</sup> Some 27 Hmong people were rendered landless and rice shortages affected the village.<sup>57</sup> Similarly, Hmong communities have been largely excluded from forest management planning for the Mae Soi valley; their participation is seen as properly restricted to falling in with resettlement plans.<sup>58</sup>

### **Conceptual Exclusion from "the Nation"**

At the level of language, highlanders have often been set apart from lowlanders by an apocalyptic, nationalist turn of phrase of a kind which has also been used in the racist and *volkish* discourse of the New Right in Europe -- one which tends to fuse concepts of race, nation, kin, blood and ethnic identity.<sup>59</sup> In this discourse, the moral standing of highland minorities is undercut by identifying them as foreigners, hence justifying treating them as high-priority targets for action on ecological problems which have varied and complex origins. Thus, ignoring a history of logging, government extension, damaging lowland agricultural practices, increasing water consumption and climate change, *phra* Pongsak Techadhammo has warned his followers that a "calamitous drought is spreading across the whole country, withering the land because a small group of people have migrated into Thailand from neighbouring countries":

"Should anyone insist that human rights take precedence over this law of nature, ... then these people must take responsibility for the destruction of the people of our nation, the land and the life of that land ... Which is the larger undertaking -- ensuring the survival of our land and our nation or the resettlement of the hilltribes?"<sup>60</sup>

In an unconscious irony, a recent public rejoinder from Dhammanaat and allied conservationist groups to charges of racism proceeds once again to typecast highland minorities as foreigners to Thailand and as "people entering *its* land":

"In contrast to *their* reception in neighbouring countries, *they* have been given a welcome. The tribal minorities from nearby countries have come to enjoy a life of relative peace and prosperity on Thailand's soils, benefiting from a high level of concern."<sup>61</sup>

One recalls with difficulty that the Chom Thong villagers Dhammanaat is making special efforts to remove, including residents of Khun Klang and Paa Kluay villages, are Thai citizens, are from Thailand, and contribute to Thailand's economic, political and cultural life, boasting many forebears who have been long settled in the Chom Thong area. For Dhammanaat Foundation and its allies both in Thailand and abroad, as anthropologist Pinkaew Luangaramsri points out, "the Hmong" are always newcomers, the Other, migrants, nomads and refugees escaping from war and harassment, who, regardless of their actual history, legal status and style of life, must in principle be conceptualized as encountering inherent difficulties in conforming to Thai law and Thai hierarchy.<sup>62</sup> It was consistent with this pattern when Dhammanaat erected another barbed-wire fence dividing mountain communities from "Nature" in

June 1998 in Ob Luang National Park near Paa Kluay village, painting the fence posts in red, white and blue -- the colours of Thailand's national flag.<sup>63</sup> The message was both unmistakable and provocative: those on one side of the fence belonged to the Thai "nation"; those on the other did not.

### **Division of Minority Groups from Each Other**

By challenging the "ethnological" legitimacy of the many inter-ethnic alliances, movements and organizations which have emerged in Northern Thailand in the past decade, some conservationists also take it upon themselves to patrol what they see as the boundaries among different mountain-dwelling ethnic groups. For example, Dhammanaat Foundation has suggested that the Hmong ethnic group (which it regularly singles out as special ecological wrongdoers) do not have the standing to participate in the so-called "indigenous" organizations they have helped to form, since they are relatively recent arrivals in what is now Thailand and are thus not "indigenous". After an October 1998 meeting in London at which minority highlanders attempted to draw the attention of British Dhammanaat supporters to the dangers of the deepening divisions in Chom Thong, Dhammanaat invited the Hmong representative who spoke at the meeting for a chat, but not the Karen participant.<sup>64</sup> "You can just see the process of divide and rule," as Stuart Hall noted of 1970s Britain, when the Right, displaying a newfound appreciation of cultural diversity, began persistently calling attention to the separate ethnic origins of people of Caribbean, East African and Asian descent who had banded together in a self-described Black movement.<sup>65</sup>

### **Dissemination of Stereotypes**

Dhammanaat Foundation also attempts to convince outside observers and supporters of the rigidity of the ethnic boundaries and the mutual independence of the "ethnic" characteristics it designates. In discussions on forest conservation in Chom Thong, foundation spokespersons often begin with an ethnologically-informed taxonomy of the ethnic groups of the district and an objectification of some of the behaviours which distinguish them from one another. Hmong, for example, are typically stereotyped as "opium-growing peoples" with an associated proclivity for forest-destructive activities in "undisturbed" forests above 1,000 metres in altitude.<sup>66</sup> This approach tends to preempt consideration both of historical contingency (for instance, the previous integration of lowland and highland interests in the opium economy and the promotion of commercial cabbage cultivation by the state and foreign agencies) and of the agency of each group and its adaptability to changing circumstances. It hides, for example, the fact that it has become "misleading", as anthropologist Anan Ganjanapan puts it, "to associate any particular swidden practice rigidly with any particular ethnic group";<sup>67</sup> that in adapting to national park encroachment on their land by taking up permanent-field agriculture, great numbers of highland villagers are pushed into raising the very commercial crops they are then stigmatized for growing; that some highland villagers are responding to environmental concerns and political necessity by switching to settled integrated farming;<sup>68</sup> that the Hmong communities of Paa Kluay and Khun Klang have actually worked to cut their cultivated area since the end of the opium era; that neither village plants opium, which is now illegal;<sup>69</sup> and that non-Hmong villages have been established above 1,000 metres.<sup>70</sup>

Above all, the stereotyping strategy functions to short-circuit efforts at collective thinking about mutual highland-lowland adjustment, instead inviting outsiders to lend their support to a simplified, managerial, scapegoating approach to groups whose

behaviour is regarded as fixed and unself-correcting. The strategy is buttressed by interpreting the utterances of others as if they, too, were necessarily organized around the logic of stereotype and fixed essences. Thus Dhammanaat has often attempted to portray its Western critics as holding the absurd view that mountain peoples in Chom Thong are "innocent ethnic peoples practising their timeless traditions", "living in ecological harmony, frozen in the mould of the past".<sup>71</sup>

This stereotyping strategy has the additional advantage that it need not rely on discredited notions of biological or "natural" superiority. These are in any case less familiar in South-East Asia, where ethnic differentiation relies less on distinguishing cultural, phenotypical, biological, social and linguistic classifications than in Europe or North America. To borrow anthropologist Susan Wright's description of the New Right, this approach can easily adapt itself to the "anthropological idea that nations and cultures are historically constituted", yet use this idea "not to erode but to reinforce exclusiveness".<sup>72</sup>

### **Guerrilla Speech Acts**

Cultural essentialism, too, can be discarded if it is ineffective in dividing and managing subordinate groups, in blocking paths of inquiry into the deeper causes of environmental crisis, or in supplying a useful straw for disenfranchised groups to grasp at. Thus, when pushed to retract its cultural essentialist claims, Dhammanaat has continued to defend targeting "the Hmong" for causing environmental crisis on the ground that it is simply more convenient to do so for popular audiences than to try to tease out all the complicated causal chains involved.<sup>73</sup>

