Michael Kleinod

The Recreational Frontier

Ecotourism in Laos
as Ecorational
Instrumentality

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Acknowledgments

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Illustrations

List of abbreviations

ADB: Asian Development Bank
ASEAN: Association of Southeast Asian Nations
CBD: Convention on Biological Diversity
CIM: Centrum für Internationale Migration und Entwicklung
CITES: Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora
CliPAD: Climate Protection through Avoided Deforestation
DED: Deutscher Entwicklungsdienst
GDP: Gross Domestic Product
GEF: Global Environment Facility
GIZ, GTZ: Gesellschaft für Internationale / Technische Zusammenarbeit
GMS: Greater Mekong Subregion
ICDP, ICAD: Integrated Conservation and Development Project
IUCN: International Union for Conservation of Nature
LNTA: Lao National Tourism Association
SEMFOP: Social and Environment Management Framework and Operational Plan
SNV: Stichting Nederlandse Vrijwilligers (Netherlands Development Organization)
WMPA: Watershed Management and Protection Authority
WTO: World Trade Organization
NEPL: Nam Et-Phou Loei National Protected Area
NHEP: Nam Ha Ecotourism Project
NNNS: Nam Nern Night Safari
NPA: National Protected Area
NT2: Nam Theun 2 Hydropower Project
PTD, PTO: Provincial Tourism Department / Office
UN: United Nations
UNDCP: United Nations International Drug Control Programme
UNESCO: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNWTO: World Tourism Organization
USAID: United States Agency for International Development
UXO: Unexploded Ordnance
NGO: Non-Governmental Organization
TIES: The International Ecotourism Society
VT: Vientiane Times
WCS: Wildlife Conservation Society
WWF: World Wildlife Fund for Nature

Introduction: Ecotourism and the capitalist crisis

Forty years ago, Dean MacCannell based his seminal sociology of *The Tourist* on the idea that "[…] 'the tourist' is one of the best models available for modern-man-in-general" (1999 [1976], 1). In a similar fashion, this study examines ecotourism in Laos neither for the sake of ecotourism nor of Laos *per se*. Rather, by choosing ecotourism in Laos as its subject it seeks to place itself in the midst of the current global predicament.

Which is a formidable one, indeed. On the one hand, the "world's protected areas have increased in number by 58% and in their extent by 48%" since 1990, and nature conservation today represents "one of the most important land-use allocations on the planet" (Bertzky et al. 2012, 6f). In March 2015, the German Minister of the Environment declared that 60 million hectares of forests were rehabilitated worldwide in four years only, and that we are on a good way to meeting our goal of restoring 150 million hectares of destroyed forests by 2020. How could anyone not rejoice? On the other hand, however, news are that efforts to build an ecological and sustainable form of capitalism could not even slow down the global increase in greenhouse gases, with emissions having increased since 1990 by 45% overall (Konicz 2012). This fact along with the regular failure of climate talks, as well as a host of various other manifestations of an aggravating accumulation crisis evidence the general incapacity of capitalist society to keep

itself from literally walking over dead bodies. The "best possible world" is at the same time one of the worst imaginable.

Because ecotourism is an offspring of this unhinged *Weltgeist* and inherited its peculiar malady, it offers a prime vantage point from which to inquire into the sociological workings of capitalist solutions to the capitalist crisis. As is argued in this study, ecotourism represents a crisis remedy which is itself crisis-ridden. An examination of its internal and external contradictions will thus illuminate the twisted ways in which current capitalism seeks to redress its crisis tendency.

Ecocapitalism and ecotourism

How does ecotourism embody the capitalist crisis? Let us start with an official definition. The International Ecotourism Society's (TIES) defines ecotourism as "responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment, sustains the well-being of the local people, and involves interpretation and education" (TIES, 2015).[1] According to this definition, ecotourism does not equal nature tourism in general, but is nature and culture tourism that supports conservation as well as local development (as in interventions such as ecotourism, "well-being" equals increased participation in the market economy). I am looking at such forms of tourism, which are implemented with exactly this intention: to provide for a "win-win" situation regarding conservation and development. Their productive link is the nub of the matter. However, the definition by TIES is much too smooth in this respect. As I seek to demonstrate, such "reconciliation" of conservation and development is not just more twisted and conflictive in reality; in fact, both stand in a productive yet uncomfortable tension with each other that is perhaps *the* defining feature of ecotourism as understood here. I will trace this tension through the concept and practice of ecotourism.

It is this productive-yet-tenuous integration of conservation and development within one and the same practice which makes ecotourism a paradigmatic form of ecocapitalism. The conservation-development tension, as the guiding thread of this analysis, directly points to the dialectic of overaccumulation and underproduction in world-ecological terms (Moore 2015). I use the term "ecocapitalism" in order to refer to the fact that current capitalism seeks to reflect its own impossibility that it at once disregards and relies on natures. Ecocapitalism recognizes its own potential to create an "ecological crisis", but only to the degree that crisis management goes along with continued capital accumulation – only a "selective reflection" (Görg 2003) of which ecotourism is paradigmatically expressive. Al-

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[1] "What is Ecotourism?", see: https://www.ecotourism.org/what-is-ecotourism; accessed March 2, 2016. Before this definition read: "responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the well-being of local people" – the recent adding of the educational aspect aside, the shift from "improving" to "sustaining" local well-being shall give us a first pause.

though capital's ecological turn might be largely a farce at present, accounting for its ecological blind spots also seems the only way into capital's future.

If the ecological crisis is managed by reaffirming the crisis principle (such as taking for granted an ideological dualism between Nature and Society), ways to handle this crisis must be crisis-ridden as well. The focus on ecotourism will scrutinize such crisis-ridden crisis management in a social phenomenon that is concisely indicative of the epistemic and institutional power of ecocapitalism and its systemic downsides, and that, at the same time, presents a tangible social fact which is empirically explorable. Because the so-called environmental crisis is a precondition of ecotourism, ecotourism – as a crisis-ridden remedy of this crisis – embodies and concisely expresses capitalism's dilemma between conserving and developing natural resources. In short, ecotourism is not just a tangible and observable object of research, but, to borrow from Marx, "a sensual-transcendent thing" that is also expressive of ecorationality's ideological metaphysics.

A main thrust of this book is a revision of the disciplinary scope of sociology in light of the experience of the ecological crisis. Instead of continuing to explain the social by the social alone, as sociologists have done since Durkheim, the crisis-ridden ecology of capitalist society prompts us to re-center notions of the social around a certain notion of nature (see Chapter 1) in order to account for the possibility of crisis. In this vein, societies are understood here as specific ways of organizing and appropriating natures, human and nonhuman. In other words, sociology turns into social-ecology to inquire into the preconditions, modes and effects of current ways of socializing natures. Mediating social theory with Moore's world-ecology approach, I seek to problematize and render critical the ecotourism definition by TIES just quoted by pointing towards ecotourism's socio-ecological function as a *crisis-ridden crisis remedy, which recreates nonhuman natures (resources) in the periphery by recreating human natures (labor) in the centers* of capitalist world-ecology. In terms of world-ecology, that is, ecotourism is seen as a force of underproduction rather than of capitalization. I will thus link the symbolic and material tensions, ambiguities and aporias of ecotourism (as concept and practice) in zones of environmental plunder (the Lao upland frontier) with its socio-ecological functionings in the urban centers of capitalization (the recreation of labor power). It is in this sense that ecotourism can be conceived of as a "recreational frontier" exerting, as a force of neoliberal conservation, ecorational instrumentality (see below).

Ecotourism and extractive landscapes of Laos

This study of ecotourism as a global social force is empirically grounded in research on ecotourism in the Lao People's Democratic Republic (referred to from here on as "Laos" or "Lao P.D.R."). This seems apposite because this small, land-locked "rentier state" (Barma 2014) in the center of mainland Southeast Asia perfectly mirrors the global imbalance between conservation and development. One

of the most advanced protected area systems worldwide and the intention to increase the country's forest cover from today's 40% to 70% by 2020 go hand in hand with large-scale environmental plunder and turning "land into capital" (Chapter 4). Laos aspires to the status of the "battery of Asia", a regional hub of electricity production thanks to the power of the Mekong and its tributaries. Trade in timber and wildlife, legal and illicit, productively ties into Laos' transformation from a "land-locked" into a "land-linked" country, with regional infrastructure projects facilitating access and runoff of the country's raw materials – so much so that a recent WWF report[2] sees the

[…] situation with timber harvesting in Laos […] evolving under a worst-case scenario exactly opposite to what was envisaged by Forest Strategy to the Year 2020 […]. Contrary to the government's good intentions developments under the actual scenario will undoubtedly lead to the sheer depletion of commercial timber stocks in its natural forests - on the same path that Thailand, Vietnam and Cambodia have already taken.

How do these opposing trends go together? And how is ecotourism situated on the resource frontier of the Lao uplands? This study thus not only looks at the nature of ecotourism as an ecocapitalist project; ecotourism also opens a window for a comprehensive reading of Laos' socio-economic transformation.

Argument and structure

The point of departure is ecotourism as crisis-ridden crisis remedy, which makes the recreation of human natures in the centers of capitalization serve the recreation of nonhuman natures in "peripheral" zones of plunder and cheap appropriation. I hark back to Critical Theory's notion of instrumental reason and coin the term "ecorational instrumentality" in order to qualify ecotourism's relation to human and nonhuman natures. An empirical effect of such relation is social inequality. I argue that ecotourism repeats and maintains the crisis tendency of nature domination as it adheres to the same epistemic and institutional universe of crisis production. Ecotourism, as will be demonstrated, conceptually and practically relies on exclusionary notions of Nature vs. Society, Tradition vs. Modernity and so forth[3], which legitimize and facilitate real exclusion. As is further shown, however, such dominating relation to natures systemically produces undermining

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[2] This report is classified as "final draft for internal use only", which is why I refrain from providing the reference. This classification is indicative of the report's controversial nature.

[3] Capitalization of such words as Nature, Society, Tradition indicates a capitalist, ideological notion of these terms as part of a dualistic either/or constellation. For example, "Nature" hints at (common) ideological (mis)understandings of the term "nature" as pure realm of the nonhuman – as "external, controllable, reducible" (Moore 2015, 2) – to which "Society" represents the unmediated other.

tendencies. Boiled down to the practicable question of a gradual "more or less" (e.g. of "Nature" or "Modernity"), these symbolic and material exclusions are reproduced in bringing together socially and geographically distant social milieus and life worlds as ecotourism hosts and guests.

Directly related to this line of reasoning is a general skepticism regarding the reasonability of capitalist development. In contrast, modernization in Laos often tends to be framed in political-economic analyses as a process of overwhelming rationalization, simply wiping out and disenchanting traditional superstitions. Although these observations seem partly true, transition in Laos is more complex. As I aim to demonstrate, "ecorationality" is grounded in a resource fetishism of Nature's untouchedness. This fetish historically derives its religious content from the notion of the sublime as the experienced presence of God in Nature (e.g. Groh/Groh 1991). In other words, capitalist development is not as rational as is often, explicitly or implicitly, assumed. Rather, capitalist "rationality" is imbued with a host of quasi-religious "irrationalities" which to some extent also enchant frontier places (Chapter 8; Kleinod 2014). Therefore, rather than being proponents of "progress" to more reasonable forms of socializing natures, ecocapitalism and ecotourism represent a historically specific constellation of rationality and irrationality. The most recent stage in the ongoing appropriation of upland forest and people by statecraft may well do away with certain aspects of older "sociocultures" (Rehbein 2007), such as "animism", but it also productively links up with them, adding ecorationality's own peculiar fetishes of charismatic Nature and ethnic tribes.

From this take on ecotourism, the overall guiding question arises: How is crisis enacted and realized in observable social practices of ecotourism in Laos? My notion of crisis is quite formal and general: the term denotes a social process which is self-contradictory, or self-undermining, such as when capitalism as a whole undermines its own (natural) conditions of possibility (Chapters 1 and 2). Essentially, crisis is expressed in the ecocapitalist dilemma between conservation and development, which constitutes the guiding analytical thread of this examination. In order to break down the guiding question into workable parts, the more specific analytical question is tripartite: How is the dilemma between conservation and development evident in a) the preconditions, b) the procedures, and c) the effects of ecotourism practice in Laos? The argument follows this line of questioning by tracing the tension between development and conservation from theory into matter and back again. By tracking the crisis dynamic inherent in ecotourism through the structures of its concept and practice, I also show how global social differentials are reproduced in "direct" contact of distant milieus. It is through the practical reinforcement of a "global social structure" that ecocapitalist accumulation-by-appropriation proceeds sociologically.

Central to my take on ecotourism is the idea that it results from and reproduces dominating ways of relating to nature. Its structure and workings are constitut-

ed by the crisis of capitalist nature relations, and it realizes aspects of this crisis by regulating it. As mentioned, the study "zooms" into the matter and out of it again. From grounding matter in theory (Chapters 1 to 3) the argument thus proceeds to grounding theory in matter (Chapters 4 to 8). In order to render conceivable the argument that ecotourism is both result and agent of a socio-ecological crisis, Chapter 1 sets out to gauge the epistemic framework for a sociological understanding of the possibility of such crisis. It does so by discussing and combining the perspectives of Bourdieu, Marx and Critical Theory to a more strictly sociological conceptualization of what Görg (2003) termed a "reflexive materialism" of societal nature relations, including the concept of "the nonidentical" – as the only way to think sociologically about nature – into the circularity of *habitus* and social fields. This chapter locates the root of the socio-ecological crisis in the "false-and-real" dilemma of nature domination. Chapter 2 specifies these initial considerations with regard to capitalism and ecocapitalism, staying within the triad Bourdieu-Marx-Critical Theory. The specifically capitalist root of crisis is discovered in the unrealistically limitless exchange-value fixation, which translates into a dialectic of exhaustion between overaccumulation and underproduction. This chapter introduces frontiers as being central to capital's historical crisis dynamic (see Moore 2015). Furthermore, I argue that in ecocapitalism, the underproduction of cheap natures becomes an explicit object of nature regulation. The result is that the conservation/development duality turns into an inherent tension, such as in ecotourism. Further zooming in, Chapter 3 examines the concept of ecotourism as a strategy to integrate conservation and development. A systematization of the epistemic-institutional "presets" is suggested, which are based on the conservation-development tension and have fundamental bearing in practice.

Chapter 4 examines the historical making of the Lao uplands, which represent a landscape of and for ecotourism, scrutinizing diverse phases of "putting the uplands into the state". The latest phase of this historic process consists in the arrival of conservation and ecotourism at the resource frontier, and in the establishment of a productive yet uncomfortable tension between conservation and development in more concrete, spatial terms. Ecotourism's "recreational frontier" is situated within a "relational resource frontier" (Barney 2009), where it seeks, in the name of conservation, to artificially recreate the frontier in times of the "end of cheap nature" (Moore 2014). Chapter 5 focuses on the ecotouristic field in Laos, which is divided by the conservation-development tension as demonstrated by the empirical cases from which further analysis draws, namely the Nam Ha Ecotourism Project (NHEP) and the Nam Nern Night Safari (NNNS).

Chapters 6 and 7 provide an examination of two different aspects of ecotourism practice: implementing project structures and conducting a tour. Both analyses are ideal-typical representations drawn from empirical data and project literature. Chapter 6 highlights the actors, methods and activities of realizing a "distributional structure" to institutionalize the integration of local development and

resource conservation; local communities which become part of this structure are turned from peasants into "stewards and custodians of biodiversity" (CBD) or into ecosystem servants (also Kleinod 2016). Chapter 7 zooms into the practice of a typical tour, the practice of which effectively integrates conservation and development. This integration is effected by tourist payment rather than by the activities themselves, which are rather self-related and not by themselves beneficial in terms of conservation or local development. In both chapters, I not only stress the different facets of the conservation-development tension but also point out the ways in which the realization of this tension proceeds through the re-enforcement of structures of symbolic and material inequity.

Chapter 8 shifts focus from the internal to the external dynamics of ecotourism practice focusing on a peculiar locality, an ethnic spirit forest, in order to delineate the complex entanglements of symbolic-material "frontier projects" which constitute this tiny patch of land. This chapter complicates notions of "the local" and of ecotourism's empirical functioning within a whole set of accumulation interests. It further discusses the theoretical as well as political implications of "indigenism" and othering as ideological pitfalls of sustainable development. Chapter 9 presents a final discussion of the main arguments in light of the empirical investigation. The Conclusion considers some limitations of this study in tandem with potential future research and reflects on practical implications of this study.

Situating the study within the field of literature

Given the already existing academic coverage of ecotourism: Why yet another study? The answer has already been given: I believe that this study investigates ecotourism from a novel angle which combines the conceptual scope of capitalism as world-ecology with that of sociology. In ecotourism research, we find on the one side a body of empirical studies that grows on a daily basis, compiled as project reports by advisors or external, often academic, consultants. These policy-oriented studies are largely concerned with the "hows" of ecotourism and focus on lessons learned for future practice, while ecotourism clearly remains undertheorized. On the other side of the spectrum, we find more political-economic and theoretical approaches, questioning the "what" of ecotourism and criticizing its implications and effects from the perspective of "commodification" or "neoliberalization". Taking a rather radical and principal stance, this pole of ecotourism studies tends to use practical examples in order to illustrate theoretical synthesis.

This study concurs more with the "what" side of ecotourism studies but sees ecotourism's empirical "hows" as constitutive for its understanding. While I draw from empirical cases in a particular country, the general scope goes, as mentioned, beyond ecotourism in Laos *per se* and so transcends the scope of most country-based studies of ecotourism. The attempt to understand ecotourism as an aspect

of capitalist ecology is in line with and draws from many theory-based critical insights: it approaches ecotourism as a Western construct (Cater 2006), the particularity of which is a crucial aspect of ecotourism's social power. It builds on the notion of the "ecotourism bubble" (Carrier/MacLeod 2005) to scrutinize the detachedness-in-proximity so characteristic of ecotouristic experience (Chapter 7). It furthermore shares the view that ecotourism stands in an "un/comfortable" relation to resource extraction (Büscher/Davidov 2014a), and it largely concurs with the critique of the "stakeholder theory" (Fletcher 2009; see Honey 2008). My argument is in line also with a view of ecotourism as a multiple fix of capitalism's accumulation crisis (Fletcher 2014) as well as with the concepts of Nature spectacle (Igoe 2010) and of conservation as a mode of "primitive accumulation" (Kelly 2011; Büscher 2009). In addition, my account draws from the insight that ecotourism is a way of making Nature "pay its way" (see Duffy 2002, 99), and that ecotourists seek (in vain) to "get away from it all" (West/Carrier 2004). Furthermore, this study is indebted to Butcher's (2007) ideology-critical analysis of ecotourism.

While this inquiry into ecotourism shares with these contributions and authors a critical stance, the stress on a (reviewed) sociological take on ecotourism as a concept-in-practice is, I believe, its unique selling point. Select contributions are discussed in more detail during the course of the argument. As much as this examination is driven by a similar urge to arrive at some kind of "synthetic" theory of ecotourism (as in Fletcher 2014) or of "neoliberal" biodiversity conservation (as in Igoe et al. 2010 or Büscher et al. 2012), it does not pretend to attain such comprehensive synthesis within the given institutionalized epistemics (Conclusion). The major novelty of the present approach to ecotourism and capitalist natures is the pursuit of a comprehensive and systematic understanding of ecotourism on the grounds of a self-critical sociology. It does so because it holds that the problem to which ecotourism is designed as an answer − the ecological crisis − is, first and foremost, a social problem; and it is from the perspective of the social, that is, of regulated and regulating practice, that ecotourism and its socio-ecological functioning is grasped most comprehensively. A synthesis is only attainable on the grounds of a theory of social practice.

This major theoretical point of departure is thoroughly discussed in the beginning of Chapter 1. Here, I briefly and provisionally illustrate the importance of a decidedly sociological understanding of the political ecology of ecotourism with a recent contribution on ecotourism in Northern Thailand: Youdelis (2013) situates herself conceptually within a decidedly poststructural ecology approach, following Fletcher's (2010) distinction of several environmentalities within conservation discourse. Like Youdelis, this examination seeks "to explain the contradictions and tensions involved in adopting ecotourism as a market-oriented conservation strategy" (ibid, 162). My argument is, however, that a poststructural approach to ecology cannot explain those contradictions and implications because of its fixation on the power of "discourses" to shape environmental "subjectivities" without

accounting for the *social* (i.e. institutional) origin of discursive power. As is argued in more detail in Chapter 1, a poststructuralist approach is able to describe constellations of power and knowledge; yet without accounting for ecotourism as a social practice (which implies accounting for the overall conditions under which ecotourism becomes a conceivable option for human natures to be involved in), the power of ecotourism is hardly explained. Why, for example, does getting away from capitalist normality constitute one of the world's largest "industries"? The entwinement of escape from and active participation in capitalist business-as-usual (2.1.3) points to fundamental social and thus sociological problems. Ecotourism as a historically and culturally particular form of tourism hence has the potential to reveal insights into specifically ecocapitalist modes of social existence. Focusing on ecotourism as complex social practice furthermore allows attending to the interrelations not only of diverse actors but also of social levels (global-local), dimensions (symbolic-material), locales, rationales, and histories. If ecotourism is consistently constructed as a social, i.e. practical, process of "doing crisis", a more comprehensive understanding of current capitalist realities may become possible which integrates partial and confined analytical alternatives of Micro vs. Macro, Structure vs. Practice, Dynamic vs. Static, Subject vs. Object, Tradition vs. Modernity, or Culture vs. Nature. Therefore, understanding ecotourism is not limited to "how contradictions play out and affect rural peoples' lived realities" (Youdelis 2014, 162): rather, ecotourism is a concrete enactment of a global social structure that concerns the "lived realities" of those social milieus it brings together as hosts and guests.

The disconnect between theoretical conceptualizations and empirical cases as expressed in policy-oriented vs. political-ecological ecotourism studies is also integral to the latter. A recent example is an anthology on the "ecotourism-extraction nexus" (Büscher/Davidov 2014a). The introductory chapters (Davidov/Büscher 2014; Büscher/Davidov 2014b) provide a cutting-edge theoretical approach to the nexus in question with which this book is largely sympathetic. The case studies in that anthology present detailed pictures of locally lived realities in the context of ecotourism, which this study aspires to as well. However, overall, the case studies illustrate and allude to the theoretical part without actually applying and consistently reflecting it. Similarly, the theoretical framework alludes to the empirical cases demanding attention to locally lived realities in general, but it does not seem informed by any of these cases in particular. Such disconnect of theory and empirical cases is certainly due to the form of the academic article and its limitations. In contrast, this study exploits the possibilities of a monograph in order to more tightly integrate theory and empirical data. Thus, the perspective on the structured doing of crisis in ecotourism seeks to closely read theory against experience, and to provide a consistent theoretical line to be traced through concept and practice. Regarding ecotourism practice in Laos, this analysis relates to and draws from recent studies such as Phommavong (2011), Pio (2011), Ounmany (2014), Mar-

quardt (2010) and Neudorfer (2007). It goes beyond these quite descriptive accounts by situating ecotourism within a historical process of nature production (Chapter 4).