Other fallbacks are also available. For example, when stereotypes are challenged, it is possible to switch to the subtler rhetorical strategy of merely attaching an "ethnic" predicate to a noun in a way which suggests (without stating) that the attribute identified by the predicate is the cause of the purported problem identified by the noun. Thus the phrase "Hmong cabbages" is used nearly as frequently by some conservationists active in Chom Thong as "black family breakdown" is by the US Right, "Jewish bankers" by 1930s European anti-Semites, or "African corruption" by development agencies and right-wing political scientists.<sup>74</sup> Eschewing the use of the lumbering armoured division of a single, well-articulated racial theory or stereotype in favour of the deployment of a mobile swarm of fleeting, evasive guerrilla speech acts, this strategy is well-adapted to escape damaging hits from the big guns of intellectual analysis. Camouflaged as common sense, carelessness or trivia, such utterances tend to melt into the underbrush when challenged. Rationalists drawn into hot pursuit are likely to be ambushed by protestations of "but do you deny that Hmong plant cabbages?" or accusations of "political correctness".

### **The Transformation of Inclusion into Exclusion**

Racial oppression can and must also seek fresh resources in the very concepts which oppressed groups themselves use to seek legitimacy. Thus just as minority highlander groups interpret the double-edged categories "nation", "Thainess" and "development" in ways which make them as inclusive as possible, so Dhammanaat Foundation reinterprets the newly-valorized, double-edged category "indigenous" -- which has been constructed partly to help link together, and mobilize international support for, groups organized in less-hierarchical polities on the periphery of nation-states -- in ways which support exclusion. Taking advantage of tendencies within indigenous peoples' movements, including those of Thailand, to yoke the legitimacy of some of

their claims to narrowly technical chronological priority of occupation or ancestral ties to particular land areas, Dhammaaat has been able to argue that certain minority groups in Northern Thailand enjoy neither.<sup>75</sup>

The contest for the conceptual resources used to justify racial violence is not just a matter of word games -- or, as Quentin Tarantino puts it, what people talk about "before they get their guns out". It is also a part of the violent actions themselves. When Chom Thong conservationists and officials seized the highland village's Buddha images in March 1998, they were not merely attacking a minority community. They were also contesting what they saw as an attempt to appropriate the mantle of Buddhist legitimacy for an illicit settlement. Yet this act too, because it was an affront to the sacred, was double-edged in its potential to provoke feelings of repugnance among local residents, both highland and lowland.

## **The Social Nature of Science**

Playing an especially important role in the dynamics of racial oppression in Chom Thong has been science -- not only anthropology and other "sciences of culture", but also hydrology, botany, ecology and other "sciences of nature". Like their social-science counterparts, these disciplines are inevitably encased in the politics of their time. All derive many of their variables and questions, to say nothing of their directions and funding, from wider contemporary social currents.<sup>76</sup> This is not an "impurity" in the natural sciences but one of their virtues: part of their strength as living, valuable, productive social practices capable of playing a role in human liberation is that they will always also be vulnerable to having their characters partly determined by, and to being drafted into a role which shores up, darker, anti-democratic social trends. One of the darkest of these trends is that of ethnic divisiveness. In Thailand, as in India, Algeria and North America, the interface between actually-existing forest science and racial oppression is especially long and rich in capillary connections.<sup>77</sup>

These connections are as productive in "good" science -- that science which yields true results -- as in what is referred to in the US legal system as "junk science". Junk science, of course, abounds in racist nature conservation in Northern Thailand, as it does elsewhere,<sup>78</sup> and is the type of science usually targeted for criticism by anti-racists. Examples include Dhammaaat Foundation's categorical claims that before Hmong occupation headwater forests were "undisturbed" or "pristine" and that lowland forests made no significant contribution to stream flow in river valleys and plains -- claims which are either contradicted by the available evidence or insufficiently substantiated.<sup>79</sup> Evidence that extension of upland agriculture as practiced to date in Northern Thailand has resulted in increased erosion remains unconvincing,<sup>80</sup> as does the claim that mere residence by humans in some parts of the highlands necessarily affects water supplies in the lowlands. As geographer Timothy Forsyth concludes, "the current perception of upland agriculture as damaging seems more reflective of historic Tai attitudes toward ethnic minorities than of an approach based on scientific research of environmental processes".<sup>81</sup> Also unproven, even uninvestigated, is the blanket claim that only in the lowlands can "humankind exist with the forests". Nor has much scientific evidence been provided that monopoly bureaucratic control of highland forests would result in their preservation; indeed, most of the evidence is on the other side.

Yet it is important to recall that "good" natural science -- that which is competent in conventional professional terms and which yields true results -- can also be shaped by, and shape in its turn, racial oppression. Political interests necessarily influence not only the social processes by which certain facts are highlighted above others, but also the processes by which certain questions are chosen over others for investigation; by which greater efforts are made to confirm one hypothesis rather than another; and by which scientific facts themselves are engendered and developed.<sup>82</sup> Where the scientific gaze falls at a particular time, and what subsequently do and do not become solid, visible "facts", are partly determined by, among other political factors, background patterns of racial discrimination.

Thus highland forests which have become a focus of urban middle-class contemplation, enjoyment and concern over water supplies will likely attract more scientific research than lowland forests which have already been cut or depleted. A political atmosphere dominated by the needs of institutions to make highland minorities the "usual suspects" for deforestation, similarly, will be more conducive to scientific findings being generated about the ecological drawbacks of highland cabbage cultivation, or of swidden agriculture, than about, say, lowland water consumption, the hydrological capacity of the Ping river basin as a whole, the record of Forest Department conservation, or defences against fire, mining and illegal logging which depend on highland communities staying in place. The net result is likely to be a science which, though it may escape the fate of "junk science", will accentuate the dichotomy between "sensitive" highland forests and "expendable" lowland forests. This is a science which, whatever its virtues, will do nothing to challenge what Anan Ganjanapan calls policy-makers' and government officials' "misconceptions about the management of the environment",<sup>83</sup> including the notion that permanent agriculture is the only environmentally acceptable agriculture and that highland deforestation and lowland water shortages are caused by highland communities having been "established in the wrong place" and by their "unchecked growth of population".<sup>84</sup>

The racist character and functions of such science -- again, assuming that it produces at least some confirmable, true and interesting findings -- cannot be explained away as unprofessionalism, bad intentions, irrationality or personal bias on the part of individual scientists. On the contrary: current professionalism dictates precisely that scientists *not* be distracted in their day-to-day work by questions about the origin or wider meaning of their investigations of, say, runoff from a particular field or species diversity in a forest fallow.

The case is analogous to that of the 19th-century European scientists who, inspired to seek clues about what they were encouraged to see as "criminality", studied with great professionalism the skulls, cranial capacities and facial measurements of convicts;<sup>85</sup> or who, following their age's fascination with setting up oppositions between the sexual nature and practices of Africans and Europeans, formed themselves into a committee to examine, describe and formulate theories about the labia of Sarah Bartmann, the "Hottentot Venus", whose genitals, after her death, were painstakingly dissected, measured, analyzed, detached, and displayed.<sup>86</sup> The case is also analogous to that of 20th century scientists who compile gene sequences or IQ statistics as part of inquiries into urban violence, homelessness or divorce. All such scientists can legitimately attest that they are merely "reading off" what the calipers, rulers and test results say, merely stating "the way the world is". If in so doing they are contributing to the naturalization of current discriminatory boundaries, they can protest, that is

only because the facts compel them to do so. What procedures these facts emerge from, what other facts they obscure, and what role they play in the economy of racism, is irrelevant to the question of whether they are facts or not, which is the only "scientific" question which can be raised about them.

This characteristic protest, to give it the benefit of the doubt, may often be merely naive. Many scientists' consciousness of the ways they are contributing to racism are likely to be buried beneath moral fervour and excitement at the prospect of bringing their own expertise usefully to bear on a social problem.<sup>87</sup> Then too, just as plumbers are likely to suspect that many social problems are the result of deficient pipes, or teachers to suggest that a lack of classrooms might be responsible, so many natural scientists are likely to have little difficulty in convincing themselves that what is mainly lacking in society is proper scientific knowledge. But perhaps the biggest encouragement of all to many scientists' sense of their own innocence and privileged moral status is a still-popular view according to which natural science, alone among human endeavours (with the possible lingering exception of religion), is capable of escaping, in the words of biologist and historian Donna Haraway, the "processes which give it birth", deriving neither inspiration nor direction nor authority, questions, methods, theories and facts from social sources, but entirely from a purified Natural and non-racialized Other which reveals itself in due course to a properly-sensitized priesthood through the oracles of instruments, observations, textbooks, and the "scientific method" itself.<sup>88</sup> From this perspective, for scientists to take responsibility for asking questions about those structures of racial oppression in their societies which might play a part in constructing their topics, theories, laboratories, field sites, statistical methods and refereed scientific papers is as uncalled-for as it would be for characters in a Greek drama to ask if there might be some human involvement in all those cryptic messages emanating from Delphi. Hence the puzzled complaint of scientific nature conservationists such as those associated with Dhammaanat Foundation, whenever the issue of racial oppression is brought up, that:

"[i]t serves no useful purpose to bring the issue of racism into what is essentially a discussion about how to manage people and natural resources for sustainable development in fragile ecosystems".<sup>89</sup>

The presumption throughout is of a scientific terrain which is somehow devoid of racism, and indeed of politics altogether, until they are (illegitimately) introduced.<sup>90</sup>

## **Denying Racism, Obeying "Natural Law"**

The example suggests why the close study of science as a social practice is indispensable to contemporary anti-racist struggles. The less necessary it seems to scientists to examine their work for the marks of racial oppression, the more potent and resilient that oppression is likely to be. The view that natural science is, in principle, an activity in which (in philosopher Bernard Williams's phrase) a Nature purified of human activity "inscribes itself into scientific journals without benefit of human intervention" is one aspect of that denial of the extent of racism which is an integral part of contemporary racial oppression. Conversely, if science were better appreciated as a living social process performed by human beings -- and not seen as one that derives its authority from a metaphysical connection with a purified "natural" realm walled off from political processes -- the more that its best products (as well as its worst) would themselves be seen as being based partly on political choice. The result would be less temptation to be seduced by the dangerous vision of a "science-

based" or "science-led" policy whose science is not also at the same time policy-based.

To question the oracular, priestly view of natural science is politically important also in that it gets at the heart of the puzzle of why racist nature conservationism can appeal so strongly to many Western environmentalists who, in other spheres of life, are not insensitive to the lessons of the struggle against Naziism, oppression of blacks, and so forth. To say, as Dhammanaat Foundation does, that environmental problems in Chom Thong are a result of lack of scientific education among most of those concerned is acceptable, comfortably familiar, even flattering, to educated, middle-class Westerners, whereas a more openly and conventionally racist explanation would not be.

In Thailand itself, the oracular view of science has been strengthened by its fusion with intellectualistic strains of modern Buddhist thought which locate the roots of social and environmental problems in a lack of "correct understanding" of an unchanging and unquestionable "Nature" which dictates the form a moral and "correct" society must take.<sup>91</sup> One late abbot revered by the progressive middle class, and said to be an influence on *phra* Pongsak Techadhammo, saw this society as realizable only through a "Buddhist socialist democracy which is guided by *dhamma* and managed by a 'dictator' whose character [charisma] exemplifies the ten Royal Virtues (*dasarajadhamma*)".<sup>92</sup> This dictator, of a non-hereditary *ksatriya*<sup>93</sup> class, would be necessary to "expedite" the society's achievement of an "original state of nature or human condition" -- one without multiplying, unsatisfiable material desires and without accumulation, in which the needs of society as a whole superseded those of individuals.

Such views, which enjoy huge moral authority, can easily be enlisted to lend weight to the view that once all parties are imbued by aristocratic, scientific or priestly elites with a correct understanding of hydrological principles, resettlement of minority groups will follow as a matter of course.<sup>94</sup> Sermons against "desires that cannot be satisfied" can meanwhile be selectively directed against highland minorities who, supposedly unlike the lowland majority, have "destroyed forests not to support human life but for riches, for financial gain".<sup>95</sup> The result is a potent anti-democratic mixture which carries more than a faint echo of the "natural law" rhetoric of German National Socialism, according to which an "ideologically charged 'natural order'" held to be unmediated by the social and political "does not leave room for compromise; its claims are absolute".<sup>96</sup> According to *phra* Pongsak Techadhammo, forest conservation:

"is not a matter of differing personal opinions. It is a matter of truth and lie, a matter of upholding the truth or destroying and ignoring the laws of nature ... The blood in our veins and the water in the highland streams are connected. When the forests are felled and the balance of nature is destroyed, the life capacity of the earth diminishes. It is not within our power to stop this. We cannot change a law of nature".<sup>97</sup>

"If those who are destroying [forests] ... would leave the area, our problems would be solved," *phra* Pongsak concludes. "Let us have no more talk".

## Explaining Away Resistance

Thais who believe that, on the contrary, it would be constructive, both from a scientific and from a policy point of view, to have quite a bit more talk, especially from oppressed groups in Chom Thong who have not yet had much chance to be

heard on the national stage, are meanwhile not only contesting the terrain of Buddhist morality but also tapping popular democratic and anti-discriminatory currents of feeling. These currents are formidable. These days, talk of "participation" is everywhere in the air in rural Thailand, while in most national and international forums, it is no longer politic to profess racist views publicly. Under public pressure, even the highly-authoritarian World Bank has been compelled, in its writings if not in its other practices, to take a stand against forced resettlement.