In that it understands ecotourism not just as offspring of abstract "neoliberalism" but also as a factor in the lived realities of upland Laos, this study, furthermore, draws from and seeks to contribute to the growing body of research on transition in Laos and Southeast Asia. Not least, the framing of socio-ecological change in Laos as "primitive accumulation" (e.g. Baird 2011, Kenney-Lazar 2011) or "enclosure" (e.g. Barney 2009) is as crucial as approaches to the Lao social structure and globalization (e.g. Rehbein 2004; 2007). Since the sociological scope also involves symbolic dynamics of change and continuity, my argument also relates to debates concerning the (re-)enchantment of modernity in contemporary Southeast Asia (e.g. Taylor 2007; Lauser/Endres 2011).

I have already mentioned that my account of ecotourism in Laos is best situated neither within ecotourism theory *per se* nor within Lao or area studies, but rather in a combination of the recently proclaimed "world-ecology paradigm" (Moore 2015) and a critical theory of societal nature relations (Görg 2003). With its focus on ecotourism as conservation strategy it therefore fills one gap in the world-ecology perspective as proposed by Moore (2015): the absence of conservation at a time when protected areas become "one of the most important land-use allocations on the planet" (Bertzky et al. 2012, 6f).

Methodology

This examination of ecotourism is primarily theoretical in that it is rooted in a more "abstract" preoccupation with current capitalist society and its nature relations rather than in immediate practical concerns. It seeks to understand how capitalism "takes place(s)" with regard to this observable and tangible social phenomenon. In terms of methodology, it holds that conceptual insight can only be gained by thoroughly engaging theory and empirics, so that reductive theory is complicated and "messed up" by actuality while the latter is "unlocked" by consistent systematization. In this hermeneutic process, theory attains factual weight and is uncovered in empirical reality, whereas "blind" facts attain immediate theoretical relevance instead of just illustrating the argument.

It is crucial to note the difference between attaining and presenting knowledge. The theoretical part represents a beginning only in terms of presentation while it is already the result of a process of engagement with empirical practice. Likewise, the way practice is scrutinized is informed by some theoretical stance. Moreover, "theory" is already part of practice as practice always involves some kind of theorizing (Chapter 1). This is especially true when dealing with the practice of ecotourism, which relies on quite elaborate theoretical foundations. Although the structure of this book can hardly account for all hermeneutic circles implied in its

compilation, it at least attempts to explicate as consistently as possible the theoretical assumptions which inform the analysis (Chapters 1 to 3), and seeks to reflect the theory-empirics nexus by zooming into practice and out again (see above). The methodological rationale behind this movement is to finally provide a "thick description" of ecotourism as a social phenomenon, which is the same as saying that ecotourism is treated as a "lens" through which to look more closely at larger dynamics and structures of current (eco-)capitalist society.

Ecotourism as lens

Ecotourism as understood here is designed in order to practically tackle the capitalist dilemma of Nature as "resource": whether to overexploit (develop) resources or to save (conserve) them; and it is itself struck by that dilemma. As a concept, ecotourism sheds light on the symbolic-material contradictions of late capitalism's nature relations (Chapters 1 to 3). As a practice, it illuminates how these tenuous configurations play out in structured "glocal" interactions between hosts and guests (Chapters 6 to 8). The epistemic and institutional structures of ecotourism are indicative of the nature of current ecocapitalism more generally because of the specific contradictions it is struck with. While the sociological study of ecotourism contributes to a formulation of "crisis in practice", social theory can also learn from ecotourism as a social phenomenon. It provides sociological inquiry with a tangible and thick social fact, which is culturally and economically particular, but generalized by institutional power. The way capitalist power works in and around ecotourism and Nature conservation in Laos – in its conditions, modes, and results – is telling of the twisted and active ways in which ecorational instrumentality may proceed below the level of open violence in so called "fortress conservation". The focus on ecocapitalist nature relations, as seen through the lens of ecotourism, furthermore allows for some extrapolation of future capitalist conditions because the "greening" of capitalist development is not only a marketing strategy but also objectively required from the viewpoint of the system, if it is to last.

Used as analytical lens, ecotourism has much to tell about how life worlds of the political-economic centers are linked with those in the peripheries in unequal yet productive ways. It sheds light on how individuals from distant social and geographical origins are "converted", or convert themselves, into more or less ecorational actors, at least to the degree that they participate in ecotourism. Through ecotourism as structured and structuring practice, we can also attend more closely to the "attractions" as well as the "attritions" (Salemink 2004) that ecocapitalist roles and fields present to acting individuals (Chapter 1). If "[…] 'the tourist' is one of the best models available for modern-man-in-general" (MacCannell 1999, 1), ecotourism paradigmatically embodies and expresses the nature of "ecological modernity" more specifically.

Methods, fieldwork and data

The entanglement of theory and empirical evidence is clearest with respect to the methods applied in order to elicit "ground truth", since these methods are necessarily informed by the initial scope of interest. Methods not so much grant access to data but structure and produce it. Empirical research was carried out between 2011 and 2014. It focused predominantly on conducting various sorts of semi-structured interviews with tourists, ecotourism advisors and management staff, guides as well as villagers, including questions on social background, views of ecotourism and its contexts. Overall, 25 interviews with tourists were recorded, 23 with advisors, management staff and guides ("mediators"), as well as 8 *habitus* interviews[4] with guides. More than 60 village interviews were conducted in most of the villages that were part of the projects I focused on, as well as beyond. The general fieldwork design was structured formally by the concept of the host-guest relation as central to (eco)tourism practice, and in terms of content according to the intention to trace the conservation-development tension through practice.

Four sites were selected, three of which were ongoing ecotourism projects: the Nam Ha Ecotourism Project (NHEP) at Nam Ha National Protected Area (NPA); the Nam Nern Night Safari (NNNS) at Nam Et-Phou Loei NPA; and the Katang Trail at Dong Phou Vieng NPA. The first two are considered model projects by relevant actors, and are thus exemplary for ecotourism in Laos. The project at Nakai-Nam Theun NPA has not transcended the visionary stage in the research period. In each of the three existing ecotourism projects, I participated in two tours in order to conduct participant observation: this part of the research is a central source of information because of the first-hand experience involved but also because of the researcher's proximity to the social milieu of the guests. Thus, introspection and reflection of my personal experience is a driving moment of this study. Informal conversations with several kinds of actors, as well as project reports, assessments and a cursory analysis of feedback forms from the Katang Trail (Dong Phou Vieng NPA; see Chapter 8) provide further "ground truth" information. The projects visited are introduced during the course of the examination, and the rationale of the selection of these projects will be discussed in Chapters 5 and 8, respectively; their more specific characteristics in terms of implementation and tour experience are discussed in Chapters 5, 6, 7 and 8.

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[4] On the method of *habitus* hermeneutics see, for example, Kleinod et al. 2015, 81ff.

Forms of presentation

Boxes

Aside from the commonly used elements of illustrations and diagrams ("figures"), pictures[5] and tables, this study makes use of "boxes" to throw spotlights on cases paradigmatic for the respective point or argument. A box provides a fitting anecdote, vignette or snippet to open a window into the matter at hand and its interlinkages with other passages of this text. The use of boxes shall contribute to a dense and "thick" description of the reality of ecotourism in Laos. They are used more in the first, rather abstract half of this study.

Abbreviations

My presentation of ecotourism involves a nuisance to the reader that was difficult to avoid: it takes part in the exuberant use of abbreviations and acronyms so popular in the development business. The profusion of acronyms in development cooperation is largely due to linguistic "monstrosities" such as "Social and Environment Management Framework and Operational Plan", which is virtually impossible to refer to without taking resort to the official acronym SEMFOP. What is more, I add to the already existing confusion of cognitive shortcuts by inventing NNNS for the Nam Nern Night Safari, one of my central empirical cases. The acronym NHEP for the Nam Ha Ecotourism Project is official, as are all other abbreviations. The abbreviation NPA has two official meanings in Laos, referring both to "National Protected Area" and "Non Profit Association" (i.e. nongovernmental organizations, or NGOs); it is used here to refer to the first. A decoding list of abbreviations most used here is included above, the rest is clarified in the respective sections.

Diacritics

My reproduction of Lao terms in Latin script attempts to accommodate a potentially international audience not necessarily familiar with the Lao language. Therefore, my diacritics do not follow any of the official systems since these relate to one definite second language. In terms of geographical designations, I largely maintain common spellings, again choosing those versions that might bring an international audience as close as possible to Lao pronunciation. I keep with the common writing of Lao P.D.R.'s capital as "Vientiane" even though "Viang Chan" would be more appropriate (and although I remain closer to the original name in related cases, such as "Vieng Thong").

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[5] All photos were taken by the author except for picture 2b, the source of which is not indicated for reasons of anonymity. Permission for use in this study has been granted verbally.

1 Social natures

If ecotourism is to be regarded as a crisis-ridden remedy of the ecological crisis, then the first logical step of analysis is to gauge the epistemological grounds on which "crisis" is conceivable to begin with. This chapter consequently discusses the problem of how to conceive the crisis ecotourism is a result, reaction and mode of. The notion of crisis is the subject of the entire analysis but a provisional idea of what is meant here by that term is the image of a social process which undermines itself by undermining its conditions. The so-called "ecological crisis" is understood here as the reality and objectivity of the "Nature/Society" dualism as "a binary that is empirically falsifying" but still "of real historical force" (Moore 2015, 21) – a "false-and-real" contradiction.

I argue that the epistemological ground for grasping crisis is found in a self-critical sociological approach that seeks to bring nature (back) into sociological reasoning, locating crisis dynamics in the problem of instrumental reason, or instrumentality (1.4). Crisis is seen as a social fact and must therefore be understood sociologically. However, it will become clear that the fact of crisis also poses a fundamental problem to central disciplinary tenets of sociology, and so must ecotourism if it is to be seen as a result and remedy of the ecological crisis. The possibilities and limitations of sociological thinking with regard to the *relation between* society and nature lie in its, ultimately circular, claim of the social as its sole terrain, which is rooted in the historical formation of sociology as a discipline within

the field of science. That is, sociology established and sustains itself through its circular insistence on the social as distinct realm with peculiar dynamics and structures. This emphasis is both the strong and weak point of sociology when asking for how crisis is enacted.

This examination is framed by the critique of two recent conceptualizations which are both ambitious, cutting-edge accounts of capitalist natures, and which pertain directly to the present argument. I start with Fletcher's (2014) attempt at a "unified theory" of ecotourism, discussing the "poststructuralist" paradigm within which Fletcher situates himself (1.1). Pointing out the limitations of this theoretical stance, my examination goes on delving into a discussion of social practice as necessary for understanding the production and realization of crisis. This is done by discussing Bourdieu's practice theory (1.2) to highlight the conceptual distortion of his discipline, what I call the sociological bias (1.2.3), and which, I argue, needs to be transcended in order to understand crisis as realized through practice, as well as to maintain the theoretical possibility of critique and societal change. I set out to bring back nature into the concept of social practice with a Marxian notion of practice as metabolism (1.3), and with the idea of nonidentity and instrumental reason derived from Critical Theory (1.4). Before this theoretical triad is bundled into a comprehensive approach to social practice which transcends the sociological bias and its impotency of framing crisis-ridden nature *relations* (1.6), the argument returns to the issue of poststructuralism in order to critically discuss the latest conceptual contribution to capitalist natures, Jason W. Moore's (2015) call for a "world-ecology" paradigm (1.5). A central logic of this chapter is to show that a meaningful grasp of ecotourism must stand on sociological grounds but re-examine and transcend the sociological bias that everything is explained by the social alone, in order to strengthen a sociological approach to the crisis of ecocapitalist nature relations (Chapter 2). Ecotourism is thus seen as a result and way of socially regulating (and perpetuating) a socially produced crisis.

1.1 Limits of discursive power

The debate about commodification or neoliberalization of natures (e.g. O'Connor 1988; Castree 2008 and 2003; Heynen/Robbins 2005), and in this context also about neoliberal conservation and ecotourism (e.g. Igoe/Brockington 2007; Fletcher 2010; below) is much akin to the perspective taken here (see Introduction). However, one crucial difference lies in the role of the social in my account which plays only a minor role in current theorizing on nature in late capitalism. This section serves as a point of departure in order to develop and unfold an understanding of ecotourism as practice of crisis. A recent contribution to the understanding of ecotourism is Robert Fletcher's (2014) *Romancing the Wild: Cultural Dimensions of Ecotourism*. Differences in scope and ecotourism definitions aside, Fletcher's and my approaches converge in the interest in the power implied in

ecotourism and its practice. Explicitly identifying with a Foucauldian, poststructuralist strand of theorization, Fletcher promotes Foucault's notion of neoliberal governmentality, a recent form of non-disciplinary power (2014, 136; 2010). While Foucault's concepts of governmentality and bio-power are often cited and applied, his approach to neoliberal governmentality in particular has found only limited academic attention so far. It profoundly concerns the matter at hand as an environmental mode of "conducting conduct". Foucault writes:

[…] homo oeconomicus *[…] responds systematically to systematic modifications artificially introduced into the environment.* Homo oeconomicus *is someone who is eminently governable. [...]* homo oeconomicus *now becomes the correlate of a governmentality which will act on the environment and systematically modify its variables.* (Foucault 2008, 270f)

A special form of governmental power, neoliberal governmentality is environmental in that it creates environments of incentives for *homo oeconomicus* to act in a certain, desired manner. Fletcher (2014) foreshadows central aspects of the present analysis, suggesting that:

[…] ecotourism development can be viewed as the introduction of a new (monetary) materiality as well as an effort to inculcate in local stakeholders a significant cultural shift. Neoliberalization can thus be understood as […] virtualism, constituting a political project that endeavours to create a social reality that it suggests already exists. (ibid, 137)

Fletcher points out that although subjects may not by themselves simply conform to the projection of a *homo oeconomicus* "in providing […] incentives […] locals are encouraged to behave in precisely this manner" (ibid, 139). He coins the term neoliberal environmentality, which neatly frames the implementation of "alternative" forms of income (such as ecotourism instead of wildlife trade) as a governmental act of ruling people. However, we will see later on, that, notwithstanding the analytical value of neoliberal governmentality, effective control via setting environmental economic incentives is also always precarious and regularly undermined by the very same actors to be controlled. Moreover, it remains debatable whether this specific kind of rule is truly that recent.

Important as the concept of neoliberal environmentality may well be, it includes certain presumptions that must be seen as problematic from the perspective of crisis. Fletcher aims at a unified theory of ecotourism (ibid, 21ff) through a combination of Foucault, Marx, and psychoanalysis (Butler, Lacan), and consequently adheres to a Foucauldian notion of power: "power produces […] reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth" (Foucault in ibid, 22). Fletcher fully embraces this notion of productive power established against a concept of restriction and inhibition. Consequently, he does not seem to avoid Foucault's theoretical inconsistencies: In *The History of Sexuality, Part I*, Foucault elaborates:

*Power is everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere.
[…] power is not an institution, and not a structure; neither is it a certain strength we are en-
dowed with; it is the name that one attributes to a complex strategical situation in a particular
society.* (Foucault 1978, 93)

Expressed in this passage is a monism of power that knows no outside, is "self-
producing" and mere "omnipresence of power" (ibid; Fink-Eitel 2002, 78ff). This
seems a problematic design: as Axel Honneth (a proponent of critical theory)
remarks, Foucault's notion of power does not clarify sufficiently the consolidation
of power positions while working with an idea of power-exercising institutions, so
that the actually interesting problem disappears: the institutionalization of power
(see Schneider 2004, 84). Foucault's power is thus unable to explain what it is
interested in: how and why "power" solidifies in "a complex strategical situation in
a particular society".

   There is another, related, ambivalence in Foucault. In his "Discourse on Lan-
guage", appendix to *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, he writes that "our age, whether
through logic or epistemology, whether through Marx or through Nietzsche, is
attempting to flee Hegel", an attempt which "is possibly one of [Hegel's] tricks
directed against us, at the end of which he stands, motionless, waiting for us"
(Foucault 1972, 235). Now, Foucault's own ambition to "flee Hegel" into a "hap-
py positivism" (ibid, 125) leads him, throughout his publication career, from sub-
jectivity to a power monism and back to the subject (Fink-Eitel 2002, 98), thereby
fulfilling what he had predicted. In fact, read closely, Foucault's writings, and es-
pecially *History of Sexuality*, are throughout haunted by Hegel's subject-object dia-
lectic and hardly manage to escape his "insidiousness". Although Foucault rightly
points out, for example, that power not simply hampers individual action but is
also productive, he overstresses this point (instead of, for example, conceptualiz-
ing actual workings of power more dialectically as productive constraints and con-
strained productivity). With his conception of productive power comes a silent
materialism that still sees power exerted *on something* which is not simply produced
by power but its object. In her rigorous reading of Foucault, Judith Butler has
concisely pointed out those sections of *History of Sexuality* where Foucault betrays
this unsolved tension. For example, on the one hand, he claims that there is no
"sexus" beyond power/knowledge; on the other, he does indicate something of a
sexual diversity as such (Butler 1991, 146). In a similar manner, throughout his
elaborations in *Discipline and Punish* and *History of Sexuality I*, Foucault is constantly
forced to apply a vocabulary of repression, constraint and resistance, such as
where "pleasures" are "penetrated" or "controlled" (Foucault 1978, 11). It is this
silent materialism which saves Foucault for sociology, whereas Butler's discourse
feminism takes off into a "radical" performative politics oblivious to its own (elit-
ist) social origin (e.g. Bourdieu 2005, 178).

It seems crucial to note that, although Fletcher explicitly claims allegiance to Foucault's poststructuralism, the latter does not constitute a core element in his "unified" ecotourism theory. Rather, power as merely productive is inconsistent with his emphasis on "alienation" (2014, 106). In *explaining* ecotourism, Fletcher is thus forced, as is Foucault, to assume a subjectivity able to experience discontent with its *involvement in* power-structures. It therefore seems necessary, and Fletcher suggests so, to turn to more specifically sociological approaches such as Bourdieu's, in order to describe the *embodiment,* that is, the *realization* of disciplinary practices in *habitus*, or to situate ecotourists in certain social milieus.

Yet, the full implications of Bourdieu's approach do not seem to be appreciated by Fletcher who claims that

Bourdieu stakes a relatively generous space in his so-called practice theory […] in terms of which actors are seen to actively construct through (somewhat) self-conscious strategies of 'capital' accumulation the very social structures that direct and constrain their actions to a certain degree. (ibid, 23f)

If this assessment of Bourdieu's theoretical value, the space for agency, is not based on some misunderstanding, it is at least a debatable reading of his practice theory. In contrast, I see Bourdieu's theory of *habitus* as structure-deterministic – which is exactly its strength for thinking crisis sociologically. In comprehending the theoretical possibility of crisis (as precondition for ecotourism), in other words, understanding the ways in which "discourses" are exactly *powerful*, and how crisis is a *socially made reality*, Bourdieu goes beyond a poststructuralist notion of power, largely because he is more materialist – although he is still not materialist enough.

1.2 Practice and the sociological bias

A sociological stance is most helpful in unlocking the complex workings of ecotourism in Laos. First of all, the sociological scope prohibits essentialism and primordialism as everything is seen as "originating" in historical, principally arbitrary societal formations. This protects against claims of the ecotouristic discourse itself. Second, sociology is situated at the intersection of symbolic and material processes, which allows for a more comprehensive scope of actual, observable dynamics. Third, with its focus on practice, sociology scrutinizes the locale where epistemic and institutional structures converge, and where subject and object, nature and culture, traditional and modern entangle observable events. Finally, in contrast to "neutral" concepts such as actor-networks or *oikeios* (1.5), a mainstay of sociology in particular is a qualification of relations, for example, as dependency, hierarchy or reciprocity. And of course, sociology transcends the scope of discursive power (1.1).

1.2.1 *Habitus*, field and symbolic violence

Bourdieu goes beyond a poststructuralist scope in that power ceases to be primarily discursive. For him, the power of discourse is not found in discourse itself but is the delegated power of institutions and their legitimacy (Bourdieu/Wacquant 2006, 182f). Clearly, not all discourses are powerful, not all speakers are heard. He stresses, furthermore, that discourse is also only one element in a "universe" of possible practices (ibid, 18). In short, the power of "the" discourse is social (inequality in) power. In this sense, Bourdieu's approach to power transcends the scope of poststructuralism. We will see, however, that he partly remains poststructuralist, seeing sociology like most sociologists as "external linguistics" (Bourdieu 1990, 32).

The argumentation presented here goes along with Bourdieu's attempt to reconcile objectivism and subjectivism (Bourdieu 1990; also 1977 and 1998). His central concepts provide us with a strong sense for the *symbolic-material* economies of the social, namely, his concept of *habitus* as "product of the regularities of the social world for which and through which there *is* a social world" (Bourdieu 1990, 140; italics original). More analytically, *habitus* are "systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures" (ibid, 53). Bourdieu captures the dialectic of the symbolic and the material as "dialectic" between *habitus* and fields, which represent relatively distinct spaces of (unequal) distribution of various forms of capital, "the energy of social physics"(ibid, 122) with field-specific rules of equivalence and convertibility. Practice keeps the reproductive cycle of internalized dispositions and socio-structural positions going. The *habitus* is a generative principle of social practice that not only tends to reproduce the distribution of different forms of capital (economic, social, cultural, symbolic, and diverse sub-versions); it is emphatically a materiality, embodied inequality, and so actually realizes and enlivens social structure, making it "possible to inhabit institutions":

> […] *it is through the capacity for incorporation, which exploits the body's readiness to take seriously the performative magic of the social, that the king, the banker or the priest are hereditary monarchy, financial capitalism or the Church made flesh. Property appropriates its owner, embodying itself in the form of a structure generating practices perfectly conforming with its logic and its demands.* (ibid, 57)

The conjunction of objectified and embodied structure entails what Bourdieu calls the original *doxa*: "regularities inherent in an arbitrary condition […] tend to appear as necessary, even *natural*, since they are the basis of the schemes of perception and appreciation through which they are apprehended" (ibid; emphasis added). This pre-adaptedness (ibid, 54) of action and social structure makes social arbitrariness appear natural. Such an idea of the "natural" as effect of the co-constitution of structures of unequal relations and as patterns of practical orienta-

tion is specifically instructive for social nature relations and their symbolic-material power, because it perfectly captures the fact that "nature" is fundamentally a social projection legitimizing the *status quo*. If the latter is defined by social inequality and domination, the original *doxa* effects symbolic violence through the practical (mis)recognition of the social as natural: dominated subjects share with the dominating class the latter's symbolic universe, the result being that their inferior position appears as natural also to them so that they participate in their subjection.

Expedient as this approach is: its limitations for the problem at hand, societal nature relations, lie in exactly these points, as well. The subsequent section demonstrates this problem and highlights the need to transcend Bourdieu (with Bourdieu).

1.2.2 Theory and practice

Bourdieu states that it "is not easy to speak of practice other than negatively" (ibid, 80). He draws attention to the fact that theory necessarily distorts practice as it takes a position outside of an actual practical process:

One only has to stand outside the game, as the observer does, in order to sweep away the urgency, the appeals, the threats, the steps to be taken, which make up the real, really lived-in, world (ibid, 82).