Conservation organizations demanding removal of mountain peoples from the highlands have thus had no choice, when on the public and especially the international stage, but to disavow violence, forced resettlement and racism. This has led to considerable -- and potentially productive -- strain. First, denying racism has entailed an awkward attempt to erase a great deal of recent Thai history and to mould racism into (to use Stuart Hall's words) "respectable forms which exempt it from having to recognize itself as such".<sup>98</sup> Second, in the face of ethnic minorities' massive and longstanding resistance to resettlement,<sup>99</sup> and thus the certainty that in many cases relocation would *have* to be forced,<sup>100</sup> conservation organizations have been able to maintain their position advocating segregation of highlanders from "sensitive" forests only by attempting to *simulate* democratic consent to removal. Thus the headline in a 1997 English-language Dhammaaat newsletter aimed at an international audience trumpeted that "The Hmong want to come down!",<sup>101</sup> while foundation spokesperson *mom rachawong* Smansanid has claimed when talking to Europeans that "all the hilltribes I've met want to come down".<sup>102</sup>

The fact that minority groups contest such claims has made some awkward manoeuvres necessary. For example, a Thai-language petition referred to by British Dhammaaat supporters at a meeting in London in 1998 purporting to be signed by minority villagers agreeing to relocation turned out, on examination by the Thai speakers present, to be from landless villagers from a district outside Chom Thong who were requesting land. Confronted with the fact that the ethnic minority leaders present also clearly indicated their opposition to relocation, one Dhammaaat supporter was reduced to pointing to a photograph of a politely-smiling Hmong village leader visiting the resettlement site being prepared by the foundation as evidence of minority acquiescence in relocation.<sup>103</sup> This prompted a Thai observer to joke privately that "it looks like we'll have to warn our friends not to smile in any picture taken by Dhammaaat for fear it will be misinterpreted." On the ground in Chom Thong itself, the need to be seen to be involving minority groups in resettlement plans has resulted in a minority presence at some meetings. However, the facts that the language of such meetings is Thai, with which many mountain groups are uncomfortable, and that an atmosphere of intimidation and implicit threat toward minorities often prevails, make it difficult to regard this as a step toward democracy.<sup>104</sup>

## **Environmental Racism as International**

Throughout their existence, campaigns to dispossess hill-dwelling minorities in Thailand have tapped the power of international racist science and development discourse. Organizations such as Dhammaaat Foundation, in addition, have attracted significant international support, both material and moral, from liberal Western environmentalists, who, in addition to sometimes having little understanding of the historical dynamics of race in Thailand, often seem noticeably forgetful of the West's own lessons of racist violence and racist denial. Indeed, as Dhammaaat itself points

out, *phra* Pongsak Techadhammo's "ideas have been more quickly appreciated in the international community" than among Thais.<sup>105</sup>

Thus a brochure issued by the Dhammanaat Foundation contains warm endorsements from leading British green Jonathon Porritt, film director David Puttnam, and wildlife documentary presenter David Attenborough,<sup>106</sup> who said in a recent interview on the Chom Thong issue that he did not have time to discuss indigenous peoples.<sup>107</sup> Appreciative documentaries treating the foundation's activities have been aired in Australia, Sweden and the UK.<sup>108</sup> The foundation, which is a registered charity in the UK, lists financial donations from the Canadian Friends Service Committee, the British, German and Canadian Embassies in Thailand, the Canada Fund, the Ford Foundation, the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), WWF-UK, the United Nations Environment Programme, the Thai-German Development Foundation, the Van Meile firm of The Netherlands and the Bristol Rainforest Group, as well as model Penelope Tree and the Prince of Wales.<sup>109</sup>

Several British Dhammanaat supporters also unwittingly echo the more extreme racial language used by the foundation. Somerset Wildlife Trust Director Roger Martin, an ex-diplomat, for example, singles out "Hmong cabbages" as a cause of deforestation in Chom Thong in a recent letter to the World Rainforest Movement supporting Dhammanaat's approach.<sup>110</sup> By collapsing a multifaceted ecological history and politics into a single ethnic predicate, such epithets help clear the ground for the construction, in the West as well as in Thailand, of practical syllogisms of a chillingly familiar type: cabbages cause deforestation; the cabbages are Hmong; therefore take away the Hmong. While few Western environmentalists would today permit themselves to indulge in a phrase such as (for example) "Jewish cabbages", or claim that the damaging ecological effects of (say) "Black sugar cane" grown in Haiti or "German battery acid" produced in a Rhineland factory implies that plantation land should be taken over by whites, or German industries by North Americans, it is worth noting that, among the more backward elements of international nature conservationism, "forest cleansing" remains more acceptable than "ethnic cleansing" of the more familiar variety.

Understanding environmental racism means paying attention both to the uniqueness of particular cases and to wider parallels. Examples such as that of Chom Thong provide rich materials for understanding evolving patterns of ethnic violence and their links both to local and regional inter-class politics and resource competition and to structures of racism embedded in international science and mainstream environmentalism.

## Notes and references

<sup>1</sup> Worby, E., "Maps, Names and Ethnic Games: The Epistemology and Iconography of Colonial Power in Northwestern Zimbabwe," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 20, 3, September 1994, p.371.

<sup>2</sup> Cronon, W. (ed.), *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature*, Norton, New York, 1996; Di Chiro, G., "Nature as Community" in Goldman, M. (ed.), *Privatizing Nature: Political Struggles for the Global Commons*, Pluto, London, 1998; Gould, S. J., *The Mismeasure of Man*, Penguin, London, 1981; Haraway, D., *Primate Visions: Gender, Race and Nature in the World of Modern Science*, Routledge, London, 1989; Merchant, C., *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology and the Scientific Revolution*, Harper and Row, San Francisco, 1980. See also Jennings,

F., *The Invasion of America: Indians, Colonialism and the Cant of Conquest*, Norton, New York, 1976, pp.58-84.

[3](#) Lancaster, C. S., "Ethnic Identity, History and 'Tribe' in the Middle Zambezi Valley", *American Ethnologist* 1, 1974, pp.707-30; E. R. Leach, *Political Systems of Highland Burma*, University of London, London, 1954; David Campbell, "Apartheid Cartography: The Political Anthropology and Spatial Effects of International Diplomacy in Bosnia", forthcoming in *Political Geography*.

[4](#) Allen., T. W., *The Invention of the White Race*, vol. 1: *Racial Oppression and Social Control*, Verso, London, 1997, p.32.

[5](#) Morita, N., Vice-President of the Asian Development Bank, quoted in Tangwisutijit, N., "Relocation in Sight for Hill People", *The Nation* (Bangkok), 4 August 1996. The project referred to is entitled *Poverty Reduction and Environmental Management in Remote Watersheds in the Greater Mekong Subregion*.

[6](#) Luangaramsri, P., "On the Discourse of Hill Tribes", Department of Anthropology, University of Washington, Seattle, 1997.

[7](#) Luangaramsri, P., "The Ambiguity of 'Watershed': The Politics of People and Conservation in Northern Thailand. A Case Study of the Chom Thong Conflict", Department of Anthropology, University of Washington, Seattle, 1998; Inter-Mountain Peoples Education and Culture in Thailand Association (IMPECT) et al., "Reply to M. R. Smansanid", *World Rainforest Movement Bulletin*, Montevideo, July 1998; "Summary of Illegal Actions by the Chomthong Conservation Group and the Insecurity of Highland Communities in Doi Inthanond National Park Chiangmai Province, Thailand", Chiang Mai, 1998.

[8](#) IMPECT, "Summary", op. cit. 7, Ethnic Studies Network (ETHNET), Faculty of Social Sciences, Chiang Mai University, "Information Package", 1998.

[9](#) Luangaramsri, P., "Ambiguity", op. cit. 7; IMPECT, op. cit. 7; ETHNET, op. cit. 8.

[10](#) ETHNET, op. cit. 8.

[11](#) McCoy, A. W., *The Politics of Heroin in Southeast Asia*, Harper & Row, New York, 1972, pp.137-38.

[12](#) Panakumnerd, K., interview in *Watershed* 4 (1) July-October 1998, p.22; Jonsson, H. "Rhetorics and Relations: Tai States, Forests, and Upland Groups" in Durrenberger, E.P. (ed.), *State Power and Culture in Thailand*, Yale Southeast Asia Studies Monograph 44, New Haven, 1996.

[13](#) Luangaramsri, P., "Ambiguity", op cit. 7.

[14](#) However, the Thai government did set up four camps (*nikhom*) in Northern Thailand as early as 1959-1967 to which Hmong, Lahu, Lisu, Akha and Mien communities were relocated to help bring them under government control. Leepreecha, P., "*Ntoo xeeb*: Cultural Revival on Forest Conservation of the Hmong in Thailand", University of Washington, Seattle, 1998, citing Buruspatana, K., *Chao Khao*, Prae Pitaya, Bangkok, 1985.

[15](#) Smalley, W., *Linguistic Diversity and National Unity: Language Ecology in Thailand*, University of Chicago, Chicago, 1994; "Thailand's Hierarchy of Multilingualism", *Language Sciences*, 10 (2), 1988, pp.243-261. "Tai" refers to a

larger group of ethnicities and languages to which the Thai group and language belong.

[16](#) Compare the relations of multiple sovereignty in effect along most of Siam's ambiguous borders as late as the 19th century. Winichakul, T., *Siam Mapped: The History of the Geo-Body of a Nation*, University of Hawaii, Honolulu, 1994. See also Tooker, D. E., "Identity Systems of Highland Burma: 'Belief', Akha Zang, and a Critique of Interiorized Notions of Ethno-Religious Identity", *Man* 27, 1992, pp.799-819.

[17](#) Waranoot Tungitti-plakorn found that highlanders perceived far more inter-group hostility than did lowlanders in the controversy over Chom Thong conservationist fencing projects. See "Highland-Lowland Conflict over Natural Resources: A Case Study of Mae Soi, Chiang Mai, Thailand", M. S. Thesis, Asian Institute of Technology, Bangkok, 1992, pp.51-52. Among progressive lowland groups, racism tends to appear in the unreflective assumption that highland minorities aspire or should aspire to *assimilate* to lowland norms rather than in the assumption that they should be *excluded*. Examples: Sing, S., "The Necklace" in Anderson, B. R. O'G. and Mendiones, R. (eds.), *In the Mirror: Literature and Politics in Siam in the American Era*, Duang Kamol, Bangkok, 1985, pp.247-59; Tan Kim Yong, U., "Ongkorn Sangkhom nai Rabob Chonprathan Muang Faai lae' Kaan Radom Sapayakorn: Priap Thiap Rawaang Chumchon bon Thii Soong lae' Chumchon Phuen Raab nai Phaak Nuea khong Pratheet Thai", *Sangkhom-saat* (Chiang Mai University) 7, 1-2, 1984-5, pp.158-94.

[18](#) The phrase is due to Thongchai Winichakul, "The Other Within: Ethnography and Travel Literature from Bangkok Metropolis to Its Periphery in Late 19th-Century Siam", paper for the Fifth International Conference on Thai Studies, University of London, 4-10 July 1993. See also Chitkasem, M., "Nation Building and Thai Literary Discourse: The Legacy of Phibun and Luang Wichit" in Chitkasem, M. (ed.), *Thai Literary Traditions*, Chulalongkorn University Press, Bangkok, 1995. Conflating ethnicity and nationality, of course, has a double edge in that it allows minority groups who do have citizenship papers to respond to ethnic slurs by noting that "we are Thai".

[19](#) Deetes, T., *Mae Jan: Sai Nam Thii Phanplian*, Thienwan, Bangkok, 1985.

[20](#) Jonsson, H., op. cit. 12. For comparative materials from the US, see Higgins, R. R., "Race, Pollution and the Mastery of Nature", *Environmental Ethics* 16, 1994, pp.251-264.

[21](#) Hirsch, P., "Seeking Culprits: Ethnicity and Resource Conflict," *Watershed* 3 (1), July-October 1997, p.27.

[22](#) Tapp, N., *Sovereignty and Rebellion: The White Hmong of Northern Thailand*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989; Kesmanee, C., "The Poisoning Effect of a Lovers Triangle: Highlanders, Opium and Extension Crops, a Policy Overdue for Review", in McKinnon, J. and Vienne, B. (eds.) *Hill Tribes Today: Problems in Change*; Luangaramsri, P., "Discourse", op. cit. 6. For an update, see "Hmong Say They Are Victims of Injustice", *Bangkok Post*, 23 August 1998.

[23](#) Leepreecha, P., *Ntoo xeeb*, op. cit. 14. See also Kammerer, C. A., "Of Labels and Laws: Thailand's Resettlement and Repatriation Policies", *Cultural Survival Quarterly* 12, 4, 1988, pp.7-12 and Cooper, R.G., "The Tribal Minorities of Northern

Thailand: Problems and Prospects" in *Southeast Asian Affairs*, Institute for Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore, 1979, pp.323-32.

[24](#) Lohmann, L. "Land, Power and Forest Colonization in Thailand," in Colchester, M. and Lohmann, L., *The Struggle for Land and the Fate of the Forests*, Zed Books, London, 1993, p.216.

[25](#) Luangaramsri, P., "Ambiguity", op. cit. 7.

[26](#) Luangaramsri, P., *Rai, Rai Lu'an Loy, Rai Mun Wian and the Politics of 'Shifting Cultivation'*, Department of Anthropology, University of Washington, Seattle, 1998.

[27](#) Cited in Eudey, A. A., "14 April 1986: Eviction Orders to the Hmong of Huai Yew Yee Village, Huai Kha Khaeng Wildlife Sanctuary, Thailand", in McKinnon, J. and Vienne, B., op. cit. 22, p.256.

[28](#) Originally used of royalty, this term is now employed colloquially to mean senior officials or bosses, as when a watershed conservation official recently told a Karen leader that the Karen should not practice swidden in the Mae Ning forest because "jao naai from outside will definitely love [this fertile forest] if they have a chance to come here ... The cutting of forest in this area would make a bad impression on the jao naai when he comes to the village". Luangaramsri, P., "Rai", op. cit. 26.