Theory replaces practice's particularity of moments and temporal dynamics with a homogenous time arrow while practice "has a logic which is not that of the logician" (ibid, 86), containing only so much logic as is practical. This is a most central point to make for this study which will observe that ecotouristic practice also undermines the theory which structures it. But his argument about the incompatibility of theory and practice becomes more problematic:

[…] as soon as he reflects on his practice […] the agent loses any chance of expressing the truth of his practice […]. Simply because he is questioned, and questions himself, about the reasons and the raison d'être *of his practice, he cannot communicate the essential point […] that the very nature of practice is that it excludes this question. His remarks convey this primary truth of primary experience only by omission […] truth of practice as a blindness to its own truth.* (ibid, 91)

When Bourdieu suggests a "primary truth of primary experience" that consists in "blindness to its own truth", and which cannot be accessed by theory either, the opposition of subjectivism and objectivism that he had set out to transcend is re-established. This is explicit in his claim that the self-questioning of the agent "about the reasons and the *raison d'être* of his practice" is artificial and somewhat pure non-practice because it is "the very nature of practice […] that it excludes

this question". This betrays an essentialization of theory and of practice: an observer of practice, by definition, cannot capture the essence of practice, he is not in "the real, really lived-in world"; the actor herself cannot do so as well, neither in habituated, unconscious practice nor in her conscious reflection on it. An actor, in Bourdieu's terms, does not theorize and detach herself from immersion in practice. This essentialism is rooted in Bourdieu's central category of practice: the *habitus* as the concept of "non-conceptuality" *par excellence*, a blind operator that does not require reflection, the practical "unconscious" (see Scherr 2014). The problem seems to lie in Bourdieu's notion of dialectic: if the *habitus* is essentially structure (structured and structuring), the *habitus*-field dynamic is internal to structure, a circulatory system. The *habitus*-field "dialectic" is thus no actual dialectic in the sense that structure is mediated through practice as the other of structure.[6] This is not to say that Bourdieu does not take reflexivity into account at all but it has no place in his core theory[7] because reflection is attributed to theory as the abstract other of practice. Bourdieu's argument would not only be more dialectical but also more convincing, if reflexivity (or theory) was attributed to practice and vice versa.

A more dialectical procedure would also be beneficial to some of Bourdieu's central categories, such as domination or violence. The very content of these terms, the idea of something being dominated or violated against, remains largely beyond his conceptual scope: individuals count as habituated actors, statistical categories. Bourdieu presumes relationality of agents and institutions like speech-act theory presumes for language; there is no signified beyond the sign in the *habitus*-field dialectic, society is ultimately *langue*. Consequently, and ironically, "*habitus*", "field" and their "dialectic" do bring up the issue of domination, but only point towards it: domination here is chiefly a problem of the distribution of properties and capital, instead of the quality of a social relation; the *habitus* supports domination but is not domination itself, and it cannot explain why domination exists (Demirovic 2014, 260f). Moreover, acting individuals only count as actors, possessing the relevant dispositions to produce effects in fields so that the particularity of individuals only consists in their specific positions (Bourdieu/Wacquant 2006, 139).

Bourdieu's analytical toolkit is thus useful for describing how relations of domination play out as the production and reproduction of unequal distributions of power but an emphatic notion of domination escapes the scope of his core theory. Not being able to explain domination, however, is problematic in terms of conceptualizing crisis, which is not only relevant for understanding ecotourism

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[6] This is also demonstrated by the fact that *habitus* is essentially a statistical category, explicitly abstracting from the particular individual (see Bourdieu 1990, 59).

[7] In fact, although he criticizes proponents of ideology critique for overestimating consciousness and underestimating unconscious habitual processes, he admits that consciousness, in the form of social anamnesis, is an important liberating force (e.g. Bourdieu 2005).

practice but must also be brought into the focus of state of the art sociology more generally if sociology is to keep up with the times.

1.2.3 Sociological bias

Bourdieu's theory of practice is at its core an heir of the sociological discipline and its inherent bias. Since Durkheim sociologists hold that "[i]t is […] in the nature of society itself that we must seek the explanation of social life" (Durkheim 1982, 128). By emphasizing and claiming the social as its terrain, sociology established and sustains itself through the circular insistence on the social as a distinct realm with distinct dynamics and structures. This emphasis was and is the strong side of sociology against mentalistic, economistic, or biological reductionisms. But with this emphasis sociology seems to have inherited another reductionism: the hypostasis of the social (analogously to "discourse"). The epistemic side of such institutional fix is thus also a central weakness for a sociology of the ecological crisis, as it drags along the age-old Nature/Society and Subject/Object dualisms (see box 1).

> **Box 1: The social constitution of the environment**
> A brief examination of a sociological approach to the environment shall demonstrate the pitfalls and logical dilemmas that an insistence on sociological discipline is doomed to encounter in the attempt to tackle the problem of nature. In his theory of the social constitution of the environment, Kraemer (2008) goes along with Durkheim in that he regards it as indispensable to adhere to the methodological rationale of sociology to explain the social with the social if a sociological approach to the environmental problematic is to be explored (ibid, 149). The circularity of this argument[8] signals an arbitrary self-limitation that is neither necessary nor conducive for understanding the reality of current socio-ecological problems. Stressing the aspect of social practice, Kraemer seeks to bridge the gap between naturalist and constructivist positions within environmental sociology. He rightly criticizes Catton/Dunlap (1978), one of the founding texts of environmental sociology, as a naturalist position that ends up being un-sociological[9].

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[8] In other words: "If sociology is the discipline of our choice, and if sociology explains the social with the social, then it is meaningless to speculate on the nonsocial."

[9] These authors argue that most or all sociology, no matter its diversity, has so far adhered to the Human Exceptionalist Paradigm (HEP) which assumes human uniqueness, cultural variability, possibility of conscious social change, principally unlimited cultural progress and the solvability of social problems (Catton/Dunlap 1978, 42f). They regard this attitude as problematic given the objectivity of scarce resources on a limited planet. In following HEP assumptions, they argue, it has been difficult for sociologists "to deal meaningfully with the social implications of ecological problems and constraints" (ibid). In order to counter these inherently modernist projections, Catton and Dunlap pose the New Environmental Paradigm (NEP), assuming that humans "are but one species among the many […] involved in the biotic communities that shape

> However, he ultimately contradicts himself, on the one hand maintaining that within the scope of sociology physical-biological factors *in themselves* matter only as boundary conditions of the social (Kraemer 2008, 46) while, on the other hand, the "link" between such nonsocial factors and the social is deemed the "deciding theoretical problem" (ibid, 169). His distinction between "natural" and "cultural environment" reproduces the Nature/Society dichotomy, deliberately focusing only on the cultural part[10]. Looking at the practical constitutions of the environment, he does consider materiality, but only the societal aspect of it – which is like not considering it at all.

While the sociological insight is certainly valid that "things" are inevitably social, the ecological crisis clearly evidences that nothing is simply and purely social. For, how could social action result in a real threat to that society? This is only understandable if an other of the social is assumed. From the perspective of the ecological crisis as precondition of ecotourism, what is at issue is the relation between sociality and its other; or rather: its various others. A meaningful grasp of ecotourism must thus re-examine and transcend this bias in order to strengthen a sociological approach to the capitalist crisis and ecotourism.

It is possible to tackle this task by transcending Bourdieu with Bourdieu. First of all, the *habitus* is to be appreciated for what it is: a statistical category, i.e. abstracting from actual people who only matter as "actors" reproducing structures. While his theory is not materialist enough, it lends itself to a more radical materialism that saves Bourdieu's (like Foucault's) central insights for a more ecological notion of social practice. But how to transcend sociological circularity without relapsing into the old naturalism? A first step, I suggest, takes us back before the historical formation of sociology as a disciplinary field by highlighting practice as metabolism.

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our social life." Further, "[i]ntricate linkages of cause and effect and feedback in the web of nature produce many unintended consequences"; the world is, moreover "finite", with "potent physical and biological limits constraining economic growth […]" (ibid, 45). The NEP thus establishes an unmediated opposition of assumptions: against sociocentrism, it pits a positive ontology of Nature.

[10] Similarly, following Giddens, his theory of the "social constitution of environment" includes a "material-physical" level which is "immediately evident" and hence does not need further explanation (ibid, 169), although it is the relation between an "irreducible" (*unhintergehbar*) materiality of environments and the other, social, levels (practice, institutions, norms etc.), which poses the "deciding" theoretical problem.

1.3 Practice as metabolism

For the sociological bias, nature is by default either already society or a mere boundary condition not pertaining to sociological explanation. Such bias, unintendedly and necessarily, drags along unresolved the Nature vs. Society dualism even where it seeks to transcend it. As long as "nature" remains either completely social or fully outside of society, sociology is still not materialist enough to explain crisis: for, how is it possible for the social, or the discourse for that matter, to undermine itself? If sociological circularity is rooted, as was argued, in the historical formation of an academic field – which itself represents an institutionalized Nature/Society divide (natural sciences vs. humanities) – it may be methodologically reasonable to take one step back in the history of ideas. The following section continues to examine social practice in the light of Marx, trying to get nature back in as more than a boundary condition. I will also point to certain limitations of the Marxian approach which leads over to the introduction of the concept of the nonidentical in 1.4.

1.3.1 Practice and the society-nature dialectic

A step back leads to Marx who seems to offer both, an epistemology that avoids the pitfalls of a decisionistic sociology and the chance to integrate Bourdieu's theory into a more comprehensive and ecologically meaningful theory of practice. This is only one methodological step in transcending the sociological bias, rather than a last word on the constitution of the social. I argue that Marx's materialist approach provides elements for an epistemological base from which to work out a notion of ecocapitalist nature relations that form the conditions of possibility of ecotourism. Marx's contributions alone are not sufficient for understanding ecocapitalist society, however, but must be, in turn, "sociologized", again without giving up on his central insights. He provides a profoundly dialectical notion of practice in his concept of human labor:

Labour is, first of all, a process between man and nature, a process by which man, through his own actions, mediates, regulates and controls the metabolism between himself and nature. He confronts the materials of nature as a force of nature. He sets in motion the natural forces which belong to his own body, his arms, legs, head and hands, in order to appropriate the materials of nature in a form adapted to his own needs. Through this movement he acts upon external nature and changes it, and in this way he simultaneously changes his own nature. He develops the potentialities slumbering within nature, and subjects the play of its forces to his own sovereign power. (Marx 1982, 283)

In this central passage of *Capital Vol I*, all of Marx's general notions of the society-nature relation are already assembled. It is seen as a "metabolism", the exchange of matter (*Stoffwechsel*), between the realm of external nature and human society.

The central mode in which this process evolves is labor, the spending of physical (also mental) power, in order to appropriate nature for own purposes. This implies that human labor is external to the material – which becomes obvious, for example, in the state of decay (Schmidt 1971, 74).[11] That is to say, that "nature", in a first sense, is material for human consumption (and of excretion), and defined by human appropriation.

Moreover, this external nature also bears "potentiality". The ways of its use and the meanings it may bear are related to the technological possibilities and needs of a given societal formation, but they also originate from the relatively unchanging properties of a given material. That man "subjects the play of its [the matter's] forces to his own sovereign power" implies that appropriation also means acting according to the laws of nature. You cannot melt wood, for example. But if that is so, then humans also act like nature – in order to subdue it. The "laws of nature" change historically with the degree of technological and scientific advancement; but in a given constellation they determine the possible forms that are socially appropriable. Furthermore, humans do not only act like nature: as decidedly sensual, physical individuals, they are nature(s) themselves. Labor is expense of physical strength, muscles, nerves, brain, etc. Technology, as much as it may transform simple manual labor, is, first of all, the human extension of the physical capabilities of humans. In that sense, nature is not "external" to society but society itself is nature. Most notably, through this practical metabolism, humans alter their own nature, their overall being in the world – what "humans" are, or can be, is therefore historically fluid and not anthropologically invariable. Thus, on the one hand, nature interacts with itself in human labor while, on the other, nature is appropriated in a way that is suitable to man's own life as opposed to "mere" nature. This suggests that humans, while being part of nature, are at the same time also opposed to it, are something of their own, by nature – nature is a divided unity.

We can apply this insight to our sociological concept of practice which must be understood as a divided unity as well: social practice not only reproduces society but is also the metabolism with what is not socially produced but object of social formation. It is a metabolism between society and the natures internal and external to acting individuals. That implies that individuals are never only social "actors" but always also natural beings. Problematic as the term "nature" itself is,

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[11] A chair, for example, is a result of the exercise of human power on wood; in this way, wood is attuned to human purposes but the form of a chair is external to the nature of wood, which becomes obvious when the chair, or any other use-value, decays (ibid). Decay is not the "natural" side of things having use-value, however: in capitalism, decay is an economic factor liable to the premise of productivity and turnover. The category of "planned obsolescence" – the consciously and concertedly built-in fault line where a commodity stops to have use-value – is central to an economy fixated on exchange value, which is in turn telling for the ecological implications of such logic has (Chapter 2). Decay is, therefore, not only defined by the laws of the material but also by the requirements of the social system.

in Marx as well as in general: Such comprehensive understanding of practice, the central place where social reality emerges, is necessary in order to comprehend the issue of domination and crisis.

1.3.2 Produced nature

Marx' concept of nature is threefold: it is, first, the object of human labor as practical appropriation of the laws of nature to the laws of a particular society – the main aspect that Marx is interested in (Schmidt 1971). Second, the subjects of social labor, humans, are themselves material, sensual – they are nature themselves. However, they transcend mere nature in their anticipation, reflection and planned working through her, in order to realize a social purpose. This sociality is, in turn, exactly their nature. Thirdly, nature is also seen as the abstract totality of society and nature – a "differentiated unity" (Schmidt 1971, 45) of formations of "inorganic" (external to human purposes) and "organic" (social) nature mediated historically. Such a view helps to profoundly liquefy our understanding of nature and to "'de-forest' our minds" (Peluso/Vandergeest 2001, 766):

Animals and plants which we are accustomed to consider as products of nature, may be, in their present form […] the result of a gradual transformation continued through many generations under human control, and through the agency of human labour. (Marx 1982, 287f)

This is a crucial insight for the present topic: the "primary" forest that ecotourism capitalizes on (Chapter 7) is not to be regarded as such; rather "primary forests" are the product of many generations of labor subjecting the laws of nature to those of society: it is historically produced nature (Chapter 4). As society is constituted by nature, what is regarded as "nature" is also constituted by society. We are consequently led to see ecotourism, or conservation, as one step in the historical production of nature. It is peculiar to ecocapitalism and ecotourism that natural resources are more consciously produced, such as, through conservation (2.2).[12] Untouchedness, so central to neoliberal conservation (2.2.3), is structurally rooted in the relational logic of the historical labor process; as Marx goes on the explain, "The same use-value is both the product of a previous process, and a means of production in a later process. Products are therefore not only results of labour, but also its essential conditions"(ibid, 287). Use-values, social natures, appear as either mediated products or as immediate means of production *relative to a particular phase of the overall production process*. More generally: "Nature, as the material with which men are faced, can only be regarded as unformed material from the point of view of the purposes of human activity" (Schmidt 1971, 63). Things are immediate only in relation to a specific standpoint in the overall process, in which everything is always already mediated through history. If ecotourism and its objective,

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[12] This is the case although conservationists might not refer to their practice as Nature production.

Nature "conservation", are to be seen as phases in the social production of natural resources, the perception of the Lao uplands as immediate pristineness, or abundant material, comes with some systemic necessity. From the relational perspective of ecotourism, then, *a product of human mediation comes across as "first" nature.*

1.3.3 Anti-utopian utopianism

From the viewpoint of sociology, there is a problematic twist to Marx's nature-society dialectic. He views all human history up to his days as prehistory, with humans not being masters of their productive forces but appendages of the machinery on which they depend. "First" nature (i.e. not yet appropriated or not anymore used) and second nature (appropriated, material use-values) do not differ in their practical relevance within a social situation that pits agents against blind, uncontrolled and misrecognized objective forces. In their daily lives, subjects actively produce and reproduce society as first nature in that sense. As socialized humans, they "make their own history, but […] they do not make it under self-selected circumstances", as Marx phrased it in his *18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* [13], and produce a social history as natural history, i.e. unfree existence. A utopian, communist, free society of humans would be the advent of actual history.

Marx's understanding of utopian communist society seems to exhibit a central inconsequence, however, as it entails ontological elements that stand against his overall approach: As free as a utopian society would be, it will have to dominate nature; there is a principal, quasi-natural opposition between society and nature (see Schmidt 1971). While this conclusion decidedly stands against Hegelian idealistic identification – and is thus in the spirit of the argument presented here – it also contains a dogmatism of utopia, a contradiction in terms. It shows how Marx is an Enlightenment thinker, sharing in the belief that man does actually comprehend nature by systemically and gradually working through it; that society is capable of positively grasping the nature of nature and of doing justice to it by appropriating it. A domination-free society would still entail nature domination, although it might apply more efficient and sensitive means of domination (Schmidt 1971, 156). Marx's utopia is thus quite anti-utopian (not domination-free), the Society/Nature dualism is still not incapacitated.

Thus, while Marx helps to bring nature (back) in as more than just a boundary condition of the social, adding substance to the latter, he remains too naturalist for a sociological approach. He eternalizes a historical situation and thereby does as if taking a stance beyond societal refractions was possible: he does not reflect his own situated-ness within a socio-historical phase, which logically would prevent him from attempting a direct access to social nature relations in general. "Nature", furthermore, tends to be equated in Marx with the potentials it presents for socie-

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[13] See, for example: https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1852/18th-brumaire/ch01. htm, accessed March 30, 2015.

ty, which must always relate to them in appropriating and exploitative ways. While Marx thus certainly does not ontologize nature itself, his materialist "realism" ontologizes the quasi-natural nonidentity of subject and object.

1.4 Instrumentality and the nonidentical

Although Marx has prepared the conceptual grounds for bringing nature back in without relapsing into naturalism he remained with one leg, as it were, on ontological grounds: he tends to regard the fight between man and nature, in which the latter appears solely as matter of human purpose without any relevance in and of itself, as anthropological necessity. While Marx does not deny "nature's" own peculiar qualities – indeed, he takes them into account (see above) –, he nonetheless presumes that nature only matters insofar as it is rendered identical with society. This view seems overly optimistic in times when purpose-driven penetration of the nonsocial is unprecedented – as is the magnitude of "unintended consequences". The key point of this section is, in contrast, that the core of crisis in the nature-society metabolism lies exactly in the assumption of "nature" as consisting only in social purpose without any right in and of itself. It is this disregard for "nature's own right" – what is going to be termed the nonidentical – which returns to haunt the socialization of natures via domination, which renders this relation precarious and crisis-ridden.

1.4.1 The nonidentical

If social practice is to be "ecologized" by bringing nature back in: how can one avoid relapsing into the nature/society dualism that is to be overcome? An answer could start with the idea that

The traditional antithesis of nature and history is both true and false—true insofar as it expresses what happened to the natural element; false insofar as, by means of conceptual reconstruction, it apologetically repeats the concealment of history's natural growth by history itself. (Adorno 2004, 358)

If Nature/Society (or history) is false, it is to be discarded; if it is true, it must be kept. How to deal with this contorted matter? The answer seems to lie in thinking the relation of society and nature dialectically, so that both categories are retained while their relation is turned from an unmediated binary into a relation of mutual constitution. In other words, this means to transcend the dichotomy of subjectivism (constructivism) and objectivism (naturalism) by a "second reflection" (ibid, 201), driving constructivism beyond itself. Adorno argues that social constructions always rely on "something" which is nonidentical with them. This "something" is not an ontological but an epistemological claim, designating "a cogitatively indis-

pensable substrate of any concept"; it is not positively given but "the utmost abstraction of the subject-matter that is not identical with thinking, an abstraction not to be abolished by any further thought process"; it is a "metalogical rudiment" (ibid, 135).

The nonidentity[14] of what is meant by thought with thought itself, as well as thought's own nonidentity with the social, are necessary for thinking but inaccessible for it, except as negative moment. Thinking, or social meaning, must reflect its necessary limitedness. In turn, that which is not itself social meaning – that is, the various material preconditions, media, objects of meaning – is always mediated by social forms, and thus can only be reached through them, not in abstraction from them. Put differently: since reflection cannot take a position beyond social mediation, that which is not thinking (and, by implication, not society) and meant/identified by it, is *negatively implied* in any thought, or social aspect. Nature is negative in the sense that it becomes "positive" only in its nonidentity with social identifications. In such way, Adorno aims at a renewed materialism which acknowledges the relativity of constructions but points towards that which is not identical with them (Görg 2003, 45).

For a sociology of nature relations, a negative notion of nature means that the social meanings of the "ecological crisis" are not to be opposed to an assumed materiality independent from them. Rather, materiality appears right within its social forms, and only there. Bluntly put, a chair is as much a "socionature" as is a Nature reserve. Both are *objectified social meanings*, social facts in the strong sense of the word: they have been *made* out of matter via social interpretation and treatment (in this and not another, equally possible way); and so these meanings have attained an objective, material reality that cannot be simply defined or discussed away. Neither in the chair nor in the Nature reserve is it possible to point one's finger at the boundary between the social and the natural, while both are nevertheless impossible to understand without these categories.

The various social interpretations of the "ecological crisis" thus not only refer to one another but, each interpretation in its own way, to *something* (= some, however constructed, thing which is) "meaningful" right because it is not just fiction but fact – in this case a quite veritable one[15]. The "signified" something, in turn, can only appear in its social moldings, its signs and forms; or rather, in its *resistance* to these shapes. A second, critical reflection on social projections as necessarily

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[14] It would be more correct to consistently use the term "the nonidentical" in order to remain true to the content of this concept which aims at individual peculiarity and idiosyncrasy. "Nonidentity", in contrast, again generalizes this aspect and so abstracts from the very singularity expressed by the concept. I use "nonidentity" as synonymous with "the nonidentical".

[15] The reality of an ecological crisis is thus not to be established as a mere antithetical insistence on its objectivity against (social) constructivist-idealist positions (Görg 2003, 64). That it is objectivity – not just inter-/subjectivity but objectified and materialized inter-/subjectivity – which appears in its social mediation is betrayed (and not falsified) by the battle of definitions: the "ecological crisis" is not simply identical with the battle itself.

limited brings nature right into the social: in form of the discontents and down-sides of social projections being realized. Through critical reflection of how society constructs natures a materialism comes in sight that does not succumb to the naturalism/constructivism duality (Görg 2003, 48). The material is not an ontological dogma, a monolithic other of society, but rather an *implication* of all social processes that can be conceptualized only negatively, as the nonidentical which constitutes a precondition, medium and result of social practice. Social meaning is never pure but always relies on something substantial. There is no symbol, no thought or symbolic practice without ecological footprint. All nature, in turn, is socially organized. Taking this argument to its sociological consequence, the non-identical is not an ontological given or an anthropological constant but the specific effect of a certain, dominative, way of organizing the metabolism with human and nonhuman natures by means of the structured dynamics of social practice as metabolism.

1.4.2 Instrumentality

If the nonidentical is not again a dogmatic *a priori*: where does it originate? An answer is found in the problem of domination as historical principle. Horkheimer and Adorno (2002) propose that: "Any attempt to break the compulsion of nature by breaking nature only succumbs more deeply to that compulsion" (ibid, 9). This is a clear refusal of the implicit evolutionism in Hegel and Marx (see Rehbein/Schwengel 2008, 21): historical progress towards growing human possibilities of freedom from natural constraints is constantly thwarted by the increase in domination. Human history is not a complete success story so far, but fatally double-edged. We thus cannot talk about progress without the fundamental regressions any step "forward" implied so far – as long as development draws on a certain form of reason as instrument.[16] The authors argue that reason was and remains essentially a tool, result and medium of survival struggle instead of liberation:

Like the material tool which, as a thing, is held fast as that thing in different situations and thereby separates the world, as something chaotic, multiple and disparate, from that which is known, single, and identical, so the concept is the idea-tool which fits into things at the very point from which one can take hold of them. (ibid, 31)

Just like an instrument, the operations of this kind of grasping reality always stays the same regardless the nature of the specific object. Such instrumental reason, or instrumentality, is essentially how-to-knowledge (akin to the Weberian *Zweck-*

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[16] The concept of the dialectic of enlightenment thus is not an empirical historical account but rather a broad, formal dialectical framework, and consciously so. The authors do not claim historical exactness but are concerned with the intertwinement of two symbolic-material logics: myth and reason.

rationalität), morally "neutral" and conducive to any random objective: "it presents either peace or war, tolerance or repression, as the given state of affairs" (ibid, 68). Such rationality of formal logic and schematism lends itself to any purposes but retreats from determining them. Aims are set by particularistic self-actualization regardless the interest of what is thereby turned into a fungible object. Instrumentality, that is, disqualifies in its categories and assumptions the qualitative diversity of what is to create a positive, identical totality: "Nothing is allowed to remain outside, since the mere idea of the 'outside' is the real source of fear" (ibid, 11). Because of such totalitarianism, which is irrational for its being driven by existential fear, the "multiplicity of forms is reduced to position and arrangement, history to fact, things to matter" (ibid, 4) by a projection "cut off by a lack of reflection" (ibid, 158) on its being (just) a projection. In short, instrumentality is the root of the subject/object dualism and its crisis: using something or someone as instrument to realize one's own, particular purposes means disregarding the interests of the other; one side acts, the other is acted upon. The nonidentical is thus produced, an effect of how reason and its practical consequences go about their preconditions: it results from the lack of reason's self-reflection. Consequently, crisis, i.e. a self-contradictory dynamic, is rooted in instrumentality directed against oneself and others: self-mastery is at once the foundation of the self as well as its annihilation, destroying "the very thing which is to be preserved (ibid, 42f)"; mastery of other natures purchases "the increase in […] power with estrangement from that over which it is exerted" (ibid, 5f). We can thus say that crisis originates in the domination, that is, instrumentalization of natures, both human and non-human: the nonidentical resulting from such treatment is prone to undermine rationality's purpose.

Contrary to Marx, therefore, there is no utopian hope in nature domination at all, which facilitates and inhibits life due to the oppressive and self-centered way it relates to its "object". Denial of the autonomy of an other as the condition of one's own (supposed) autonomy is the basic form of domination (Görg 2003, 41) – and the root of nonidentity and crisis. Such definition must again be sociologized, the denial itself must be explained: how does one person/institution come into the position to deny the autonomy of an other in order to maintain its own autonomy? Actual domination is, further, not just denial but *appropriation* of an other's autonomy (or: free time). This means that denial only becomes problematic as *practiced* instrumentality. But this is still under-determined as many interactions entail practical appropriation without necessarily involving social domination.[17] It is, crucially, the *perpetuation of the direction in which appropriation proceeds* which describes the content of *social* domination more properly. Rather than mere denial, it is the *constant, actively enforced* (though not necessarily personally intended) *refusal*

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[17] For example, it is not quite the same kind of social relation in communal harvest cooperation in a Southeast Asian village and in slavery, although both may involve the kind of appropriation in question.

of the autonomy of certain entities for the benefit of others. According to Horkheimer and Adorno, the system of the social division of labor is a generalization and objectification not of a general but of particular interest. This system is thus the structural means by which such denial is constantly enforced – so that a somewhat metaphysical "power" (such as in Foucault; see 1.1) becomes a structure of the exploitation of the autonomy of certain members of society and its appropriation by others, while it appears as objectivity, "as the reason which informs reality" (ibid, 17). It appears as natural, as Bourdieu says.

To sum up: there is *no domination without nonidentity* and vise versa: it is the misrecognition of singularity through which domination is defined and which produces nonidentity necessarily; the nonidentical aspects of the dominated entity have the empirical potential to haunt and undermine that relation (Görg 2003, 97). Nonidentity, furthermore, implies that social refusal of one's autonomy must be *legitimized*, rendered necessary, natural, reasonable, and desirable. Such legitimization, ideology, draws from and perverts the nonidentical utopian drive, as is observable in ecotourism (Chapter 7).

This concept of instrumentality as historical root of the dualisms of Subject/Object, Society/Nature, and by implication of nonidentity and crisis, becomes ecorational instrumentality more specifically when subsistence peasants are to be turned into "stewards and custodians of biodiversity" (CBD). This identifying "power/knowledge" (Foucault) is economic in that it is driven by the logic of exchangeability of qualities, and it goes along with Moore's notion of "abstract social nature" (Moore 2015, 194ff).

1.4.3 False alternatives

Instrumentality, the disqualification and appropriation of natures as dead disposable matter, mediates between human natures; between them and nonhuman natures; as well as socialized individuals' self-relation – this is the content of nature domination. Like humans are treated by society, so is nonhuman nature. Climate change and soil degradation are as much part of the "ecological crisis" as are hunger, war or manic depression. Likewise, there is no true emancipation to be expected from a society that dominates nature; freedom of the individual implies freedom of external nature. Domination is thus not, like Marx implied, a quasi-mythical, ontological fact but results from specific forms of social organization. It is therefore the specific set-up of a society that renders its nature relations uncontrollable when resting on the illusion of reason's capacity to fully control nature as Nature. In face of the destruction produced by this illusion, any alternative would have to be self-critical, attempting to master and control not Nature but the symbolic-material relations to it (Görg 2003, 33). Such "second reflection" is practically necessary in order to tackle the current entanglement of increasing control over natures (labor and resources) and decreasing control of the unintended consequences of such mastery.

Societal nature relations are therefore workable: there is principal freedom in designing nature relations in a more reasonable manner (ibid, 44). Although humankind must organize its metabolism with nature, it can principally do so one way or another. This freedom is dependent on the means and possibilities, structures of interest and power of a given society. Domination-based social formations turn this principal freedom into the naturalized fate of a false alternative the inescapability of which is that of power (Horkheimer/Adorno 2002, 25): to either dominate nature or to be dominated by it. Ecotourism as a form of ecorational instrumentality rules humans and nonhumans according to the second alternative (which of course amounts to the first). The turning of Lao peasants into "custodians of biodiversity" through converting them into ecotourism hosts is a key example: development options are precluded by the supposedly natural imperative of "intact ecosystems".

In this context, I use the term "false-and-real" to indicate the contrariness of capitalist nature relations. The alternative just mentioned, as well as the Nature/Society dualism as its origin, are false because they present the rather "unnatural", arbitrary self-contradiction of nature domination (1.4.2) as a fact of nature itself. This naturalization is possible only because such falsity is realized via practice in the social world as much as in the *habitus* of acting individuals. In short: if Nature/Society was only false thinking, we would not have to bother too much about it – the key problem is that such thinking makes the world in its image, with dire consequences for all kinds of natures. Thus, if the historical process still involves domination "as the principle of all relationships" (ibid, 5), "ecological modernization" is not too rational but not yet reasonable enough (see Kracauer in Schweppenhäuser 2000, 39).

The ecological crisis tells us that not only what is identifiable and appropriable has meaning for society but also that which escapes societal grips and grids. "Unintended consequences" are tangible systemic effects of instrumentality enacting the metabolism between society and its others. In order to work against this dynamic, thinking, as a crucial moment in that metabolism which always identifies and projects, must do so consciously, aware of its limitations and the importance of what it blanks out for its own possibility (Horkheimer/Adorno 2002, 156). Such second reflection would not restrain the capacity of thought artificially but rather seek to encompass as many potentials of reflection as possible, including fantasy and emotionality – reason as opposed to rationality, so to speak: "the sole way of assisting nature is to unshackle its seeming opposite, independent thought" (Horkheimer 1947, 127).

1.5 On "symmetrical" theories

Before summarizing this chapter, it is apposite to briefly return to the problem of poststructuralism, because only now it becomes understandable why my approach does not seek to elide dualisms as actor-network theory (ANT) does, for example.[18] It is necessary to sketch out some differences between the present approach and such "symmetrical" accounts, in order to clarify why I prefer keeping with the dualisms that are thrown on a "bonfire" by ANT proponents as supposedly "essentialist divisions" (Law 1999, 3). Importantly, Moore's latest call for a "world-ecology" paradigm is fraught with the problems of symmetrical thinking.

On the one hand, perspectives such as ANT are arguably close to the ponderings of negative dialectics; on the other, the intellectual methods to come to grips with dualism are radically different. Stating that "objects […] are always more than one and less than many" (Law 1999, 11) is like putting Adorno's statement that "[e]very entity is more than it is" (Adorno 2004, 102) in an undialectical way – and deliberately so.[19] Both perspectives are thus at the same time very close and incompatible. However, theories, which seek to "evade" dualism by cleansing their terminology of it, appear unsuited for the interest of this examination, which seeks to qualify the workings of social domination in ecotourism. As Latour explains, in contrast, ANT is decidedly not "a theory of the social or even worse an explanation of what makes society exert pressure on actors" but "a very crude method to learn from the actors without imposing on them an a priori definition of their world-building capacities" (Latour 1999, 20). The social, domination, or duality are seen as artificial constructs that do not resonate with actors' actual "world-building capacities". Rather than investing too much *a priori* qualification into the object, a vocabulary of "ridiculous poverty" (ibid) is methodically employed so as to not impose anything on the actors but to instead learn from them. This method implies that

ANT does not tell anyone the shape that is to be drawn – circles or cubes or lines – but only how to go about systematically recording the world-building abilities of the sites to be documented and registered. (ibid, 21)

Theory, that is, should not seek to explain or understand but rather describe, register, document. The intention to not impose anything on the object studied is certainly close to critical theory. However, the latter holds that there is no way around such imposition, and also ANT's neutralization seems illusive: its "neutrality" presupposes mutuality and democracy, *a priori* ruling out that reality *is* perhaps

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[18] But also the theories of Haraway, Descola, Ingold as well as Luhmann's system theory can be seen in this light.

[19] For Latour, dialectics link "the two poles of nature and society by as many arrows and feedback loops as one wishes […] literally beat[ing] around the bush", not being able to "relocate the quasi-object or quasi subject" (Latour 1993, 55) which is found in the middle.

much less democratic, thus precluding that domination could be useful to learn about actors' world-building capacities, or incapacities.[20] The "neutral" vocabulary, abstract actants in networks, is only able to register principal mutuality but cannot capture relations of dependence, subordination etc. In contrast, this study seeks to investigate exactly the ways in which domination is useful to explain reality with regard to ecotourism. It assumes *asymmetry* and power inequity, while ANT assumes the opposite, ontological symmetry and democracy. Similarly, ANT and other accounts "[…] would [not] allow an observer to zoom from the global to the local and back" (ibid, 19); again in contrast, a central procedure of presentation pursued here is exactly such "zooming". While ANT is deliberately unspecific, it is my approach to specify. Thus, while symmetrical approaches may have their merits, they are unsuited for a topic which assumes asymmetry.

Let me just briefly allude to reasons for choosing asymmetry over symmetry. Callon (1986) bases his analysis of the domestication of scallops on principles of "agnosticism" (impartiality between actors in controversy), "generalised symmetry" (explaining conflicting viewpoints in the same terms) and "free association" (abandonment of a priori distinctions between the natural and the social). While from a dialectical perspective, the establishment of any principle seems dubious to begin with, the principles favored by Callon seem especially debatable. Their "neutrality" is conveyed to the concept of "interest":

To interest other actors is to build devices which can be placed between them and all other entities who want to define their identities otherwise. A interests B by cutting or weakening all the links between B and the invisible (or at times quite visible) group of other entities C, D, E, etc. who may want to link themselves to B. (1986, [9][21])

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[20] It is interesting that despite such egalitarian intention Latour likens theory to arsenals of military equipment (2004, 231). One is left to wonder about his surprise that such theory could become hijacked by the "bad guys" (ibid, 227). His conclusion is to "bring the sword of criticism to criticism itself" (ibid) which, in his account, seems to amount to a neutralization of critique – the complete opposite, again, of critical theory to which self-reflection is at the core of critique. For Latour, the term critique seems to mean two different things: it denotes poststructuralist deconstruction, i.e. demonstrating how a fact is socially constructed; and a dualistic "trick" of "critical barbarity" (ibid, 240f). For critical theory, in turn, the fact of the construction of facts is part of critique but not the whole of it. Rather, critique consists in showing "the contradiction between what things are and what they claim to be"; i.e. in uncovering the essence behind empirical appearances (i.e. facts) – an essence (*Wesen*) which, "to begin with, is the fatal mischief (*Unwesen*)" (Adorno 2004, 167); an essence, that is, which, despite its anti-essentialist thrust, is anathema in Latour and others. It is the *how* of social construction which is object of critique, not the mere if. It is telling that Latour sets out to demonstrate the social constructedness of "matters of fact" only to end up as "the [only] one who naïvely believes in some facts" (ibid, 228), such as, global warming. Not least, he discards critique such as that of the commodity fetish on the ground of personal feelings and turns into an outspoken advocate of "naïve believers": "One thing is clear, not one of us readers would like to see *our* own most cherished objects treated in this way" (ibid, 240; emphasis original).

[21] Pages in documents without pagination are indicated according to the page count of AdobeReader.

This vocabulary does deliberately not distinguish between subject and object, human and nonhuman and so forth: A, B, C etc. can be everything and nothing in particular. Consequently, Callon's examination results in what appears as a quaint subject-object confusion from the view of dialectics: he observes that at a certain point of the interaction,

The larvae detach themselves from the researchers' project and a crowd of other actors carry them away. The scallops become dissidents. […] The situation is identical to that of the rank and file which greets the results of Union negotiations with silent indignation: representivity is brought into question. (ibid, [16])

Without any second thought, humans and nonhumans fall into one as if the situation of the scallops was in earnest "identical to" that of union negotiations; as if scallops could be considered "dissidents" in the same way humans can[22]. The scallops are effectively anthropomorphized. What is actually understood by such deliberate de-specification remains unclear and it seems that exactly the avoided dualisms would facilitate a better understanding in this case. Instead, subject and object of social practice are simply blurred and the actual social logic of the whole process obscured. In contrast to such an operation, the present examination prefers following Adorno:

In truth, the subject is never quite the subject, and the object never quite the object; and yet the two are not pieced out of any third that transcends them. The third would be no less deceptive. […] The duality of subject and object must be critically maintained against the thought's inherent claim to be total. The division, which makes the object the alien thing to be mastered and appropriates it, is indeed subjective […]; but no critique of its subjective origin will reunify the parts, once they have split in reality. (Adorno 2004, 175)

If the dualism is real – however logically false it may be – then it is to be confronted head-on instead of evaded: because it *cannot* be evaded. Symmetrical theories thus reproduce the subject/object dualism unintendedly.[23] To Latour and others, facts are two things at once: made and thus not simply givens; and "out there", disconnected from how they are conceived. The idea that dualism might be real, objective *because* it is realized by (inter)subjectivity, does not enter the picture: "[…] it is not, in this semiotic world-view, that there are no divisions. It is

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[22] Especially, when they have to be carried away by other, human, actors in order to become dissidents.

[23] Despite the intention to transcend traditional dualisms, the words nature and society, subject and object, human and nonhuman are continuously used throughout the argumentations of Latour, Callon as well as Descola. Moreover, it seems that nature and society are coterminous with human and nonhuman (e.g. Latour 1993, 11; Descola 2011, 20). In contrast, it is argued here that both registers are not synonymous: humans as well as nonhumans are principally both, nature and society.

rather that such divisions or distinctions are understood as effects of outcomes. They are not given in the order of things" (Law 1999, 3). Although this observation is crucial, the possibility that "the order of things" might already be "effects of outcomes" – and, in such way, precede and condition their individual apprehension while still being constructed – is not part of the argument. In contrast, this study seeks to deal with this "falling apart" of subject and object by supposing that precisely *because* facts are made they are objective – "false-and-real", social fictions realized. Such a perspective is based on grounds other than a "semiotic world-view" which does not know anything that transcends, precedes and determines identifications. Contrary to its claim and intent, symmetrical thinking remains identity thinking.

This elaboration would not be more than a footnote to the topic at hand if the latest audacious theory of capitalist nature was not unintendedly imbued with the fallacies of the symmetrical method. In *Capitalism and the Web of Life* (2015), Moore proposes a synthesis of Marxism and Green thought that is immensely relevant for the present account, first of all, because of the promised transcendence of the Cartesian "Nature/Society" dualism as source of all other binaries which "drips with blood and dirt" (ibid, 4). Moore recognizes that ANT and similar theories have pointed the way but have not challenged this binary directly (ibid, 5). He proposes a "double internality": of capitalism working through nature and nature working through capitalism in the historical process – a dialectical view of world-ecology. So far, so laudable. Unfortunately, however, parts of Moore's reasoning resemble Latour's, such as with regard to the concurrence of purification and translation in *We have Never Been Modern* (1993): he observes that, in its concepts, capitalism neatly divides between Society and Nature while, in practice, such a neat distinction cannot be made (capitalism as project vs. as historical practice; Moore 2015, 2). Although Moore acknowledges this dualism as a material force, it still follows for him that it must be "eschewed" (ibid, 27); and he does so by naming "the relation through which humans act – and are acted upon by the whole of nature" (ibid, 4) with the word "*oikeios*". Such naming deems him indispensable in order to not again end up with the Nature/Society dualism (ibid, 9). The *oikeios*, an adjective turned noun, posits the creative and generative relation of species and environment as the "ontological pivot – *and methodological premise* – of historical change" (35, italics original). It is defined as "a multi-layered dialectic, comprising flora and fauna, but also our planet's manifold geological and biospheric configurations, cycles and movements" (ibid, 36). Moore's *okeios* explicitly favors actual symmetry and unity over asymmetry and antagonism:

Rather than presume humanity's separation, in the recent or distant past, the oikeios presumes that humanity has always been unified with the rest of nature in a flow of flows. What changes are the ways in which specific aspects of humanity, such as civilizations, "fit" within nature. (ibid, 12)

Nature is understood as "matrix" in and through which human and extra-human natures get "bundled". Moore opts contra "flat ontologies" seeking to not collapse distinctions, but he discards the notion of "society" and "social organization" just as Latour and others do. Such presumption of an a priori unified whole is in stark contrast with Marx' notion of nature as a divided unity (1.3), an author otherwise central to Moore's thinking.[24] The *oikeios* is consequently, and clearly, at odds with the task of thinking crisis, contradiction and conflict.

Insofar as the *oikeios* is concerned, it seems, Moore's insight that it "has been easier to assert a dialectical method than to practice it" (ibid, 25) applies to him as well. It remains, in fact, incomprehensible why "[m]odernity's […] dominant relations of power" should just "form an organic whole" (ibid, 3); how resource depletion and greenhouse gas are generative for a "dynamic totality" of the "web of life". Not only does his terminology share in the hegemonic wordings in the CBD, for example: the *oikeios* views war as cooperation, or "co-production". Despite Moore's assertion that nature is historical, the qualifications of the *oikeios* as its substitute are fundamentally ahistorical. Contrary to his aim to specify, descriptions of the *oikeios* (a deliberate "liberty with the language"; ibid, 35) remain necessarily vague, abstract and random. For one may ask: why exactly a "web" "bundles", "flows", "matrix" (and not networks, assemblages etc.)? In short, the *oikeios* names but does not conceptualize. This act of naming a relation brings the dialectic to a hold, turning a dynamic into a thing with "dynamism" as ascribed quality. But saying words like "diverse" or "dialectics" is not equal to comprehending the issue or proceeding dialectically; it is invocation instead of thinking through – poetry in place of theory. In fact, Moore seems to suggest that dialectics is out there and coterminous with ontological harmony in the web of life[25], while it is truly only where antagonism is. Instead, consciousness is absent in the description of the *oikeios* whose "flow of flows" is a mythical eternity.

In short, the *oikeios* and other symmetrical concepts approach societal nature relations from the wrong, impossible side: that of "nature" as a realm without distinctions and frictions, and with humanity integral to it. This move "eschews" the dualism only rhetorically, and with it the qualitative aspect of societal nature relations: that of a specific societal formation with certain structures, positions and functions. Instead of attempting the impossibility of ruling out this determinant of any grasping of "nature", I suggest to start with and approach the problem of crisis from the only side possible: that of an antagonistic society.

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[24] For Marx, nature is the entity which comprises everything but one constituted by, not collapsing, the tension between society and nature. According to Marx, societal nature relations are not symmetrical but asymmetrical: defined by human appropriation and exploitation of nature for social purposes.

[25] Schmidt (1971) argues that dialectic does not exist in abstraction from consciousness. According to him, a dialectic of "nature as such", as for example in Engels' *Dialektik der Natur* (1959), is a misconception.

Fortunately, the *oikeios*, although erected as "ontological pivot", does not have much bearing on Moore's fruitful discussion of capital as historical practice. His insight into the importance of practice in capitalist world-ecology is instructive: "Yes, the distinction between humans and the rest of nature is longstanding. Never before, however, had a civilization organized around a *praxis* of external nature" (ibid, 17). If the dualism is a matter of praxis, however, it is unclear why the "abstractions of Nature/Society separate symbolically what is unified practically" (ibid, 20) – it should rather be the case that this separation is enacted, which would, in turn, indicate that the presumptions of the *oikeios* are untenable. Rather, practice evolves in and through contradictions institutionalized symbolically and materially. A world-ecology paradigm clearly cannot dispense with a reflexive theory of social practice, while the symmetrical *oikeios* must attain its adequate position, as wishful thinking: not as an ontology but as a regulatory idea for critical practice; it stands at the end, not at the beginning. Insofar as Moore "challenges" the Cartesian binary via avoiding this problem altogether, employing an alternative terminology instead, he is part of the "poststructuralists" that he is reluctant to identify with (ibid, 40). Like hybrids and networks, the *oikeios* points the way but does not go it.

We end up in this discussion with two conclusions. First, there is a danger if nonidentity is absent even in cutting-edge theory, which thus remains chained to identity thinking, the source of the dualism. The primary intellectual problem is identification and how to deal with it; its solution would solve the Nature/Society dualism "automatically": if reason acknowledges and attends to what suffers (from) its identifications and related treatments, it will contribute more to bridging the gap than the *oikeios* does. Because it is "false-and-real", the dualism is to be confronted heads-on consciously instead of dragged along unconsciously. Secondly, and relatedly, there is hope as the *oikeios* points the way in a specific, practical sense: it has its place not as *a priori* transcendence of a historical rift but as a political project of establishing harmony.

1.6 Discussion: Reflexive materialism of practice

In this chapter, I had started out by arguing that a consistent theoretical construction of ecotourism needs to unfold from sociological grounds while the problem of crisis (the precondition of ecotourism) also poses a problem to sociology's credo that only society matters, because from such perspective it is inconceivable how a social process could undermine itself. I then turned to Marxist thought in order to get nature back in and transcend the sociological bias.[26] The inconsistencies in Marx's materialism led to the notion of nonidentity and instrumentality, integrating the constructivist stance into a reflexive materialism.