[29](#) See, for example, Ghimire, K. B. and Pimbert, M. P. (eds.), *Social Change and Conservation*, Earthscan, London, 1997; Peluso, N., "Coercing Conservation: The Politics of State Resource Control", *Global Environmental Change* 4, 2, 1993, pp.199-217; Neumann, R. P., *Imposing Wilderness: Struggles over Livelihood and Nature Preservation in Africa*, University of California, Berkeley, 1998; Adams, J. S. and McShane, T. O., *The Myth of Wild Africa: Conservation without Illusion*, Norton, New York, 1992.

[30](#) ETHNET, op. cit. 8; Thongbue, W., "Lamdap Sathanakaan Khaw Tae Jing Koranii Kaan Kerd Fai Paa nai Kheet Uthayaan Haeng Chaat Doi Inthanon lae' Uthayaan Haeng Chaat Ob Luang", report for the International Alliance of Tribal and Indigenous Peoples of the Tropical Forests, Chiang Mai, 1998.

[31](#) Luangaramsri, P., "Ambiguity", op. cit. 7. See also Thongbue, W. op. cit. 30 and Association of Academics for the Poor, Chiang Mai University, "Sathanakaan Fai Paa Uthayaan Haeng Chaat Doi Inthanon (Km. 33-34) lae' Kaan Jap Klum Chaaw Baan Paang Daeng (Palaung, Muser, Lisor lae' Khon Thai Phuen Raab) nai Koranii Chiang Dao", Chiang Mai, 1998.

[32](#) For instance, in the late 1980s, some lowland National Reserve Forest land was released in order to set up "forest villages" (*muu baan paa mai*) for lowland villagers. The Royal Forest Department provided legal approval and skilled personnel, while funding came from the private Dhammaanat Foundation. Luangaramsri, P., "Ambiguity", op. cit. 7.

[33](#) *Thai Rath*, 22 February 1986.

[34](#) *Siam Rath*, 27 February 1987.

[35](#) United Press International, 29 September 1987; Kammerer, C. A., op. cit. 23. See also Kammerer, "Territorial Imperatives: Akha Ethnic Identity and Thailand's National Integration" in McKinnon, J. and Vienne, B. (eds.), op. cit. 22, pp.259-302.

[36](#) Luangaramsri, P., "Ambiguity", op. cit. 7.

- [37](#) *Bangkok Post*, 16 April and 19 May 1998; Association of Academics for the Poor, Chiang Mai University, "Sathanakaan", op. cit. 31.
- [38](#) Ekachai, S., "Do Not Destroy the Ethnic Culture", *Bangkok Post*, 23 January 1997.
- [39](#) Statements of Waiying Thongbue and Komin Thoedphraiphawon at the Consultation on Conservation and Conflict among Tribal Peoples, Lowlanders and the State in Northern Thailand, University of London, 2 October 1998; Luangaramsri, P., "Ambiguity", op. cit. 7.
- [40](#) Techadhammo, P., *Phuttasasana kap Kaan Anurak Paa Mai*, Klum Phitak Chiwit Matuphoom, Chiang Mai, 1991.
- [41](#) Luangaramsri, P., "Ambiguity", op. cit. 7.
- [42](#) *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 13 December 1990; Ruttanakrajangsri, K., personal communication.
- [43](#) Svasti, S., interview in *Watershed* 4, 1, July-October 1998, pp.10-13.
- [44](#) Svasti, S., personal communication, August 1998. Failed resettlement schemes have been a major cause of social unrest in Thailand in the 1990s. Chom Thong highland-lowland relocation schemes, moreover, are criticized by many lowlanders concerned about land competition as well as highlanders. Leepreecha, P., "*Ntoo xeeb*", op. cit. 14. Chiang Mai's Provincial Administration Organization has reportedly recently canvassed the proposed resettlement area as a dump site for the provincial capital's increasing volumes of garbage.
- [45](#) Pairote Suwannakorn, a former Director-General of the Royal Forest Department, has for example endorsed Dhammanaat's activities.
- [46](#) Testimony of Waiying Thongbue at the Consultation on Conservation and Conflict among Tribal Peoples, Lowlanders and the State in Northern Thailand, University of London, 2 October 1998.
- [47](#) Jonsson, H., op. cit. 12.
- [48](#) For example, *phra* Pongsak Techa-dhammo received a Global 500 Award from the United Nations Environment Programme in 1990.
- [49](#) Statement of Waiying Thongbue, op. cit. 46.
- [50](#) IMPECT et al., "Summary", op. cit. 7.
- [51](#) Kanwanich, S., "Agricultural War: The Case of the Drying Rivers" and "A Conflict High and Low", *Bangkok Post*, 20 July 1997; "The Source of Life is Poisoned", 27 July 1997.
- [52](#) Some idea of the importance of pickup trucks in indicating social status in rural Thailand is conveyed by the fact that, before the recent financial crash, this medium-sized country was the biggest market for such vehicles in the world outside the US. (It was also the second largest market for Mercedes-Benz automobiles and Johnnie Walker whisky). Bello, W., Cunningham, S. and Li, K. P., *Siamese Tragedy: Development and Disintegration in Modern Thailand*, Zed Books, London, 1998, pp.5-6. For minority groups to be seen to be availing themselves of this symbolically-freighted commodity constitutes an implicit challenge to the ethnic hierarchy imagined by many lowlanders.
- [53](#) Svasti, S., interview, op. cit. 43.

[54](#) Deputy Minister Newin replied to challenges to his semi-random roundup of 56 mostly minority people for arson by rights groups and scholars by asking "Those who are trying to defend this small group of people -- do you care for the other 60 million in the country? When there is fire, drought or flood, do these people ever come out to look after the public? But when a minority people violate the law and cause damage to the country, why such effort to protect them?" (*Khao Sot*, 4 April 1998).

[55](#) *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 13 December 1990. See also statement of Waiying Thongbue, op. cit. 46.

[56](#) *Phujatkarn Raiduan*, March 1994.

[57](#) Luangaramsri, P., "Ambiguity", op. cit. 7.

[58](#) Ibid. See also Sae-Va, T., interview in *Watershed* 4, 1, July-October 1998, pp.14-16.

[59](#) Levitas, R. (ed.), *Ideology of the New Right*, Polity Press, London, 1987.

[60](#) Techadhammo, P., translated transcript of interview, 3 December 1991, Project for Ecological Recovery, Bangkok, emphasis added.

[61](#) Watershed Protection Group (Dhammanaat Foundation and 21 other conservation organizations and academic associations), statement presented to the Consultation on Conservation and Conflict among Tribal Peoples, Lowlanders and the State in Northern Thailand, University of London, 2 October 1998, emphasis added.