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[26] Since Bourdieu's thinking partly derives from Marxist theory, he himself suggests this integration.

1.6.1 Social practice reconsidered

Reconsidering Bourdieu means explicating what is largely implicit in his concepts: the fact that violence, symbolic and material, is done *to* natures. Undoubtedly, "nature" or "nonidentity" are themselves problematic placeholders for what is not graspable by theory: "The category of nonidentity still obeys the measure of identity" (Adorno 2004, 193); but it puts identity thinking to its (ir)rational limits. This methodological step is essential if ecotourism as result of and tool to manage crisis is to be understood from the viewpoint of social practice: while the *habitus*-field "dialectic" is the central dynamic that reproduces domination, the latter cannot be thought without the element of social nonidentity. The dialectical tension – not, as Bourdieu wants, between *habitus* and field, but between *habitus* and field on the one hand and nonidentity on the other – is integral to social practice unfolding at the intersection of these three spheres. Social practice is imbued with nonidentity throughout, society is the practical organization of natures, human and nonhuman.

The constitutive tension between nonidentity and identity in the practical reproduction of the social relies on domination *creating* oppositions, "building walls between [the subject] and the object" (Adorno 2004, 31). This is to say, again, that nonidentity is not another type of ontology but the objective effect of a historically specific practical orientation: unreflected instrumentality systemically disregarding particularities and idiosyncrasies; the latter are not seen as systemically relevant, whereas, in fact, they are (as the ecological crisis demonstrates). Domination plays out in generally two ways: materially, as appropriation, exploitation, accumulation; and symbolically, as ideology, mystification, naturalization. Reflection, at best underrepresented in Bourdieu's notion of practice, arises out of the nonidentity within sociality and must be seen as integral to social practice, either in its more physical (negative sensations, discomfort, disquiet, discontents etc.) or more mental form (theoretical critique), or both. Thus, the fact that "actors" – as actually existing humans – always also stand in a detached, reflexive and cognitive relation to their own practice and *habitus* means that reflection on the *raison d'être* of practice is integral to any socialized human practice.

While it is thus certainly true that social practice tends to reproduce social structure, it may do so through the conscious impotence of socialized human beings instead of simply behind their backs, who can only realize their motivations via a set of predefined options (that never actually lead to the satisfaction actors had set out for). People may also play along somehow, (bodily and consciously) knowing that "it is a scam but the only option" – and may find some leeway for dealing with this experience. A point can thus be made in claiming that domination is practically enforced although no practitioner fully believes in the rules of the game (*doxa*) and the value of investing in it (*illusio*). Actually existing agents *are*

not pure "non-conceptual" executors of habitual programming.[27] The commitment of the "actor" to the field is never total. It is in practice as habituated *and* reflexive where the "epistemological break" takes place – not, as Bourdieu claims, between theory and practice.

1.6.2 Inequality and domination

I have discussed the relevance of social structure for the notion of domination in critical theory. However, critical theory tends to downplay the complex societal refractions of domination and treats the fate of the individual in a problematically unitary manner. This is where Bourdieu's "social physics" can add substantial detail, enabling to grasp societal domination with a much finer grained model of social entities perpetuating exploitative relations. Artists are dominated in different ways than are farmers, electrician, managers, and so on. However, without a more emphatic notion of domination as Bourdieu himself provides, *habitus*, fields, capitals or milieus remain descriptive categories unable to explain the unequal distribution of dispositions and resources they detect. One central strength of instrumentality as sketched out above is that it is not a one-way affair but necessarily produces its own downsides and discontents, since domination is never total.

1.6.3 Materialist constructivism

A major consequence of this exploration is to push one insight of constructivism beyond itself: that everything is a social construction. Social constructions cannot be conceived of solely as fictions without resonance in the reality they form. The social, as practice involving materiality in its preconditions, modes and effects, calls for an emphatic understanding of social constructions*,* or facts, as objectifications of social dynamics. Constructions are social facts: materializations of political ideologies that are largely both, false and real, established through tangible, sturdy practice. "Nature" is such a fact, produced through human and nonhuman historical labor. In a strictly logical sense, there is no primary that could be "conserved" since untouchedness only exists from the respective position in a historical process of nature production (1.3.2). Part of such production is the ecological crisis, which not only poses a real-existing threat to that society which unintendedly produced it but also to all natures that are not yet fully or not anymore socialized by it.

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[27] Clearly, Bourdieu acknowledges consciousness in action but it does not have a theoretical function within his framework (e.g. Scherr 2014). For example, he maintains against ideas of "false consciousness" that "ideology" is embodied and therefore largely unconscious. However, Bourdieu not only fashions his concept of symbolic violence exactly like the idea of false consciousness as recognition by misrecognition; he also maintains that awareness of the workings of symbolic violence is a necessary political step.

The production of nature, finally, means that if nature counts only as physical-biological factor and "boundary conditions of the social", it becomes what is was: mere passive material of human action. This sociological bias is insufficient because simple truths, of everyday life in the Lao countryside for example, escape its scope, such as, the amount of labor going into just pushing the forest back or the logic of shifting cultivation, which show that the material laws of the "biophysical" factors are much more central to and *implied in* social practices. Thus, instead of presupposing and leaving unanswered unanswerable questions about the non-social "in itself" and singling it out as mere boundary condition, I suggest that the nonidentical is a *central condition* implied in any social aspect, and that *the social is never purely social*. Instead, if crisis and hence ecotourism are to be conceptualized sociologically, the indispensable focus on practice should look at the organized action of physical, socialized and reflexive beings[28] who are never purely social, and who organize matter that is therefore never purely natural – also not in "natural environments". It thus appears that capitalist nature relations and the ecological crisis need to be tackled conceptually with a reflexive materialist theory of practice that disallows ontology and essentialism.

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[28] Such practice is organized and productive in a wider sense, potentially crossing scales (local-global), dimensions (symbolic-material), academic specializations (ecology-religion), and social nature relations (subsistence-capitalist) as well as binaries such as "tradition vs. modernity", "conservation vs. development", etc.

2 Capitalist natures

The first chapter's engagement with societal nature relations in general was rather abstract and only a first step in understanding ecotourism as result and remedy of the ecological crisis. I argued so far that at the core of crisis is domination, a perpetuated one-sided instrumental relation between society and nature (human and nonhuman) that is based on structured denial of autonomy. This denial is crisis-ridden as it produces social nonidentity among human and nonhuman natures; and it is historically ongoing: capitalist transition, as much as it represents a socio-ecological rupture, does not disrupt but repeat and intensify this continuity. This chapter seeks to further clarify the specifics of capitalism's crisis in particular (2.1) as well as ecocapitalism's attempts to deal with it (2.2). The central argument is that ecotourism as tool for conservation is an ecocapitalist practice seeking (in world-ecology terminology) to underproduce resources at "the end of cheap nature" (2.3). The systemic limits to growth have become integrated into the reproduction of capitalist society in a concerted effort to renovate the resource base as a new ecological regime remains out of sight. Ecocapitalism is defined by its internalized conservation-development tension, which is further traced through ecotourism as concept and as practice in Laos (Chapters 3 to 8). We will also see how capitalist natures are mediated by the ideology of the resource fetish (2.1.3) mediatized as spectacle (2.2.3) which has a direct bearing on the concept and practice of ecotourism.

2.1 Capitalism's crisis

Sticking to the triad Bourdieu-Marx-Adorno, this section explores the nature of the capitalist crisis by elaborating, first, on the specificities of capitalist versus precapitalist socialization and on the transition from one to the other. On a meta level, both Bourdieu's and Marx's notion of capitalist transition blend ideal-types and historical practice, implying that capitalist transition is theoretically a radical break but not necessarily experienced as rupture in practice since "capitalism" continues the history of nature domination. Theoretical contradictions might therefore go seamlessly together in everyday practice (2.1.1). Second, capitalism is framed here as world-ecology in order to account for the historical unfolding of capitalism's value principle as root of capital's ecological crisis. Capitalist nature domination is specified in terms of overaccumulation and underproduction, and the centrality of resource frontiers for historical capitalist ecology is highlighted (2.1.2). Third, the ideological flipside of capitalist nature relations is conceptualized as resource fetish, analogous to Marx's commodity fetish; it is combined with Adorno's critique on authenticity as jargon through which culture industries hijack nonidentity (2.1.3). Ecotourism proceeds practically through such fetishization.

2.1.1 From precapitalism to capitalism

As is well known, for Marx, pre-bourgeois society is characterized as nature's "own inorganic existence", a social condition which makes humans "along other natural beings […] an appendage of the earth" (Marx in Schmidt 1971, 81f). Precapitalism is seen as an existence dominated by the laws of external nature, defined by "[…] the fragmentation of holdings, and the dispersal of the other means of production" (Marx 1982, 927). Marx argues that a society of "free" proprietors of their own working conditions cannot organize labor *socially*. As soil and means of production are fragmented, also "the social control and regulation of the forces of nature" is (ibid). External nature is fought only locally, unorganized on a higher than the community level, so that peasant society is organized according to the laws of nature.

Precapitalist subsistence economies, furthermore, functioned according to the operation C-M-C: commodities were produced, sold and bought for their use-value; money was a means of circulation, not capital (ibid, 200ff). This logic is radically inverted by capitalism where commodities are bought in order to sell, that is, for their exchange value (M-C-M; ibid, 248ff). Money transforms into capital: invested to purchase the peculiar commodity of human labor-power to be consumed in production in order to sell the product with a surplus (M-C-M') (ibid, 274ff). From the perspective of capital, labor is the sole source of surplus value, the accumulation of which is capitalism's *raison d'être*; external nature is seen as original, free gift with no economic value itself. The actual use value of a commodity and its consumption are turned into means for realizing surplus value.

Such abstraction from and equation of specific use-values of commodities (and virtually everything becomes a commodity in capitalism), with the sole focus being on quantitative exchange value represented in the money-form, is thus central to capitalism's specific ecological metabolism: "the radical divorce of labour from its objective natural conditions" (Schmidt 1971, 82). Accumulation of surplus knows no intrinsic limit; yet, it can be realized only through the production of use-values, the materiality of which is limited in the light of capitalism's endless hunger. Thus, while there are commodities, trade and money already in precapitalist societies, it is with capitalism that endless exchange becomes the rationale of economy, rather than satisfying consumption. This has immediate practical implications: the radical transition to a market-based economy might not necessarily be experienced as that radical "on the ground", because everyone has sold and bought products for centuries already.

Let us add more sociology to this characterization of precapitalism and capitalism: Bourdieu's sees precapitalist societies as defined by the interdependence of economics and ethics (see Bourdieu 2000, 44f; also Scott 1976). For him, there is a fundamental difference between a calculating orientation towards the future, as in capitalist societies, and a mode of production focused on immediate consumption, as in agrarian subsistence society. Simple reproduction has not yet come to its economic self insofar as economic interests are concealed as moral obligations. Accumulation, exploitation, calculation and competition are present in peasant society, but veiled as moral obligations and questions of honor. Continuous flows of ritual gift and counter-gift are objective economic transactions couched in selfless rhetoric of kinship and community. Social stratification is minimal as resistance towards accumulation and social distinction serves as the basis of societal order (Bourdieu 2000, 46). Power and wealth differentials do exist and are seen as legitimate as long as those in power do not forget their moral obligations towards the worse-off: patron-client ties are a mainstay of subsistence economic insurance (also Scott 1976, 27f; Scott 1972), based on the idea that "one is rich in order to give". Symbolic capital, that is, (mis)recognized economic capital (unequally distributed material resources) is the basis of social organization, a "soft" domination "by the ethic of honour" (Bourdieu 1990, 127). For Bourdieu, precapitalist societies are the paradigmatic site of symbolic violence (ibid, 126).

In capitalism, according to Bourdieu, functional differentiation of social fields (culture, religion, education, economy, politics etc.) enables unconcealed competition for material profit in the economic field while symbolic capital is relegated to the political and cultural fields. Through differentiation, and especially of the educational system "capital is given the conditions of its full realization" so that "relations of power and dependence are no longer established directly between individuals" but "set up, in objectivity, among institutions […] and through them" (Bourdieu 1990, 125ff). Both formations, premodern and modern, thus differ in their modes of dominating human natures: the first is defined by personal domi-

nation, the second by systemic domination of institutions which "have the permanence and opacity of things and lie beyond the reach of individual consciousness and power" (ibid, 130). While in personal domination, the fact of domination and violence must be actively concealed over and over again and is always precarious, capitalist domination is "secured quasi-automatically by the logic of the labour market" (ibid, 123). Precapitalist personal domination is preoccupied with veiling and euphemizing inequity by referring to kinship, marriage alliance, or ritual traditions. Capitalist impersonal domination, on the other hand, is based on a reification of society as it becomes more abstracted from individual everyday experiences. This idea of systemic domination is strictly in line with both Marx's and Critical Theory's understanding of capitalist society and neatly links up with the social division of labor as a dominative relation (1.4.2)

How can we think about the process that leads from precapitalism to capitalism? This question pertains immediately to capitalist transition in Laos and ecotourism's role in it. The process, which, according to Marx, leads from simple production to capitalist production, is known as "primitive" or "original accumulation" (Marx 1982, 871ff). It describes this historical transition as violent separation of labor from its means of production (soil and tools), and as the formation of the opposition of capital and labor via land appropriation and displacement of the rural population. The means of production are transferred from the "original" producers to the hands of a few who do not work but who buy "double-free" labor: free, firstly, to enter into contracts with other, formally equal individuals; and, secondly, free from owning the means of production (ibid, 874). The combination of these two "freedoms" forces laborers to "freely" enter into exchanges that exploit their surplus labor. It is not anymore only the product of the labor process which is appropriated, but the labor process itself, and not for consumption primarily but to endlessly accumulate capital through exploitation of double-free labor. In such exchange of labor for wage, labor is reduced to an abstract potential measured as socially necessary labor time. Thus, although liberated from serfdom and domination by external nature, human nature is forced into conditions where it is negated by the conditions of capitalist production. The abstract role of human labor is mirrored by the abstract function of all natures in a capitalist social formation: humans have been appendages of nature before, now they, as well as external nature, are appendages of the profit machine. Production, before geared towards the satisfaction of needs (basic or luxury), becomes an end in itself; use-value is turned into a means of exchange value. The continuous extraction of value from both, human and nonhuman natures knows no intrinsic limitations, which has divorced society *historically* from nature.

Let us, again with Bourdieu, account for the social dynamics mediating this ecological transition. In his study on Algeria he examined the conditions of possibility of access to behavior deemed "rational" from a capitalist perspective (Bourdieu 2000, 17). He argues that such behavior is fundamentally alien to rural life

worlds and *habitus*: saving, investing, accumulating, and participating in a fully monetized economy constitute a culturally particular "belief system" (ibid, 16) inaccessible to a precapitalist ethic. Its imposition on agrarian societies through colonialism is a violent act that leads to manifold disruptions. Bourdieu traces these fractures into the subjective hopes of those in transition, showing how traditional and modern structures and dynamics intersect, and how premodern moral economic systems persist in the context of the individualizing life worlds of the colonized (ibid, 68ff). He pictures this coincidence of traditional and modern as subordination of the former to the latter (ibid, 79). Bourdieu observes that exactly when economic hardship is greatest large social networks disintegrate and precarious improvisation replaces precaution based on custom (ibid, 84). Bourdieu's conclusion is that economic necessity imposes a kind of behavior which is meaningful neither within the traditional nor the modern logic, an ambiguous "*Gestalt*" (ibid, 84). Bourdieu thus frames transition as fragmentation, disorientation and conflict between mutually exclusive systems. The change in *habitus* towards capitalist rationality is explained, first, by pre-existing inequality and the capacity of the already better-off to transform traditional wealth into cultural and economic capital (ibid, 104ff); second, by the conflict between habitual *hysteresis* and a changed, imposed reality, which forces conservative *habitus* to improvise and innovate (e.g. Bourdieu 1990, 62). In thus far, social change seems to spring from habitual conservatism.

I would like to pause here for a second and discuss a problem in both Marx and Bourdieu when dealing with the transition from "precapitalism" to "capitalism": the blending and blurring of different scales of analysis, of ideal-types and historical practice. I agree that Bourdieu's take on habitual change is intriguing, and *habitus* incongruence may be a crucial factor in explaining transition. It seems, however, that Bourdieu employs "pure", discontinuous ideal-types here and maintains continuity there: he ascribes, for example, calculus to "capitalism" as if kinship, honor etc. are not the symbolic side of an (however implicit) economic calculus, as he also maintains. Bourdieu's ambivalence is reflected in his terminology: *habitus* and capital apply to non-capitalist as well as to capitalist societies and it is not quite clear how capitalism is specific – although he seems to imply that in functionally differentiated societies "capital is given the conditions of its full realization" (above). If, furthermore, symbolic capital is "a dimension of all power" (Bourdieu 1990, 141), legitimacy is the symbolic side of the value coin not just in personal but also in systemic domination. Thus, Bourdieu appears "trapped in the logic of realist typologies" as he argues against Weber (ibid): he is forced to think historical continuity as discontinuity by projecting a theoretical notion or essence (ideal-type) into historical reality (also Adorno 2003, 204). His approach to social change finds its ultimate limitation in the *habitus*-field dialectic, which ignores that "actors" might willingly and strategically seek to acquire new bodily dispositions – as is found in ecotourism actors such as guides or conservation workers (Chapter

6 and Conclusion). The ambiguous *Gestalt* which has meaning neither in "tradition" nor in "modernity" may thus be read as a description of practice in general: precapitalism was never "pure" but presented the soil for capitalism, while the latter is still in the process of being accomplished.

A similar problem is posed by Marx's idea of "primitive accumulation". It is foundational for understanding the social transition evolving in the Lao uplands, most notably the increasing differentiation of capital and labor (see Baird 2011). However, this concept also mixes historical and formal analysis: it is not quite clear if "primitive accumulation" is a past historical phase or an ongoing process of appropriation (see Harvey 2005; Kelly 2011). The question: "When does capitalism start to sit firmly in the saddle?" is most difficult to determine, so that, for the purpose of our scope on Laos, I evade the question whether it is exactly "primitive accumulation" that happens there. Rather, I stick to the term "(accumulation by) appropriation" in order to refer to a central dynamic in upland social ecology.

2.1.2 Frontiers of capitalist world-ecology

Foster (1999, 2000) elaborates on Marx's radical divorce of labor from land with the concept of the "metabolic rift". According to him, Marx "provided a powerful analysis of the main ecological crisis of his day – the problem of soil fertility within capitalist agriculture" and commented "on the other major ecological crises of his time […]" (Foster 1999, 373). In his grasp on soil fertility, Marx follows Justus von Liebig's critique of soil exhaustion that accompanies the increasing division of town and countryside: the constant robbery of soil nutrients leading to soil exhaustion in the country and waste accumulation in the cities (also Schmidt 1971, 89) is a dilemma paradigmatic for the metabolic rift of capitalist transition. This dynamic had a global dimension in that "whole colonies saw their land, resources, *and soil* robbed to support the industrialization of the colonizing countries" (Foster 1999, 384; emphasis original). In his approach to ecological issues of his time, Marx conceptualizes capitalism's relation to the soil as exploitative, providing an "explanation of how large-scale industry and large-scale agriculture combined to impoverish the soil and the worker" (ibid, 379).

By and large, Foster's approach coincides with the view taken here. However, his focus on the concept of a rift must also be taken with a grain of salt: not only because Foster's illustration of Marx as an environmentalist might be overdone since his and Engel's concern with the robbery of nature derived mainly from their concern about economic functionality rather than about nature *per se* (Schmidt 1971, 159). Also, the notion of a rift seems to hypostasize, again, ideal-typical categories. Radkau has argued (against Liebig) that the pessimism of decreasing soil fertility is actually of ancient origin and not a capitalist specialty (Radkau 2002, 23). Moreover, Foster's concept of a rift is based on a notion of society-nature relations as "*interaction* between nature and humanity" (ibid, 399; emphasis

original), that is, in terms of mutual perturbance of pure essences (Nature and Humanity) instead of as a relation of mutual constitution – as if humanity was not nature and nature not already socialized (1.3 and 1.4). In Jason W. Moore's words, the metabolic rift concept "locates biophysical crises in one box, and accumulation crises in another" (Moore 2011, 2). Moore suggests, in contrast, that historical capitalism does not *have* an ecological regime, it *is* one; there is no metabolic rift but a "metabolic shift". Although the metaphor of a "shift" seems equally problematic for its "symmetrical", despecifying thrust (see 1.5), Moore's perspective gets us further as it "brings together the circuit of capital with the appropriation of life" (Moore 2014, 305).

Rather than from explicit yet comparably peripheral engagements of Marx with the ecological question as in Foster, Moore takes off from Marx's core explanation of the crisis of capitalist accumulation: the theory of value and its historical unfolding through repeated fixes of its inherent crisis dynamic. For Moore, the history of capitalism is one of ecological revolutions leading to different "ecological regimes" defined as:

[…] those market and institutional mechanisms necessary to ensure adequate flows of energy, food, raw material, and labor surpluses to the organizing centers of world accumulation [as well as, M.K.] the production complexes that consume these surpluses and set in motion new (and contradictory) demands upon the rest of nature. (Moore 2011, 34)

Each ecological regime must handle the contradiction of capital between "productivity and plunder" so as to sustain accumulation. The fundamental problem from a value perspective is that due to competition between capitalists as practical mode of realizing value the need for "cheap natures" (labor, raw-materials) grows faster than its supply and overaccumulation tends to override what Moore and others call *underproduction* (see also O'Connor 1988): the societal production and provision of cheap natures for capitalization. Each ecological regime pursues its way of realizing profit in a specific constellation of a) providing cheap inputs produced outside of the capital relation and b) their valorization in capitalist production and consumption. Cheap inputs (labor and resources) are produced by capitalist society in general, that is, the state, media, civil organizations and institutions, and so on. Capitalization – taken by itself an unviable principle for any longer period of time for its tendency to exhaust its preconditions (human and nonhuman natures) – is thus enabled, managed and perpetuated by societal regulation harnessing "the capacity of particular species, ecosystems (including humans), and even geological formations, to deliver unpaid work" (Moore 2014, 296) for capital.

As ever new untouched "gifts" must be socially produced for capital, ecological regimes are fettered by their regulatory arrangements: these modes of regulation represent "fixes" of the capitalist crisis tendency (e.g. Harvey 2005, 73ff) in the double sense of fixing overaccumulation problems temporarily and spatially in

durable structures, which, in turn, ultimately limit capital's expansion. Such "fixes" thus do not solve but shuffle around the core problem, growing capital, to the point where accumulation in the respective fixes becomes impossible (Moore 2001, 15). Historical capitalism represents a process of "successive global ecological fixes" (ibid, 29). Each round of accumulation starts out with a huge "ecological surplus" (abundant cheap natures) which spurs capitalization which, in turn, decreases the ecological surplus due to overaccumulation overriding underproduction. Natural inputs are cheapest at the beginning and become dearer over the course of an ecological regime, until a point is reached where this constellation is either transcended and new *frontiers* are found (limited by the structures of the previous regime) or else accumulation falters. The ecological crisis is thus not the other of the accumulation crisis but both "are crises of the actually existing relation of socialized nature through the law of value, not of an abstract nature of 'wilderness' once, twice (or even thrice!) removed" (Moore 2011, 35). Accumulation crisis consists in a rising organic composition of capital and a concurrent decline in the profit rate; this is balanced-out by strategies of cheap nature creating new ecological surplus, such as through scientific and technological revolutions. Capitalism as a whole thus has fundamental ecological implications in that it plays out as "a succession of socio-technical innovations that *maximized biophysical throughput relative to labor*, and which continually *revolutionized the very 'nature' of the biophysical throughput itself*" (ibid, emphasis added).

Moore's crisis theory is illuminating for ecotourism in Laos specifically because it suggests that frontiers are central to capital's historical dilemma to finally drown in capital: "While all civilizations had frontiers of a sort, capitalism was a frontier. The extension of capitalist power to new spaces that were uncommodified became the lifeblood of capitalism" (Moore 2014, 288). The tension inherent in capitalist value unfolds as expansion and intensification of crisis production and fix in a dialectic of productivity and plunder, the latter being conducted in frontiers. Frontiers can thus be understood with Moore as zones of cheap appropriation (plunder) of historically (under)produced nature that are central to global accumulation in that they outweigh the tendency to overaccumulation. In frontiers, in short, global overaccumulation is fixed by local underproduction: Moore thus differentiates between accumulation by appropriation – the principal mode of accumulation at the frontiers ("primitive accumulation") – and accumulation by capitalization pertaining to capitalist production in particular. Although Moore does not deal with nature conservation at all, his approach not only helps integrating and specifying accounts of "neoliberal conservation" that appear unspecific in terms of the ways in which conservation is exactly a mode of accumulation (2.3). It also helps understand how unpaid (human and nonhuman) work is created:

In order to reduce necessary labor-time, capital sets in motion—and struggles to create through varied combinations of coercion, consent, and rationalization—a civilization that aims to max-

imize the unpaid "work" of life outside [the] circuit of capital, but within reach of capitalist power. (Moore 2014, 293)

Cheap nature must stand ready to be appropriated by and integrated into capitalist production and therefore must be brought into the confines of capitalist power (underproduction) but remain outside the capital relation itself. Of course, historically both dynamics come together, so that the inherent dilemma of the frontier is that once its "free gifts" are appropriated it gradually ceases to be one; new frontiers must be created in expansive repetition until the "end of the frontier". The "cheapness" of the frontier is only one for capital valorization, of course. The costs of the plunder in frontier areas are externalized, borne by social networks of self-help and subsistence, for example. Ecologically put, the crisis of capital therefore creates on a global scale exhaustion, depletion and contamination of successive socio-ecological constellations of human and nonhuman nature – capitalism is a world-ecology. The tension between overaccumulation and underproduction is expressed in ecotourism in that between conservation and development (Chapter 3).

2.1.3 Tourism and the resource fetish

Moore calls the symbolic dimension of capital's cheap nature strategy "abstract social nature". Although he does not refer to critical theory explicitly, this notion recalls what has been discussed already under the rubric of instrumentality (1.4.2) as it refers to practices "aimed at rationalizing, simplifying, standardizing, and otherwise mapping the world" which are "directly constitutive of producing external natures that can be cheaply appropriated" (Moore 2014, 304). The link Moore draws between abstract labor and abstract nature can be advanced further: It might be argued that the constitution of nature as abstract and external, that is, as a direct (seemingly unmediated) resource at human disposal, comes with a resource fetish analogous to Marx's commodity fetish (Marx 1982, 163ff). As with the latter, this fetish obscures the historical mediations of means of production, projecting them as immediate resources. Such view *necessarily* arises from within a certain phase in the production of resources (1.3.2). Just as the commodity is seen as bearing value in itself, the seeming immediacy of resources (untouched external nature) comes to be seen as imbued with value in itself; like with the commodity, the value ascribed by society is both economic and moral – and especially so in times of ecological crisis. "Nature" is expressed in monetary terms as much as it becomes a moral prerogative; "untouchedness" is idealized as primordiality and authenticity as much as it constitutes an ecorational instrument.

In order to understand the ideology and instrumentality of the resource fetish abounding in conservation and ecotourism, it is useful to briefly consider Ador-

no's notion of the authenticity jargon.[29] For him, jargon is when a "word is written in an intonation which places it transcendently in opposition to its own meaning […] loaded at the expense of the sentence, its propositional force, and the thought content" (Adorno 1973, 8). It is not the use of the word "authentic" per se, for example, which is in itself problematic but its ostentatious presentation, as if it *somehow*, i.e. in an unintellectual way, expressed more than it means. In jargon, authenticity becomes "sacred without sacred content" (ibid, 9). Such jargon is enacted in the resource frontier of Laos as ecotourism equates "agrarian conditions, or at least […] simple commodity economy" to "something undivided, protectingly closed, which runs its course in a firm rhythm and unbroken continuity" (ibid, 59). The problem with this "left-over of romanticism" is "transplanted without second thought into the contemporary situation, to which it stands in harsher contradiction than ever before", as if it was "not abstracted from generated and transitory situations, but rather belonged to the essence of man" (ibid). Box 2 provides a glimpse of authenticity jargon in advertising Lao tourism.

Box 2: Authenticity jargon in Lao tourism marketing
Adorno's considerations regarding the jargon of authenticity perfectly apply to the marketing of Laos as a tourist destination. According to the official website of Lao Tourism,

Laos is a country as yet untouched by the modern demands, stress and peace of life.Its beauty lies in the Lao people, century-old traditions ans heritage, ands its lush, pristine landscape. (wording and punctuation original)[30]

What is sold here is the fiction of "hale life" (Adorno 1973, 59) in contrast to "modern demands". This is, obviously, a bold claim at a time when Laos is turning itself into the battery of Asia and is about to access the WTO – a claim, which is functional within this context *because* it is "far from all social considerations" (ibid). Moreover, the character of authenticity as catchword prompting comprehension to "snap in", is formidably exemplified by above quote. The fact that this slogan is posted uncorrected for several years betrays the ultimate "plastic" nature of untouchedness (Poerksen 1995). Its words are signs claiming

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[29] Although this study opened by referencing Dean MacCannell, it chooses to follow here Adorno's critical concept of the jargon rather than MacCannell's more descriptive take on authenticity. His framing of the problem in terms of Goffman's "front/back" dichotomy (MacCannell 1999, 91ff) seems to sit uneasily with authenticity expectations in ecotourism, where supposedly uncommercialized conditions ("back") are sought for touristic experience ("front"): authenticity must not be staged in ecotourism (see 3.3.2). Put differently, if ecotourism is to be seen as a dynamic of commercialization or commodification, "the *realm of the commercial*" ceases to represent "the dividing line between structure genuine and spurious" (MacCannell 1999, 155; emphasis original).

[30] See: http://www.tourismlaos.org/, accessed March 23, 2015.

transcendence being present in Laos. Incorrectly written, they become signs of such signs – the ultimate expression of arbitrary ascription of meaning.[31]

Anticipating ecotourism's logic of restricted development (Butcher 2007; Chapter 3), Adorno points to the jargon's economic dimension: it "constantly smuggles in what is limited, finally even situations of material want, under the guise of positivity" exactly when "such a limitation no longer needs in reality to exist" (Adorno 1973, 26). Talking up "customs" as sites of refuge from capitalist civilization thus affirms the material limitations of marginalized country life as ahistorical, while the hardships and refusals of such life could be done away with here and now. The link between a vague critique of "alienated" society, its reverse affirmation of that society, and the administration of people recognized by their official identity (e.g. as peasants, ethnic tribes etc.) is productively skipping over the fact that it "was not Man who created the institutions but particular men in a particular constellation with nature and with themselves" (ibid, 61). Thus, sacralization and reification of language link up with administration apparatuses that "expand out over what they consider as their cultural domain" (ibid, 81).

In the context of the functional differentiation of capitalist societies, the modern longing for Nature and Tradition, or for the other of capitalist routine more generally, became institutionalized within the framework of modern organization of labor in the realm of "leisure", such as in tourism. Leisure, the realm of labor reproduction, is mediated by culture industries installing a "cycle of manipulation and retroactive need" (Horkheimer/Adorno 2002, 95) in order to turn the reproduction of human nature (labor) productive again. Idolization of nonhuman nature is thereby structurally tied to the exploitation of human nature in the "centers" of capitalization. However, culture industry is not just an economic sector but a "filter" of the world bearing "in advance the trace of the jargon": the "paradox of routine travestied as nature is detectable in every utterance of the culture industry" (ibid, 101). This is also to say, with Bourdieu, that the resource fetish (i.e. external nature as value in itself) becomes incorporated and practical. A crucial effect is not only the creation of profitable desires in consumers but also the exclusion of the "new" which is at the same time constantly proclaimed (ibid, 106). Culture industrial forms as conditions of subjective experience have, furthermore, the effect that "the product prescribes each reaction, not through any actual coherence […] but through signals" (ibid, 109) – such as "markers" of mo-

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[31] The reified character of current authenticity talk in Lao tourism is, these striking features aside, also displayed in the constellation of the words used in above quote: Laos is depicted as a country "untouched by the modern demands, stress and peace of life" – a meaning which is clearly unintended by the authority which released this description. It is obviously the existence, and not absence of "peace of life" which Laos as a destination is supposedly characterized by. The point is that the actual meaning, the constellation of words is not as important as the extensive use of catchwords.

dernity and premodernity in ecotouristic settings. According to Horkheimer and Adorno, escape from capitalist everydayness through culture industry "is destined […] to lead back to its starting point", everyday life (ibid, 113). This idea of a necessary return to the beginning is in fact found in ecotourism practice as a culture-industrial form of escape, that is, as a contradiction in itself (see Chapter 7).

Those are important observations for understanding the ideological instrumentality of ecotourism centering on the resource fetish. But instrumentality means more than just ideology: for, how is it that the fetish of being untouched by capitalism is such a strong enough material force to make tourism one of the world's largest industries? This can only be explained, I argue, with the socially nonidentical to which authenticity is attractive *for a reason*: because it *promises* fulfillment of unfulfilled needs, and thus represents a utopian "allegory of freedom" (Cro 1990). Now, "needs" are of course socially mediated (Adorno 1979b, 392). Understanding needs as simply natural would be an ideological mistake. However, it is also inappropriate to take them as pure social products. Rather, tourism "exploits the body's readiness" (Bourdieu) to escape capitalist existence by providing a capitalist form of escape. The veritable "masses" channeled through the touristic escape machine are a manifest critique of human nature under capitalism. Social forms are therefore *imposed* by the *formation* of needs. While in ecotourism existential unease is sought to be alleviated by "getting away from it all" (West/Carrier 2004) customers ultimately reintegrate themselves (and their labor power), though inconveniently (see 7.5). The need for escape as expressed in "authenticity" can be seen as sign of a social condition which makes its subjects escape while controlling them so firmly that escape degenerates into repetition of what is escaped from (Adorno 1979b, 392). We have here an explication of the second part of my ecotourism definition: "the recreation of human natures" which serves the recreation of external natures. Insofar, tourism is paradigmatic for Adorno's observation that the capitalistically constituted need comes into conflict with itself (ibid, 392f). In short: "authenticity" derives its power not just from itself as ideological discourse: rather, it is ideological in that it speaks to what suffers from the societal organization of natures to re-canalize this nonidentity into productive forms. Thereby, the resource fetish of untouchedness (re)appropriates human natures by capitalizing on their nonidentity.

A reflection of the economic system, authenticity and untouchedness are the mystifying side of nature as a resource, for: "If nature ceased to serve merely as raw material, it would no longer need idolization" (Schmidt 1971, 154). Such adoration is the flipside of exploitation; the ideology of "untouchedness" is created *with necessity* by a system that reduces nature to a means. We might thus see "authenticity" as a form of symbolic violence in Bourdieu's terms: insofar as it is appreciated, subjection to social domination takes place. It is profoundly material, however: its violence lies not merely in the power of the symbolism *per se* but in but in bodies

that "matter" and suffer. The self-reintegration in ecotourism practice as laid out below is empirical evidence for Bourdieu's claim that those participating in a dominative "symbolic universe" (such as in 3.3.) also dominate themselves to some degree and in certain ways. Ecotourism turns the instrumental link between nature and capitalist society productive again – not so much for capital accumulation directly but for the production of the natural conditions for capital accumulation: cheap natures (see 2.3). In this way, ecotourism represents a paradigmatic practical embodiment of accumulation's latest fashion: ecocapitalism.

2.2 Ecocapitalism

How is current global capitalism specific in its way of fixing the tension between overaccumulation and underproduction? I argue that the historic particularity of current capitalism lies in its partial turning "green"; capital has started to selectively account for its ecologically destructive tendencies. In the wake of the experience of the ecological crisis, the supposedly objective finiteness of Nature thus becomes more integral to capitalist society and a central and conscious object of regulation. Conservation work must be understood as concerted production of natural resources to be cheaply appropriated. Capital's crisis-ridden nature relations are thereby becoming internal contradictions, incorporated, for example, in the form of a continuous tension between conservation and development within conservation work, as well as, by implication, within ecotourism.

2.2.1 The end of cheap natures

As noted above, the root of the capital's ecological crisis lies in the simultaneous abstraction from and reliance on specific, material use-values of things produced for their exchange value. Insofar as accumulation is bound to material production, the structural coercion to counteract the falling rate of profit seeks to maximize the material throughput (cheaply appropriated nature) per unit of abstract labour, so that ultimately the logic of capital undermines its material conditions, systemically and successively squeezing and degrading them. That is to say that the "limits to growth" are a function of capital's relation to nature, not of "nature as such" – they are the limits of capital's own logic. Therefore,

The "peak" that capitalism cares about is peak appropriation: the moment when the contribution of unpaid work is highest, relative to the abstract social labor (capital) deployed. […] The problem is not whether more oil […] can be extracted on an abstract supply curve, but whether more oil (or its equivalents) can be extracted with less labor. (Moore 2014, 297)

For Moore, the rise in commodity prices since 2003 "signals" the end of cheap nature. He writes, "the greatest frontiers have been exhausted [while] the mass of

surplus capital continues to rise", so that "capital has sought refuge in commodity markets, pushing *up* the very prices of food, energy, and raw materials at the moment when capitalism (as a system) needs those prices to go *down*" (ibid, 298; emphasis original).[32] Capital's accumulation crisis thus may find "partial and temporary resolution in renewed financialization" (ibid). Not just the prize increase in primary commodities but increased financialization signifies that this ecological regime is running out of cheap resources. Financialization, i.e. cutting short the M-C-M' operation by directly linking M-M', is a sign of this ecological exhaustion. For Büscher and Fletcher (2014) "the emphasis thus shifts from spatial to temporal fixes […] in order to both displace overproduction into the future and to increase returns in the present" (ibid, 14). A signal of exhaustion, the M-M' shortcut "realizes" value before it is produced. Financialization, that is, signals but does not resolve overaccumulation crisis. Likewise, "the common sense of the contemporary radical critique" that capital could "actively manufacture" its own frontiers is seen by Moore as a "misinterpretation":

The processes of privatization and finance-led dispossession, insofar as they operate within the domain of capitalized relations, cannot revive accumulation by themselves; indeed, these processes worked in the neoliberal era because they were bound to the release of cheap labor-power, food, energy, and raw materials into *the circuits of capital from* outside *those circuits.* (Moore 2014, 303; emphasis original)

Financialization is directly connected to the (relative) incapacity of current capitalism to cheapen the four major inputs of production: labor-power, food, energy, and raw materials (ibid, 299). Therefore, the current bloom of "derivative nature" (Büscher 2010) is not to be mistaken for a new capitalist phase – which could only come with a revolution of the resource base, such as, via scientific progress and technological innovation making new realms of nature accessible and exploitable for capital.[33] Such revolution being inconceivable at this point of time, M-M' accumulation creates only a temporal fix, which may dissolve with the bursting of the next bubble. The "virtualization" of value and nature does not decouple exchange value from use-value. As the necessary "outside" of capital is harder and harder to find, appropriation of natures becomes increasingly expensive: "The end

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[32] Whether the recent plunge in oil prices is contradicting Moore's general observation of ecological exhaustion cannot be debated here. It certainly does not speak for it. I would argue that it seems problematic to look for verification of such *longue durée* dynamics in volatile and capricious, short-term oriented global commodity markets.

[33] As Büscher writes, "Assets with real value, in the Marxian sense, are commodities that harbour a particular use-value which is objectified by human labour. Derivatives, then, are a way of enabling the virtualisation of this value by projecting the realisation of the value of 'real' assets into the future" (Büscher 2010, 265). If realization of value is just projected into the future, it seems somewhat contradictory to maintain, however, that "the notion of value embodied by derivatives is no longer the one that Marx first articulated, albeit Marx' theory of value still forms the 'deep structure' of capital" (ibid).

of the frontier today is the end of nature's free gifts, and with it, the end of capitalism's free ride" (Moore 2014, 303).

What does the end of cheap nature mean for capitalist power over nature and people, beyond the fact that prices might be on the rise? Asking this means going beyond Moore's focus on capital's law of value. Moore notes the direct relation between abstract nature and abstract labor but how symbolic-institutional configurations (politics, culture, knowledge, ideology) – i.e. the systems of underproducing cheap nature, or in short: society – actually mediate the law of value through social practice is naturally out of his scope. Interestingly, Moore remains silent as well about Nature conservation and its role in current nature relations. However, it can be argued from his perspective that conservation amounts to the *concerted enactment of concrete places as abstract (nonhuman) Nature to be cheaply appropriated by (current and future) capitalization*. In order to arrive at a more sociological notion of what the end of cheap nature means let us look at how external nature is politically regulated in ecocapitalism; the example of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) has direct bearing on ecotourism and Laos.

2.2.2 Regulating cheap natures

I suggest that the end of cheap nature results in a concerted social underproduction of natural resources outside the circuit of capital but within reach of "capitalist power", i.e. capitalist society. Conservation areas today are uncapitalized "factories" of such underproduction: labor and effort invested into the creation of untouched external nature is unpaid for by capital, externalized, although such underproduction is realized in parts through market means, such as, in ecotourism. The manifold costs of actually existing untouched Nature – such as, schemes to keep locals from encroaching and poaching – are borne not by private capital but by (global) society. Conservation and ecotourism, in other words, belong to an ecocapitalist mode of regulating accumulation at the end of cheap nature. The systemic limits to growth have become integrated into the reproduction of capitalist society in the concerted effort to *renovate* the resource base absent its revolution. Such "ecological turn" is contradictory: if financialization signals overaccumulation, i.e. the fact that a revolution of the resource base would be in order to sustain accumulation, the mere renovation of resources necessarily lags behind the crisis dynamic and can only prolong, extend and intensify, but not resolve the critical situation. Given the objective threat this crisis poses to capitalist society itself, it is possible to argue that "sustainable development" is becoming hegemonic not merely as greenwashing strategy. In fact, the only chance of the capitalist system to persist for some longer time can only lie in the adoption of a new contradiction – that between overexploiting resources and leaving them untouched, or: conservation vs. development. It is a contemporary revenant of the false alternatives referenced above between being dominated by nature and dominating it (see 1.4.3).

The ecocapitalist "solution" to capital's ecological crisis is thus to cure illness with itself: modernization (profit orientation, bureaucratic management, scientism, technology) is to fix what emerged from modernization (Dingler 2003, 322). This is as reasonable as it gets within this system. The conscious but partial integration of the ecological "question" into the social regulation of capital parallels that of the social question; the concept of a "Green New Deal" expresses this similarity. Like its forerunner, the "ecological question" is asked and answered under the premise of profit, competition and efficiency. Environmental preservation is integrated as a condition of growth, the preservation of the material preconditions of economic activity (Görg 2003, 153).

That is to say that, in ecocapitalism, ecology becomes a central subject of conflictive power relations. Ecological problems are accounted for, but only in a selective manner because the ways of tackling the ecological problematic are subject to power relations within which the most powerful seek to maintain the *status quo* as much as possible (ibid, 138). Hegemonic framings of the ecological question and its possible answer(s) are premised on imperatives of viability and rationality, scientific expertise and technological innovation. The ecological crisis, that is, is regarded as manageable in the same way in which it was produced.

Politically, the integration of the ecological problem takes place under the transformation of statehood and its reallocation at diverse scales: functions of governing resources and people are transferred to civil society actors such as NGOs working on the local as well as the global level; and they become subject to regional economic and political integration as well as to international agreements, conventions and organizations (see Brand et al. 2008, 32ff; Görg 2003, 196f). This goes in hand with a partial revolution of the resource base through innovations in genetics and life sciences, the pharmaceutical and agro-industry being among the industries of the future. In this process, "nature" as resource acquires a new social meaning:

The resources here are of a different type to those of the Fordist phase […]. *The issue is not so much one of the availability of natural products as such, but increasingly, of the information contained within them, of the "genetic code"* […]. *These resources, thus, do not simply exist, but are constituted as resources (namely as economically useful and thus valuable material) via scientific descriptions and technological developments.* (Brand et al. 2008, 21)

Intellectual property rights and patents become a key institutional lever to privatize access to genetic resources (ibid, 26ff). Rather than unilaterally prescribing the conditions of capital accumulation, the internationalized ecocapitalist state turns from government to governance, i.e. the mediation of diverse "stakeholder" interests under conditions of symbolic-material power inequality. Görg sees in this shift away from government a "re-feudalization" of politics as particular(istic) interest groups may exert much more direct influence on governing natures than

under a ruling government (Görg 2003, 168). Governance is thus not neutral mediation but hegemonic; economic power and interest stand better chances of shaping the world. Speaking with Bourdieu, hegemony derives from the "original doxa" of factual constraints created by capitalistically organized societies in which certain interests are automatically more influential than others.[34] It is not only the "state" in the narrow sense (itself a diffuse entity) which regulates those constraints but civil society, its milieus and cultures more generally. Insofar as interests, in order to be officially acknowledged worth considering, are bound to certain epistemic-institutional preconditions (scientific expertise, funds, advertisement etc.), diversity of interests is channelled into a biased "compromise". Through such governance of multiple stakeholders' interests predefined by the constraints of "viability", ideological notions of Nature materialize through conflictive social practice.

An example of the "social magic" of mediation which pertains directly to Laos and ecotourism is the *Convention on Biological Diversity* (CBD).[35] Despite or because of being the result of mediation between diverse parties, the standards it sets for global resource governance as an internationally binding agreement betray ecocapitalist instrumentality. The Convention codifies the way in which "biodiversity" is to be regulated internationally. The concept of "biodiversity" itself testifies to a de-differentiation of science and society where scientists present themselves as political actors, claiming moral authority in an epistemic community. This blurring involves conceptual despecification and is accompanied by the managerial attitude of "experts" defining and solving the ecological problem (Görg 2003, 224; Piechocki 2007, 13f; Eser 2007; see below).