[62](#) Luangaramsri, P., "Ambiguity", op. cit. 7. For more of this simplified migration history of minority groups, see Techadhammo, P., op. cit. 40. For the parallel way the British right has persistently characterized British subjects of Caribbean or Asian origin as non-British, see, e.g., Paul Gilroy, *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack*, Verso, London, 1987. See also his *Problems in Anti-Racist Strategy*, Runnymede Trust, London, 1987.

[63](#) *Watershed* 4, 1, July-October 1998, p.15.

[64](#) Ruttanakrajangsri, K., personal communication.

[65](#) Hall, S. "Old and New Identities, Old and New Ethnicities" in King, A. D. (ed.) *Culture, Globalization and the World System: Contemporary Conditions for the Representation of Identity*, Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1991, p.55.

[66](#) For example, Svasti, S. statement to *World Rainforest Movement Bulletin*, Montevideo, July 1998.

[67](#) Ganjanapan, A., "Resource Conflict in Northern Thailand", *Mountain Research and Development* 18, 1, 1998, pp.57-68. In fact, lowland Thai were the main swiddeners in many local areas for centuries.

[68](#) In 1989, for example, Hmong communities themselves established the Hmong Environment Protection Network, which, despite having received little help from the government, has been developing and testing sustainable alternatives to commercial monocropping. In the Hmong village of Khun Sar, meanwhile, a transition from commercial mono-cropping to wet-rice agriculture was "made without any incentives or pressure from external agencies" (Tapp, N., op. cit. 22). Some Karen communities have altered their rotational farming system to incorporate agro-forestry and increased their reliance on paddy fields where possible -- even though this last adaptation is more an attempt to conform to unscientific state theories of conservation than an

actual environmental advance. See IMPECT et al., "Reply to M. R. Smansanid", *World Rainforest Movement Bulletin*, Montevideo, July 1998.

[69](#) Testimony of Waiying Thongbue, Komin Thoedphraiphanawon and Chayan Wattanaphuti, op. cit. 46.

[70](#) IMPECT et al., "Reply", op. cit. 68.

[71](#) Svasti, S., Statement to *World Rainforest Movement Bulletin*, Montevideo, July 1998, op. cit 66.

[72](#) Wright, S., "The Politicization of 'Culture'", *Anthropology Today* 14, 1, February 1998, p.10. See also "'Blood' and 'Culture'", Corner House Briefing 11, January 1999.

[73](#) Svasti, S., personal communication.

[74](#) The phrase "Hmong cabbages", it may be necessary to emphasize, does not refer to a particular plant variety (as in "Chinese plums") -- the seed used is of standard commercial varieties marketed by multinational corporations -- nor to the place where the cabbages are grown (as in "North American wheat"). Rather, the phrase has a purely racial function. In even slyer forms of racist speech, predicates themselves may be dropped, with the noun alone acting as a synecdoche expressing both racial characteristics and a sense of their importance. Thus just as "corruption" often connotes "Third World corruption", and "Aid for Dependent Children recipients" often means "lazy, black AFDC recipients", so "cabbages", when uttered in a certain tone of voice when discussing Chom Thong, often stands in for "Hmong cabbages".

[75](#) In an uncaring, self-Orientalizing, self-objectivizing 1998 appeal for international support, for example, a group of indigenous support organizations in Northern Thailand wrote of "indigenous/tribal" people of Thailand's north as if they all claimed to have "preserved the land they occupied since time immemorial", setting themselves up for a damaging Dhammanaat retort. A similar strategic misstep occurs when minority groups, under pressure of circumstances, allow the legitimacy of their claims to become dependent on how successfully they can attach to themselves a self-essentializing, culturally-reifying "traditional environmentalist" label. In doing so, they weaken in advance their ability to defend themselves against such typically racist statements as "You don't use traditional hunting gear any more; you buy video cameras; you have been commercialized and have 'lost' your culture and your harmony with Nature; therefore you have forfeited your rights to the land". A more effective strategy would continually emphasize the centrality of democracy and common agency in defining and redefining both culture and nature. For more general discussions, see Kingsbury, B., "Indigenous Peoples' in International Law: A Constructivist Approach to the Asian Controversy", *American Journal of International Law*, July 1998 and Rival, L., Wilson, R. and Corry, S. contributions to the Panel Discussion on Indigenous Human Rights, Royal Anthropological Institute - Survival International, 12 November 1997, Museum of Mankind, London.

[76](#) See, for example, Haraway, D., op. cit. 2 and Harding, S., *Whose Science? Whose Knowledge? Thinking from Women's Lives*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, 1991.

[77](#) For material on the interpenetration of forest-fire science and ethnic discrimination, see Pyne, S. J., *World Fire: The Culture of Fire on Earth*, University of Washington, Seattle, 1995; *Fire in America: A Cultural History of Wildland and Rural Fire*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1982 and *Vestal Fire*, University of Washington, Seattle, 1997.

[78](#) For some examples of "junk science" in African scientific nature conservation *see*, for example, Adams, J. S. and McShane, T. O., *op. cit.* 29 and Leach, M. and Fairhead, J., *Misreading the African Landscape*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1996.

[79](#) As forester Somsak Sukwong of Kasetsart University has recently observed, "lowland forests, especially those along streams and rivers, had tremendous ecological functions in maintaining and transpiring water" and constituted watershed "equally significant" to that of the highlands (cited in Luangaramsri, P., "Ambiguity", *op. cit.* 7). It is unlikely that landscapes anywhere in mainland Southeast Asia have been at any time in the historical period completely unshaped by human fire, hunting and gathering, or other management practices. *See* Pyne, S. J., *op. cit.* 77.

[80](#) Alford, D., "Streamflow and Sediment Transport from Mountain Watersheds of the Chao Phraya Basin, Northern Thailand: A Reconnaissance Study", *Mountain Research and Development* 12, 3, 1992, pp.257-268; McKinnon, J., "Domestication or Development?", in Kampe, K. and McCaskill, D. (eds.), *Development or Domestication?*, Silkworm Books, Chiangmai, 1997.

[81](#) Forsyth, T., "The Mu'ang and the Mountain: Preceptions of Environmental Degradation in Upland Thailand", *South East Asia Research* 183, 1995, pp.169-91.

[82](#) *See*, for example, Fleck, L., *Genesis and Development of a Scientific Fact*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1979 [1935]; Collins, H. M., *Changing Order: Replication and Induction in Scientific Practice*, Sage, London, 1985; Bloor, D., *Wittgenstein: A Social Theory of Knowledge*, London, Macmillan, 1983; Shapin, S. and Schaffer, S., *Leviathan and the Air Pump: Hobbes and the Experimental Life*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1985; Haraway, D., *op. cit.* 2; Hayles, N. K., "Consolidating the Canon" in Ross, A. (ed.), *Science Wars*, Duke University Press, Durham 1996; Harding, S., *The "Racial" Economy of Science*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, 1992.

[83](#) Ganjanapan, A., interview in *Watershed* 4, 1, July-October 1998, pp.26-28.

[84](#) Dhammanaat Foundation and Chom Thong Headwater Forest and Environment Conservation Club, "A Case Study of Pa Kluay Village and Chomthong in Chiang Mai" cited in Luangaramsri, P., "Ambiguity", *op. cit.* 7.