Acknowledging national sovereignty as central principle, the CBD aims at "the conservation of biological diversity, the sustainable use of its components and the fair and equitable sharing of the benefits arising out of the utilization of genetic resources" (Art. 1). These aims reflect global power structures – namely, the global gap between providers of biodiversity in the Global "South" and its capitalizers in the "North" (Brand et al. 2008, 63ff). The centres of capital accumulation have an interest in sustained access to biodiversity reservoirs; the providers claim revenues from granting this access.[36] The "social magic" of the CBD is that it paradigmatically embodies the biases and contradictions of ecorational instrumentality even though it is a result of a very complex process of negotiations between diverse social actors (national governments, biotechnological companies, business

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[34] There is no room here to extensively discuss the concept of hegemony and its use in Marxist and discourse critical literature (e.g. see Gramsci 1995; Laclau/Mouffe 1985; for an overview see Haug/Davidson 2004).

[35] Laos accessed the CBD in 1996.

[36] Global power structures are empirically more diverse and complex. There are Southern countries without much biodiversity, and there are Northern countries without relevant industries to capitalize on it; there are several sub-state and international interest groups etc. The actual lines of cooperation and conflict within the CBD are not of immediate concern here (see ibid).

associations, NGOs, social movements, indigenous peoples). "Biological diversity", as mentioned, testifies to a de-differentiation of politics and science that comes with its vague definition as:

[…] the variability among living organisms from all sources including, inter alia, terrestrial, marine and other aquatic ecosystems and the ecological complexes of which they are part; this includes diversity within species, between species and of ecosystems. (CBD, Art. 2)

Biological diversity thus alludes to the diversity of "all that is" while claiming scientific exactness and objectivity by employing scientific terms, such as, "species" or "ecosystems" which are problematic constructs themselves (Görg 2003, 233). It evokes a mystifying notion of "the web life" with an undefined "intrinsic value" (ibid, 236). In terms of governance, however, it is exactly this fuzziness which makes "biodiversity" useful as it at the same time integrates diverse interests and conceals their conflicts (ibid, 225f).

The Convention further combines this fuzziness with instrumentality defining "biological resources" as: "[…] genetic resources, organisms or parts thereof, populations, or any other biotic component of ecosystems with actual or potential use or *value for* humanity" (ibid, emphasis added). The pronounced reference to genetic resources (already in Art. 1) reflects powerful interests in life sciences, agribusiness and genetic industry. "Biological diversity" thus entails an instrumental dialectic of mystification and rationalization: on the one hand, a mysterious web of all beings including humanity, in abstraction from all concrete relations and dependencies; on the other hand, it refers to what has "use or value *for* humanity", as if nature was completely outside of and subject to human management. Biodiversity thus shares in a jargon veiling the fact that it "was not Man who created the institutions but particular men in a particular constellation with nature and with themselves" (Adorno 1973, 61)

This dialectic of myth and enlightenment in the dualistic concept of biodiversity reflects the false alternative of nature domination (see 1.4.3; Görg 2003, 239); and it plays out as specifically ecorational instrumentality in a quite explicit manner, such as, when "indigenous peoples" are concerned. It is telling that their rights are codified in Article 8, which deals with *in-situ* biodiversity conservation. Article 8(j) states that each contracting party is to subject to its national legislation, respect, preserve and maintain "[…] knowledge, innovations and practices of indigenous and local communities embodying traditional lifestyles *relevant for* the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity" (Art. 8j, emphasis added). Such respect for traditional lifestyles only insofar as they are "relevant for" biodiversity conservation mirrors an instrumental double-take on "indigenous peoples" as noble and unknowledgeable savages – which is part of ecotourism's *doxa* (see 3.3.2). The restriction "relevant for biodiversity" attached to cultural respect reveals ecorational instrumentality and power inequality. The power to define what

is relevant in this sense is vested in environmental managers ("experts"), and there are only two ways to go: either locals are resettled away from a site of *in-situ* conservation, or have to be integrated into park management (Pedersen 2008, 26f). Ecotourism is part of the latter strategy, which often amounts to "turning subsistence peasants into ecosystem servants" (see 3.2.1). Insofar as their cultural diversity is seen as "relevant" in the above sense, culture is seen as product and appendage of biological diversity; where cultural practices are not in line with *in-situ* conservation objectives, however, they must be altered or abandoned as unsustainable and unwise (such as slash and burn cultivation; see Görg 2003, 247). Those strategies, naturalization and modernization, or conservation and development, are complementary and found side by side in the CBD (ibid, 249).

CBD-related projects are funded through the Global Environment Facility (GEF) by a major financial institution: the "International Bank for Reconstruction and Development", or World Bank. Its neoliberal orientation thus has crucial weight in making the powerful ideology of biodiversity happen – also when looking at Laos (Goldman 2005). Its greening, as much as that of other drivers of neoliberalism, such as the WTO (Hartwick/Peet 2003), demonstrates how nature has become part of the global organization of capital accumulation.

2.2.3 Nature spectacle

Ecology's entering the social arenas has brought about the bloom of jargons of authenticity "from sermon to advertisement" (Adorno 1973, 43). A romanticist discourse is ubiquitous today in indigenous rights and environmental advocacy (Chapter 8), in "organic" consumption, urban gardening, and the gentrification of proletarian quarters. Newspapers and magazines, TV channels, YouTube etc. repeat and reheat the naturalization of "Nature" and "Culture" and celebrate them as spectacle. Following Guy Debord's notion of the spectacle as "a social relation among people, mediated by images"[37], Igoe (2010) has examined nature as mediated by spectacular images of pristine wilderness which have become integral to the management and transformation of landscapes. Central to Igoe's examination is that, in late capitalism, images are not just representations but integral to what they depict. The mediatizaton of untouched Nature as a spectacle is result as well as condition of biodiversity conservation. Within this circle, according to Igoe, there are many opportunities for diverse actors to accumulate capital. Alliances of conservation NGOs, celebrities, private business, technological innovations, and consumers of Nature images who also participate in spectacle production facilitate a "360-degree" marketing strategy of untouched Nature. Igoe argues that media productions related to conservation are eliding the conditions and dynamics which constitute what appears in these pictures – Nature spectacle is practiced authentic-

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[37] See: https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/debord/society.htm, Thesis 4, accessed March 29, 2015; also Debord 1996, 14.

ity jargon (see 2.1.3). By constantly switching between wide-angle and close-up shots an ideological, fragmented world is represented as unified whole of potentials, problems, and solutions. Representations of landscapes produced by conservation materially feed back into conservation as funding attracted by the spectacle. A "global economy of appearances" enacts spectacular accumulation, "'conjuring profits' before they are actually realized in order to 'draw an audience of potential investors'" (ibid, 377). Profits are conjured through:

[…] the simultaneous presentation of problems that are so large that they demand the attention of the whole of humanity, while identifying specific groups of people who are their primary perpetrators. […] Missing […] are the complex and messy connections and relationships that are invisible in both the open-ended vastness of spectacular ecodomain and the compelling specificity of prosperous villagers. (ibid, 378)

A "seemingly unified holistic world" is pieced together "out of carefully chosen bits" to "elide the highly uneven and fragmented nature of development" (ibid). Nature spectacle is thus practiced authenticity jargon coupled with ecorational instrumentality – result and reproduction of nature fetishized as external:

The fetishization of connections and relationships through spectacle thus shields Western consumers from the more complex and problematic web of connections and relationships in which they are actually enmeshed. (ibid, 389)

This symbolic shielding-off by fetishization is crucial for the creation of what Carrier/MacLeod (2005) call the "ecotourist bubble", an important element in enabling "authentic" experiences in "inauthentic" settings (Chapter 7).[38] Nature as media spectacle is a central culture-industrial device to underproduce nature at the end of cheap nature.

2.3 Conservation as underproduction

In light of Igoe's approach just referenced, let me finally elaborate on the argument about conservation as underproduction. Although ecotourism as conservation strategy is partly market-driven, it is not immediately part of capital accumulation (and its overaccumulation tendency) but rather of its systemic counteraction. To claim so, I believe, adds nuance to the problem in which ways ecocapitalist

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[38] A further element of Nature as spectacle is elaborated on in Chapter 8.3: the category of "charismatic megafauna". Especially large mammals (tiger, elephant, lion etc.), but also other animals with an appeal to potential donors often become "flagship species" in conservation campaigns. The spectacle mediating social relations draws funds from the charisma and impressiveness of certain species for conservation work, which is often led by rather irrational appeals and desires (e.g. Burckhardt 2006, 67f).

conservation is to be seen as "neoliberal". To stay with Igoe (2010) for another second, his notion of spectacular accumulation refers to fundraising by NGOs as well as to the advertisements of transnational corporations and off-setting initiatives. How such diverse instances of raising money are forms of capital in Marx's sense, i.e. the "valorization of value by absorbing living labor" (Marx 1982, 989) in commodity production, is not entirely clear; it seems difficult to maintain that individuals who "provide financial support for conservation interventions" (Igoe 2010, 378) raise capital in Marx's sense. Similarly, Kelly (2011) applies "primitive accumulation" to analyze

[…] how protected areas create and reproduce the means of capitalist production and, through neoliberal conservation practices, are able to become capital themselves in the form of environmental services, spectacles, and genetic storehouses. (ibid, 683f)

Although Kelly largely concurs with the perspective taken here, her use of terminology seems quite imprecise as it is incomprehensible how protected areas can at once reproduce means of production and constitute capital themselves. It remains unclear in which sense "environmental services, spectacles, and genetic storehouses" are capital exactly. In other words, it often remains unclear whether conservation is part of the capitalization dynamic itself (i.e. of the exploitation of wage labor in commodity production) or part of capital's regulation through resource (re)production (i.e. of the creation and cheap appropriation of unpaid work).

Nonetheless, such perspectives on neoliberal conservation can fruitfully be integrated into the differentiation between overaccumulation and underproduction. The neoliberal dismantling of the state means that conservation is monetized, but not necessarily capitalized. We see this clearly in ecotourism in Laos: while essentially market-driven, as conservation tool it is not part of the productive capitalization of nature but employed to make conservation pay its way (Duffy 2002, 47). This argument implies that the term "neoliberalization" of nature conceals as much as it reveals. If ecotourism is a "neoliberal" mode of conservation, it is only because it exemplifies how neoliberalism is a fiction: rather than purely market-driven, its profit dynamic is central but often also heavily at odds with other aspects of ecotourism-as-conservation, such as, remoteness and carrying capacities. At the heart of the ecotourism concept (Chapter 3) is that the "human urge to see and experience the natural world" is "harnessed to support the achievement of the goals of the Convention (Ahmed Djoghlaf, Executive Secretary of the Convention on Biological Diversity).[39] That is to say that ecotourism is hardly just a tool of "neoliberalization" but of statist regulation (see 2.2.2). In this respect, I thus disagree also with Görg where he maintains that the distinction between "conservation" and "development" can no longer serve the understanding of "postfordist" nature relations because Nature preservation is not anymore in contrast with val-

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[39] See: http://www.cbd.int/tourism/, accessed February 23, 2015.

orization (ibid, 286 and 294). His argument finally departs from its original regula-tionist perspective and ends up de-differentiating accumulation and regulation by equating protected areas as "factories" of raw materials with the valorization of biodiversity (ibid, 272). I suggest, in contrast, that conservation and development are integrated but still in tension.[40] From this perspective, ecotourism in Laos constitutes a "recreational frontier" within an overall extractive resource frontier; it isolates and so creates biodiversity employing (small-scale) capitalist develop-ment to by-pass local extraction from the immediate environment.

This chapter has detected the root of capitalism's crisis in its simultaneous abstrac-tion from and reliance on particular use-value, fixated as it is on exchange-value to realize surplus. Historically, this formal constellation plays out as overaccumulation of capital counteracted and regulated by the underproduction of cheap inputs (labor, resources), a dynamic of exhaustion. Within this dynamic, frontiers are central as places of underproduction and accumulation by appropriation. Central to ecocapi-talism is the more conscious and concerted effort to provide relatively cheap natures at the (historical or periodical) end of cheap nature. Conservation and ecotourism were argued to represent practices of underproduction seeking to renovate the re-source base. Mediated by the spectacularized resource fetish of untouchedness and authenticity, ecotourism practically facilitates underproduction in a partly market-driven way but does not simply equal the commodification of nature; rather, eco-tourism is ecorational instrumentality in that it taps the productivity of labor repro-duction (tourism) for the reproduction of resources (conservation).

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[40] A tangible example of the integration of conservation and development in ecocapitalism is the case of the Nam Theun 2 dam (see 4.2.4). It is one of the biggest hydropower and irrigation projects in Southeast Asia, situated next to one of the region's most important Nature reserves, Nakai Nam Theun National Protected Area. NT2 pays 1 million US dollar annually to the man-agement of the NPA, not least to secure steady water supply to the dam reservoir. While the profit arising from dam operation pertains to the aspect of capitalization, the annual payment to the park management is a more like a transfer payment to produce natural resources, here: a "healthy watershed". This payment represents about one percent of the annual income from the dam, so that although "capitalism's free ride" (Moore 2014, 303) is over, nature is still compara-bly cheap in this case.

3 Ecotourism

Having worked out the contradictions of domination (Chapter 1), capitalism and ecocapitalism (Chapter 2), this chapter zooms into the central matter of the analysis, ecotourism. Following a brief historical sketch (3.1) an account is given of how ecotourism integrates conservation and development (3.2) before an interpretive framework for the empirical analysis of ecotourism practice is suggested (3.3).

That ecotourism "is promoted as a means of ensuring that […] the environment pays its way" (Duffy 2002, 99) makes it an ecocapitalist practice like trade in CO_2 emission rights, accounting for "environmental services", or bioprospecting[41]. In fact, ecotourism has become one of the most important strategies of financing protected areas: according to Phan et al. (2002) "international ecotourism generated USD 93-233 billion in 1988 [quoting Fillion et al. 1992 in Le Van Lanh 1999; M.K.], and in fact, most nature reserves in the world are dependent on ecotourism revenues". In ecotourism, "commodification" of Nature is employed for the production of untouched resources. Though ecotouristic underproduction generally occurs in market form, ecotourism projects must always manage and

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[41] According to the German *Gesellschaft für Chemische Technik und Biotechnologie e.V.* since decades more than 50 % of newly registered pharmaceuticals were low-molecular "natural" substances or derived from such. See: http://www.dechema.de/13_2007-p-122682.htm, accessed March 7, 2016.

harness these market logics so that capitalization finds its limits in underproduction (e.g. through carrying capacities).

3.1 A short history of ecotourism

While ecotourism is a comparably recent phenomenon, its roots reach back as far as the Copernican revolution. Underlying ecotouristic Nature appreciation and experience is an idea of nature which is the result of the genesis of the sublime in the wake of natural theology's harmonization of religion and natural science since the 17th century (see Groh/Groh 1991). If especially wild and untamed nature was a mere horror in pre-Renaissance times, natural theologists – among them scientists and philosophers from Galilei to Newton and Leibniz – interpreted nature as designed by a God whose attributes were legible in natural phenomena, and who designed the world in a way useful for humans. This interpretation spurred natural sciences and legitimized increased nature exploitation at the dawn of capitalist society (Begemann 1986, 88). Increased domination of external nature was a prerequisite of its "uninterested" aesthetic appreciation as landscapes embodying the whole of nature (Ritter 1963). Particularly since Rousseau, the sublime turned into a means of subjective self-indulgence (Groh/Groh 1991, 139). The emergence of the sublime is inseparable from a form of proto-tourism: it was formulated not least in reports about Grand Tours of the European nobility who crossed the Alps for Italy. With the rise of the bourgeois class and the capitalist system, the Grand Tour turned into the educational journey, and later into modern tourism (e.g. Spode 1990). Early forms of community tourism emerged with increasing popularity of hiking in Europe, not least in the Alps. Another root of ecotourism lies in the specifically American experience of the frontier and its idealization by a wilderness movement which heavily drew from transcendentalist thinkers like Emerson and Thoreau (see Cronon 1996). This movement culminated in the US Wilderness Act of 1964 which established a system of wilderness areas "for the use and enjoyment of the American people […], and so as to provide for the protection of these areas […]" (U.S. Congress 1964, Section 2a). According to Cronon, the wilderness movement gained traction exactly at that moment when the last true uncapitalized spaces were about to vanish in the United States. And it exhibited exactly that kind of contorted and complex-laden relations that are constitutive also of ecotourism:

Wilderness suddenly emerged as the landscape of choice for elite tourists, who brought with them strikingly urban ideas of the countryside through which they traveled. For them wild land was not a site for productive labor and not a permanent home; rather, it was a place of recreation. One went to the wilderness not as a producer but as a consumer, hiring guides and other backcountry residents who could serve as romantic surrogates for the rough riders and hunters of the frontier if one was willing to overlook their new status as employees and servants of the rich. […] The

irony, of course, was that in the process wilderness came to reflect the very civilization its devotees sought to escape. Ever since the nineteenth century, celebrating wilderness has been an activity mainly for well-to-do city folks. Country people generally know far too much about working the land to regard unworked land as their ideal. In contrast, elite urban tourists and wealthy sportsmen projected their leisure-time frontier fantasies onto the American landscape and so created wilderness in their own image. (Cronon 1996, 15)

When the term "ecological tourism" arose in the 1960s, it denoted a form of travel "based principally upon natural and archaeological resources such as caves, fossil sites (and) archaeological sites" (Higham 2007, 2; quoting Hetzer). Thus, initially the term was used in the broad sense of "Nature-based" tourism. Since then, its meaning has, on the one hand, narrowed to denote "responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment, sustains the well-being of the local people, and involves interpretation and education" (TIES 2015). On the other, its precise meaning in terms of project implementation has diversified with ecotourism entering the global arena of neoliberal conservation. What "ecotourism" actually means in particular places depends not only on diverse, competing schools of thought (see Higham 2007) but also on the interests and mandates of implementing agencies (Butcher 2007, 42ff), as well as on the manifold local peculiarities that project implementation is confronted with (e.g. Reed 1997; Stronza 2010). In fact, practitioners have largely abandoned the term ecotourism itself for its lack of clarity, and its abuse to greenwash unsustainable practices. Despite the lack of consensus regarding a precise definition, the growing number of protected areas (see Introduction) depends on ecotourism revenue so that, within the tourism industry, "tourism to protected areas and pristine wilderness is one of the most rapidly growing sectors" (Mowforth/Munt 2009, 96).

The modern origins of current ecotourism can be found in two related critiques: first, of mass tourism as a form of development; and second of Nature preservation in the form of fortress conservation. With the rising contestation of modernization policies on part of social movements throughout the 1970s and 1980s, also the use of mass tourism as a tool for modernization came under fire (de Kadt 1979). Its adverse social, economic, cultural and ecological impacts became increasingly recognized, and new forms of "soft" and "responsible tourism" were sought, especially from the mid-1980s onward. Concurrently, the traditional mode of Nature conservation was criticized as "fortress conservation" (e.g. Chatty/Colchester 2002) which, in the tradition of Yellowstone National Park or the Serengeti, displaced thousands if not millions of marginalized people worldwide for the sake of Nature preservation (Dowie 2005). A more inclusive conservation paradigm had to be found. With the advent of neoliberalism and the selective integration of the "limits to growth"-issue into what was now increasingly labelled "sustainable development", concepts such as ecological or sustainable tourism,

community-based ecotourism etc. promised to solve both problems, conservation and development, at once.[42]

The rise of ecotourism meant its institutionalization. Since 1989, *The International Ecotourism Society* (TIES) established itself as "the world's first international non-profit dedicated to ecotourism as a tool for conservation and sustainable development" (TIES website[43]). TIES seeks to provide "valuable networking and professional development opportunities"; a "global source of knowledge and advocacy in ecotourism"; and to "mainstream sustainability in tourism" (TIES website, mission). Among its partners are UN institutions (UNEP, UNF and UN-WTO), major international conservation NGOs (IUCN, Conservation International, The Nature Conservancy and WWF; Cater 2006, 28) and the CBD (see 2.2.2). The principles of ecotourism became integrated into the CBD as well as into the other institutions related to TIES. TIES, thus, reflects the hegemony of Western interests and desires in global ecotourism (Cater 2006). Emerging from the Rio Conference on Environment and Development ("Earth Summit") in 1992, the UN launched the International Year of Ecotourism (IYE) in 2002 in order to boost the global ecotourism industry. Reflecting power inequalities in the institutionalization of international ecotourism, the boost that ecotourism received by this initiative did not confront so much as to exacerbate the frictions, having "invited widespread government and investor sponsored development programmes that may have been ill-conceived, ill-advised and poorly planned" (Higham 2007, 11; also Cater 2006, 23f.). The IYE culminated in the World Ecotourism Summit in Québec in 2002, a result of which was the *Québec Declaration on Ecotourism*. Another example how of complex negotiations between a great diversity of participants can result in ideological definitions (see 2.2.2), it set out principles and recommendations regarding ecotourism, such as, its dissemination to various social sectors (governments, NGOs, private sector, financial institutions, local and indigenous groups etc.; Butcher 2007, 54). Since then, the idea of integrating rural development and resource preservation has become a mainstay of development cooperation, not only with regard to tourism (Hartwick/Peet 2003; Goldman 2005). Ecotourism was institutionalized, furthermore, through the emergence of academic journals such as the *Journal of Sustainable Tourism* and the *Journal of Ecotourism*, and it was increasingly discussed in more conventional tourism research as well (such as *Annals of Tourism Research* or, to a lesser extent, *Hospitality & Tourism Research*).

From the concerted proclamation of ecotourism in the 1990s emerged a range of major actors: conservation "BINGOs" (such as WWF, IUCN, Conservation International); major financial institutions (such as the World Bank through GEF, or the Asian Development Bank); bi- and multilateral development organizations, state and non-state (such as SNV or GIZ), as well as national governments and

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[42] Nonetheless, "fortress" approaches are again on the rise (Adams/Hutton 2007).
[43] See: http://www.ecotourism.org/our-story, accessed March 1, 2015.

grassroots organizations. According to Butcher, all of these have "different aims" but largely a "shared perspective" with regard to ecotourism (Butcher 2007, 42ff). An internal difference exists between a focus either on rural development or on resource preservation, as is laid out with regard to Laos in Chapter 5 (also ibid).

From its beginning, the appreciation of "wild" Nature and preindustrial Culture was, as mentioned, an elitist pursuit; ecotourism inherited its socio-ideological contradictions. The difference between the 19th century and the early 21st century is that the frontier is not just closed in the "Land of the Free" but worldwide (Moore 2015, see 2.2.1). The emergence of ecotourism as distinctly recent phenomenon is due to this fact, being part of a tighter integration of "wilderness" conservation and capitalist development.

3.2 Integrating conservation and development

Ecotourism as understood here links three global socio-economic domains – tourism, Nature conservation, and rural development – in order to achieve conservation. As ecocapitalist practice, ecotourism is internally structured by the dilemma of conservation vs. development. This dilemma is expressive of the overaccumulation-underproduction dynamic and reflects the false alternative of nature domination (see 1.4.3): to either (over)exploit (develop) or strictly not use (conserve) nonhuman nature as resource for accumulation. This dilemma is not resolved but represents ecotourism's central driving force.