[85](#) Gould, S. J., *op. cit.* 2.

[86](#) Schiebinger, L., *Nature's Body: Gender in the Making of Modern Science*, Beacon Press, Boston, 1993, pp.160-172.

[87](#) Gould, S. J. *op. cit.* 2, pp.124, 145.

[88](#) Haraway, D., *op. cit.* 2, pp.12-13.

[89](#) Watershed Protection Group, statement, *op. cit.* 61.

[90](#) For exploration of a parallel case of denial in the sphere of law, *see* Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, "Color-Blind Dreams and Racial Nightmares: Reconfiguring Racism in the Post-Civil Rights Era", in Morrison, T. and Brodsky, C. (eds.), *Birth of a Nation' hood: Gaze, Script and Spectacle in the O. J. Simpson Case*, Vintage, London, 1997, p.104 and "Race, Reform and Retrenchment: Transformation and Legitimation in Antidiscrimination Law," *Harvard Law Review* 101, May 1988, pp.1331-1387.

[91](#) The Thai neologism for "nature", *thammachaat*, invoked by priests and environmentalists alike, signifies "born of the dharma", or of truth, reality, natural law, the norm, or morality.

[92](#) Buddhadasa, "A Dictatorial Dhammic Socialism" in Swearer, D. K. (ed.), *Me and Mine: Selected Essays of Bhikku Buddhadasa*, State University of New York Press, Albany, 1989, pp.182-193.

[93](#) This Sanskrit term for the ruling aristocratic warrior class is preserved in the third term of the tripartite slogan of later 20th-century Thai nationalist discourse, which has been invoked especially frequently by military dictatorships: *chaat sasana phramahatsat(riya)* (nation, religion, monarchy).

[94](#) Svasti, S., interview op. cit. 43, p.13.

[95](#) Techadhammo, P., interview, op. cit. 60.

[96](#) Staudenmeier, P., "Fascist Ideology: The 'Green Wing' of the Nazi Party and Its Historical Antecedents" in Biehl, J. and Staudenmaier, P., *Ecofascism: Lessons from the German Experience*, AK Press, Edinburgh, 1995, p.26.

[97](#) Techadhammo, P., interview, op. cit. 60. The "natural law" motif is repeated in a secular key by *mom rachawong* Smansanid, who argues that environmental politics in Chom Thong has been polarized because non-governmental organizations and academics "don't understand the importance and the function of upper watershed forests ... [I]f everyone can appreciate that natural law, there should be little difficulty in solving our problems in resource management and land use". Svasti, S., interview op. cit. 43, p.13.

[98](#) Hall, S., "Subjects in History: Making Diasporic Identities" in Lubiano, W. (ed.), *The House that Race Built*, Pantheon, New York, 1997, p.297. Thus Dhammanaat Foundation argues that because it is against agricultural settlement by *any* ethnic group in highland headwater areas, it is not racist. The tactic of denying racism was also recently adopted by proponents of immigration restriction in the Sierra Club, who insisted that race was not a "motivating" factor in their proposal for a "reduction of net immigration" into the US. As the Political Ecology Group (PEG) pointed out, the issue is less individual "motivation" than the practices and thinking of institutions. PEG found connections with lobby and funding organizations with a record of racist actions and claims. See *Political Environments* 6, Fall 1998, p.7. The redefinition tactic has also been followed by London Metropolitan police chief Paul Condon, who recently claimed that to admit institutional racism exists in his force would be "unjust" to the many "good" individuals under his command (*The Guardian*, 2 October 1998), and by Australian politician Pauline Hanson, who has redefined racism as opposing a "level playing field" in such matters as government benefits.

[99](#) In 1993, lowland and highland groups marched together to protest a proposed expansion of protected areas. Soon afterwards the Northern Farmers Network (NFN) was established to foster communication between 107 potentially-affected villages in seven northern Thai provinces (populated by five ethnic groups including lowland Thai) and policymakers. The central aim of the Network was to stop rights violations entailed by resettlement and to demand recognition of community forest stewardship. With support from NFN, a Community Forest Bill was drafted by 1994. In April 1995, 2,000 hill people demonstrated against a Forestry Department resettlement scheme (*The Nation*, 29 April 1995); persuading the then Agriculture Minister to pledge to reconsider it and to compensate families already relocated. Mountain

dwellers fighting relocation also made their views heard during the large 99-day demonstrations of the Assembly of the Poor outside Government House in Bangkok, and influenced the cabinet resolutions in April 1997 which recognized the rights of many communities living in protected areas. After the resolutions were rescinded in 1998, an Ethnic Peoples Assembly held protest rallies in Chiang Mai. On 30 July a protest letter was sent to the government bearing the signatures of representatives of seven ethnic groups. During the past decade, in addition, many minority-staffed voluntary groups critical of resettlement have grown up. When speaking with uninformed audiences, Dhammanaat Foundation representatives typically deny or gloss over the existence of these social movements, or attribute them to manipulation of a passive populace by outside intellectuals.

[100](#)ETHNET, "Information Package", op. cit. 8.

[101](#) *Sarn Dhammanaat* 6, May 1997, p.1.

[102](#) Svasti, S., personal communication.

[103](#) Statement of Pat Wolseley at the Consultation on Conservation, op. cit. 46.

[104](#) Ruttanakrajangri, K., personal communication; testimony of Komin Thoedphraipanawon, op. cit. 39.

[105](#) Dhammanaat Foundation, "Dissemination of the Project's Aims and Activities Abroad", n.d.

[106](#) Dhammanaat Foundation brochure, n.d.

[107](#) Taylor, D., "Tribal People to be Evicted -- with Help from the Greens", *The Big Issue*, 12-18 October 1998, p.5.

[108](#) Dhammanaat Foundation, "Khong-kaan Anurak lae' Fuen Fuu Paa Lum Nam Mae Soi Mae Thim lae' Mae Pok Tambon Mae Soi Amphur Chom Thong Changwat Chiang Mai 2526-2540", Chiang Mai, n.d.

[109](#) Dhammanaat Foundation, op. cit. 108.

[110](#) Martin, R., letter to World Rainforest Movement from Somerset Wildlife Trust, 5 August 1998.

## **Rights**

This text may be freely used providing the source is credited.

LSE has developed LSE Research Online so that users may access research output of the School. Copyright © and Moral Rights for the papers on this site are retained by the individual authors and/or other copyright owners. Users may download and/or print one copy of any article(s) in LSE Research Online to facilitate their private study or for non-commercial research. You may not engage in further distribution of the material or use it for any profit-making activities or any commercial gain. You may freely distribute the URL (<http://eprints.lse.ac.uk>) of the LSE Research Online website. Others claim that environmental science is only about "nature", not humans and their squabbles. Many feel that ethnic discrimination need not be a big worry for greens since surely it is something practiced only by ignorant bad guys. Environmentalists, the implication is, are much too well-educated and well-brought-up to fall into such low-class atavisms.