3.2.1 Ecotourism as Integrated Conservation and Development Project

While a wide variety of "new tourism" forms exist (see Mowforth/Munt 2009, 98ff), the basic perspective of what I call ecotourism is fairly established and laid out, for example, in the CBD:

If planned and managed properly, tourism development can be one of the least impacting economic activities associated with the use of biological resources and related ecosystem services, while directly benefiting the people and communities who become stewards and custodians of biodiversity. **Travelers, tourism operators, investors and professionals all have an inherent interest in the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity resources; it is, after all, one of the industry's main assets**. *Sustainable planning and management are in the industry's long-term interest. In fact, not only can tourism directly help finance the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity, but it has also proven to be one of the most effective public awareness raising tools for environmental protection* (CBD – Biodiversity and Tourism, bold original).[44]

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[44] See: http://www.cbd.int/tourism/process.shtml, accessed March 1, 2015.

Ecotourism is thus in the "inherent" interest primarily of travelers, investors, and professionals; the interests of local populations come second. Where ecotourism facilitates protected area management at the resource frontier, as in Laos, land is thus enclosed by interests that are quite detached from the respective localities. Behind the idea of tourism being one of the least impacting ways of using resources stands the idea of the tourist experience as non-material mode of consumption: looking at a tree does not use it up, regardless how much it is looked at; and it is the act of looking which is valuable. Revenues thus derived are used a) for funding protected area management activities (mapping, patrolling, monitoring, etc.), e.g. in the form of park fees; and b) as "alternative income", that is, a form of compensating people affected by Nature conservation with an alternative to illegalized biodiversity use. As subsistence peasants are turned into ecotourism service providers and stop being hunters or shifting cultivators, they "become stewards and custodians of biodiversity". Although this does not necessarily make conservation profitable in the strict sense (as the service is sold to conserve Nature) it creates a hypothetical win-win situation because villages develop economically through appreciation of conserved Nature. Moreover, the economic value of untouched biodiversity is to be turned into a moral value among locals, converting them more fully into ecorational subjects: if local people see the material benefits of leaving resources unused and picking up their garbage, it is hoped, they will also start cherishing Nature. This is a paradigmatic case of "neoliberal environmentality" or, as I call it, ecorational instrumentality (Fletcher 2014; see 1.1).

What seems to be a perfect integration of conservation and development is in fact a very tenuous affair, as I am going to demonstrate. The tension arises from the principal opposition constituted by conservation and development: both concepts emerge from the notion of nature as resource to either be used for the valorization of value in capitalist production, development (other uses are "unprofitable"); or to be saved and tended within the realm of underproduction (other forms of tending are deemed "unsustainable"). Ecotourism as practiced in Laos principally targets locations where impoverished populations live within or adjacent to valuable ecosystems. In order to preserve these ecosystems, community-based tourism is to by-pass direct extraction of resources by the population through the introduction of "alternative" income.[45]

This is the principal nature of ecotourism in so-called "integrated conservation and development projects" (ICDPs or ICAD projects). The non-consumption of resources is an important ideal; another is that of a "careful" and "sensitive" approach to local livelihood development in order to reduce the social and cultural "impacts" of such interventions. Thus, conservation not only pertains to the natu-

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[45] Talking about ecotourism as "alternative income" seems utterly ideological: it suggests that there is no qualitative difference between hunting-gathering or subsistence agriculture on the one hand and ecotourism on the other – all these are simply forms of "income" – whereas ecotourism and Nature conservation represent fundamentally different, and locally alien, economies.

ral environment but also to local cultures – insofar, of course, as these are "relevant for the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity" (CBD Art. 8(j); see 2.2.2). Integration of conservation and development thus happens largely as compromise in favor of conservation by placing limitations on tourism development, such as, in terms of "carrying capacities". That is to say that ICAD tourism projects carry a bulk of political and ideological preconceptions which constitute a "paradigm" of sustainable development as alternative to the modernization paradigm (Butcher 2007, 17). I concur with Butcher that ecotourism ICDPs "tie development possibilities to the conservation of the immediate natural environment" while the limits thus imposed on development opportunities "are presented as reflecting the agency of the community – *their* culture and *their* aspirations" (ibid, 88f; emphasis original). Not unlike the jargon of authenticity (2.1.3) "the lauding of empowerment […] rationalises, or makes acceptable […] unequal power relations between the developed and the developing world" (ibid). Although Butcher provides a concise critique of ecotourism ICDPs which I will keep referring to, his humanist counter-vision to sustainable development, striving to make available modern technology and the benefits of modern science to all (ibid, 17), remains overly enthusiastic about the modernization paradigm which ICDPs seek to differentiate themselves from for a reason. Nevertheless, the specific vision of *restricted development* that constitutes ICDP interventions is often a root cause for their failure since "communities aspire to develop their wealth further, beyond the small benefits on offer from the projects" (ibid, 123). The contradiction between conservation and development is thus far from being resolved. The "symbiosis" of conservation and development is rather bought with a compromise of restricted development: instead of making "the best and most advanced technology available […] or the latest building techniques to reduce the risk of earthquake or flood damage", ICDPs advocate "the meeting of 'basic needs' […] not as a stopgap measure, *but as development itself*" (ibid, 165; emphasis original).

The "compromise" of conservation and development in ecotourism practically means a balancing-out of partly conflicting and partly mutually supportive dynamics. The results of ecotourism practice, practical compromises between diverse actors, again reflect this dualism. The central target of ICDPs is the local "community": in becoming ecotourism hosts they are turned from prime environmental threats into ecosystem servants.

3.2.2 The community in ecotourism

The local community is a multifaceted and problematic object of community-based ecotourism. Since one central assumption of ICDPs is that impoverished locals pose a threat to the environment, local communities become central targets of sustainable interventions. Because the community as a whole is targeted, internal differences and conflicts tend to be ignored; ecotourism projects tend to build upon internal socio-economic differences and may even exacerbate them or create

new ones (Richards/Hall 2000; Chapters 6 and 8). Thus, the "community" as target group is at once the most important element, and it is "mythic" (Agrawal/Gibson 1999, 638; see also Neudorfer 2007, 40; Mowforth/Munt 2009, 249; Reed 1997).

ICAD projects derive their legitimacy from the aspect of community involvement as "participation" became a *sine qua non* of development projects overall. For Butcher, this rise of "participation" in sustainable development parallels the neoliberal idea that development is most efficient when the state is by-passed. To him, the value of community participation is part of a "neo-populist" agenda that sells top-down interventions as empowerment and culturally sensitive development, based on the naturalization of community (Butcher 2007, 32ff). The link between conservation and development is created "by *tying culture to nature*", that is, "by limiting the agency of the community to the manner in which they can act as nature's guardians" (ibid, 166; emphasis original). Based on a naturalization of culture "tying it to a pre-existing relationship with the natural environment", participation and empowerment are therefore "limited to the question of *how* rather than the question of *what*" (ibid). Such essentialization of the local as appendage of Nature is not only the working mode of ecotourism implementation but also the source both of a locality's ecotouristic appeal as well as of the symbolic and material injustice done to it. The concern for the preservation of local cultures derives from a static and undercomplex notion of local community and culture and elides the fact that "the conscious act of preservation, sponsored through aid funds, is itself in an important sense an external cultural influence" (ibid, 123).

The *topoi* of "community", "local knowledge" and "culture" thus mirror the ecorational instrumentality as laid down in Article 8(j) of the CBD (2.2.2). Inherent in community-based ecotourism as ICDP is the "traditional" double-take on the local as "noble and ignorant savage" in that communities are approached on the one hand as appendages of Nature and on the other as environmental threats (see Görg 2003, 243ff). This double-take is indicative of the tension of conservation and development within ecotourism ICDPs. I will now continue with an interpretive grid that condenses the discussion so far and shall allow tracing this tension further through the practice of ecotourism in Laos.

3.3 Operationalizing ecotourism

The preceding chapters had examined the issue of "crisis" first, as a general problem of domination and instrumentality; second, as abstraction from and reliance on material use-values embodied in the critical tension between overaccumulation of capital and underproduction of resources; and, third, as tension between conservation and development within ecocapitalism and ecotourism more specifically. I now set out to suggest an interpretive grid which allows detecting "crisis", read: contradiction, in ecotouristic practice. The definition provided in the introduction

of ecotourism as recreating peripheral nonhuman natures via that of human natures of the centers is inscribed in what I term its "epistemic-institutional universe".

I will first lay out this universe (3.3.1) which represents the first dimension of my analytical grid, and point out some aspects of the *doxa* of this universe (3.3.2). Second, I explain the framework's second dimension, the host-guest structure within which actual ecotourism practice is necessarily conducted (3.3.3), as well the core aspect of instrumentalization within this framework (3.3.4). I sum up this chapter with an interpretive tool, a metaphorical "dowsing rod", which helps to detect contradiction in ecotourism practice (3.4).

3.3.1 Epistemic-institutional universe of ecotourism

In this section, a set of homologous oppositions is introduced[46] that should help structure theory's foundation in matter. It is argued that this universe of oppositions embodies schematically the issues laid out in the first two chapters and serve to operationalize them for the analysis of ecotourism practice. The schema is based on Bourdieu's notion of homology as "similarity in difference" (see Wacquant/Bourdieu 2006, 137) and as practical logic (Bourdieu 1990, 87f), and on his analysis of the gender division in modern institutions (Bourdieu 2005, 66 and 180ff). It harks back to the already suggested immediate connection between institutional and epistemic structures in social practice and seeks to closely integrate theory and empirics. Inspired by Bourdieu's concept of a system of homologous oppositions, this schema (table 1) is open to the vagaries of actual practice and allows for necessary flexibility. Homology, as adapted from Bourdieu, captures the relation between of a set of conceptual, cognitive oppositions that guide practice, reflecting and enforcing institutionalized oppositions. As a result of far-reaching transformations in the mode of capitalist accumulation (see 2.2), ecotourism originates in the conservation/development duality which codifies capital's general crisis tendency in its institutional and epistemic aspects. Both institution and episteme reflect and reproduce each other through practice and its effects, and, in turn, become conditions for further practice. Thus practices which are led by ideas of an opposition of, say, Nature and Society, tend to reaffirm and prolong structural relations of inequity and appropriation/exploitation, and vice versa.

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[46] The following presents a re-worked and expanded version of my conceptualization of the ecotourism universe (Kleinod 2011) which derived from my research on ecotourism in Vietnam.

conservation – development			
epistemic/ideological		institutional/socio-structural	
Nature Society		host guest	
Tradition Modernity		leisure labor	
authentic alienated		rural urban	
extraordinary ordinary		periphery center	
other self		underproduction overaccumulation	
female male		poor rich	
good bad		not valorized valorized	
… …		… …	

Table 1: Epistemic-institutional universe of ecotourism

Within the main tension, conservation is the imperative; development finds its limits in conservation.[47] This biased guiding duality implies a range of further distinctions. On the institutional side these include socio-economic disparities, such as host/guest, labor/leisure, rural/urban, periphery/center, etc. This institutional set-up is reproduced by the ideological orientations of Nature/Society, Tradition/Modernity, Authenticity/Inauthenticity, extraordinary/ordinary, etc.[48] Given its bias towards conservation, a moral valuation (good/bad) runs through the epistemic side, the institutional side of which is economic value.

It is notable here that ecotourism practice is guided by these coordinates but in a way that is open to the necessities of actual practice, and to the conscious reflection of the actors. Because these homologous oppositions are "uncertain abstractions" (Bourdieu 1990, 88), distinct while *somehow* resembling each other, they can be related in a wide variety of ways in order to guide action. The symbolic-material order comes, as will be shown presently, with a specific *doxa*, a set of objective constraints peculiar to this universe (3.3.2). Although it is possible to consciously question this *doxa* it still has to be dealt with practically as an objective, materialized social fact. The oppositions are used by different actors in diverse and often diverging ways and thereby serve to produce or maintain this epistemic-institutional structure. They are applied to social reality by the actors and are related to one another according to practical contexts, strategies and interests. While

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[47] This is true even though conservation amounts to development in the bigger picture. From the viewpoint of ecotourism practice, there is an insurmountable dilemma between developing rural communities and conserving the forests (3.3.2).

[48] In Kleinod (2011, 46) I argued that it makes sense to regard these symbolic orientations as inheritance of developmentalism (Tradition vs. Modernity); conservationism (Nature vs. Society); and culture industries such as tourism (ordinary vs. extraordinary).

each opposition taken by itself is distinct in terms of content and irreducible to another, relating them to one another in certain situations rationalizes, naturalizes, legitimizes, guides, and facilitates the actors' individual practice without necessarily representing a closed and coherent system from the viewpoint of practice. From the viewpoint of "synoptic" theory, however, this universe is reproduced insofar as people as "actors" affirm it practically.

The commonality that makes these diverse oppositions homologous in this sense is the oppositional constellation itself. It serves as codification of and symbolic basis for relations of dominance and dependency, facilitating the practical reproduction of these relations. As mentioned, the institutional side represents the economic aspect of value, the epistemic side its moral aspect. The dialectical relation of institution and episteme points to what Bourdieu calls naturalization of arbitrary social relations. The social order appears as the natural order of things due to its world-shaping power – a tautological circle of de- and prescription to make the world fit into a dualistic worldview by practically realizing false alternatives (see 1.4.3). The oppositional constellation thus fixes socioecological crisis dynamics in symbolisms that guide action.

In order to guide action, however, it is essential that logical oppositions are rendered practicable without losing their oppositional character. One general strategy is *gradation*: instead of the impracticable "either/or" duality, a "more-less" rationale and according ideas of balance (such as between conservation and development) are employed. Closely related is the strategy of *zonation*, which makes the simultaneous existence of mutually excluding processes possible. Through such operations like gradation and zonation of contradictions in the name of conservation (as opposed to development) ecotourism practice relies on and effects ecorational instrumentality (also Kleinod 2016).

3.3.2 Elements of ecotourism's *doxa*

There are many ways in which epistemic-institutional oppositions can practically relate to one another. However, some built-in presets come with the concept, and they work as material force that constrains and so facilitates practice. According to Bourdieu, the participation in a particular field involves a certain *doxa* (belief) that remains largely unquestioned. In using this term, I do not wish to suggest a shared and unconditional belief by all involved actors. Rather, I refer to *doxa* as established through facts which may be questioned in theoretical reflection also by the actors, but which – as "false-and-real" contradictions (Chapter 1) – nonetheless form factual constraints unavoidable in practice. Some elements of ecotourism's *doxa* are examined in this sub-section.

Noble and ignorant savage

The epistemic side of ecotourism's universe entails a momentous preset with regard to the local population (see table 2). The Nature/Society opposition can be seen as the symbolic correlate of the conservation problem: Nature is opposed to Society and valued positively. The Tradition/Modernity opposition is the reflection of a romanticist, conservative critique of modernization which positively values tradition.

Nature	**Society**
Tradition	Modernity

Table 2: Double-take on the local population

Within this symbolic preset, locals are subjected to a double-take: nature is principally seen as nonhuman which must be protected from human disturbance, such as, encroachment of adjacent communities. This is achieved, in turn, through the naturalization of the locals as "ethnic tribes" or "indigenous peoples" tightly bound to "their" land. Ecotourism is thus based on a contradictory idea of local culture as, on the one hand, irreconcilable with Nature (a part of Society) and, on the other, as part of it (a part of Tradition). This double-take on the local community as "ignorant and noble", that is, as simultaneously opposed to and part of Nature (see also Görg 2003, 243ff) reflects the contrariness with which locals are targeted by ecotourism projects, i.e. as to be conserved and developed at the same time. A practical implication of this double-take is the logic of limited development (3.1.3, below).

Materialization of a Nature reserve

The establishment of a Nature reserve is a top-down process which institutionalizes and legally codifies the Nature/Society divide. Arbitrary and debatable as it may be in theory, this dualism becomes a social fact and is acknowledged through action. This even where conservation is undermined as, for example, in poaching and illegal extraction: violations of the law are determined by the law, for, without a Nature reserve there is nothing to "poach". The regulations of a Nature reserve determine its own violations not least by establishing a treasury of "natural" resources at the expense of local sustenance. The arbitrary installation of zones of non-use effectively appropriates the investment of previous work into the production of "biodiversity" now to be protected from this very kind of metabolic interaction (1.3.2). This cuts subsistence peasants off from the land they previously used and puts them in an even more vulnerable position. The constellation of natural riches here and social poverty there renders the violation of regulations rather likely, especially when weakly enforced (Chapter 4 and 8).

The *a priori* problematic relationship of nature and society is realized by privileging Nature over Society. As soon as the facticity of a Nature reserve is acknowledged, along with the aim to facilitate local people's "food security" without driving them out, ecotourism almost naturally suggests itself as legitimate and reasonable means. Put differently, a Nature reserve represents a spatial fix (Harvey) as well as a "political mythology realized" (like bodily *hexis*; see Bourdieu 1990, 69), constraining-enabling social action. From the viewpoint of a Nature reserve, ecotourism is likely to appear as relatively reasonable, also to the local population. "Informed consent" and "participation" of local communities in ecotourism projects in and around Nature reserves are thus principally premised on top-down ecorational decision-making (see Butcher 2007, 61ff). Even if there was a possibility for locals to opt out of an ecotourism project (which is almost never the case), it is more reasonable for them to opt in under such conditions – almost a "double-free" decision (2.1.1).

Ecotourist's habitus

Opting into ecotourism means subjecting oneself to another preset: the contradictory *habitus* of paying customers as inherent in members of certain social groups, or milieus, in the global social structure. The ecotourist's *habitus* uncomfortably integrates the contradiction between conservation and development. Those who actually structure and facilitate ecotourism, i.e. tourism experts, advisors and operators, presuppose this attitude in part because they are themselves part of these particular milieus. Regarding Germany, a major country of origin for ecotourists in Laos, a recent study (BMUB 2014) based on the SINUS milieu concept[49] suggests that environmental awareness (*Naturbewusstsein*) is highest in the "socio-ecological", "liberal-intellectual" and the "expeditionist" milieus (ibid, 74). Within the whole of Germany's social structure, these are located vertically in between well-educated middle and upper middle class, as well as horizontally between basic orientations of reflexive being, change and pushing the limits (ibid, 16). This likely applies, although in perhaps a slightly different fashion, to other industrialized countries as well.

One pole of the ecotourist *habitus* involves what Urry calls the romantic gaze (Urry 2002; also Fletcher 2014, 149ff): a form of the tourist gaze "in which the emphasis is upon solitude, privacy, and a personal, semi-spiritual relationship with the object of that gaze" (Urry 2002, 43). The romantic gaze consumes landscape and solitude, thereby expressing and reproducing a distinct class *habitus* (Bourdieu 1993, 111f) and, consequently, unequal social relations – within the guest's societies of origin but also between host and guest (3.3.3). According to Urry, it is first of all intellectuals who carry this sort of *habitus* which includes aesthetic ascetism

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[49] The policy and market analysis tool of SINUS "lifestyle" milieus is derived from the studies of Michael Vester (Vester 1993) who relied on Bourdieu and Marx.

and a predilection for wild Nature (Urry 2002, 81). Fletcher (2014) adds that this gaze is accompanied by "a desire for a certain bodily experience" which is more encompassing than the mere gazing upon (ibid, 151) and involves desire for hardship that corresponds to aesthetic ascetism and reflects the "class-conditioned need to continually progress through self-discipline and deferral of gratification" (ibid, 152). The ascetism involved in ecotourism, as expressed in "basic facilities" or physical exposure, may thus be regarded as reflection of a typical middle-class social position threatened by descent in the neoliberal pecking order. Following Bourdieu, the ecotourist's gaze and involvement can be conceptualized as habitual *hexis*: political mythology incorporated, perpetuated and reproduced in posture, feeling and thinking (Bourdieu 1993, 129). The ecotourist gaze, an embodiment of the ecotourism universe as much as of a social structure of inequity, is thus based on the aesthetic and detached relation of guests to their destinations, and on the exclusion of the subject of experience from its object, that is: on the subject/object duality. Because of this *a priori* detachment, ecotourism values positively the *appearance* of natural or pre-industrial conditions. This specific *hexis*, epitomized in taking pictures of ethnic minorities or pristine landscapes, is a sociophysical attitude, an aspect of socialized *habitus* that looks out for the frontiers where nature and culture are "as yet" untouched – not least by (other) tourists.

The other side of this milieu-specific *habitus* of ecotourists is a particular *hysteresis* (Bourdieu 1984, 142): a habitual inertia cultivated in comparably elevated social positions, demanding comfortability unfamiliar to host communities, such as, in terms of facilities. In order to actually gaze upon the untouched, someone must become an ecotourist and physically be there – which necessitates all kinds of "inauthentic" arrangements: the whole spectrum of tourist facilities from (inter)national infrastructure (flight connections, passable roads etc.) to the single toilet in a tourism village, are part of the necessary evil of getting guests there. As Higham (2007, 8) points out, there is thus a "contradiction in terms" in ecotourism's need for naturalness on the one side and for infrastructure on the other – a contradiction which neatly reflects the conservation/development dualism. This *hysteresis* thus demands ordinary elements in extraordinariness. While solitude and untouched Nature is sought, the ecotourist does not want to be unconditionally alone but with friends or peers. Nature is only enjoyable to the degree that leeches, snakes and bees attacks are not part of the experience. Although the facilities the ecotourist requires have to be "basic", so as not to impede on the romantic gaze, they often represent a luxury for local peasants and may therefore turn into bones of contention between them.

Self-limitation

The romantic gaze establishes a visual scarcity or perceptual capacity in that it tolerates only a limited amount of markers of "modernity" (Urry 2002, 42f). That is to say, ecotourism must limit itself in terms of infrastructure, tourist visits and

its contribution to the local income, if it is to be successful as ecotourism. This preset of self-limitation makes ecotourism a paradigmatic instrument of ecocapitalism's sustainable rural development because it ensures of its own accord that Nature and Tradition remain "as unspoiled as possible" by Modernity. This self-limitation can thus be regarded as result of the contrariness of the tourist's *habitus* (see figure 1).
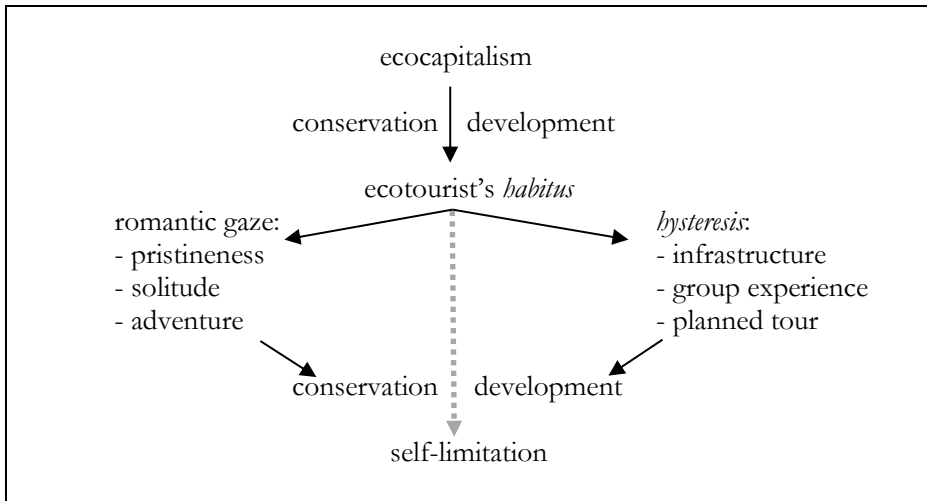
Figure 1: Duality of the ecotourist's *habitus*

This intrinsic limitation implies that ecotourism does not and must not "stage authenticity" to any obvious degree (see MacCannell 1999, 91ff). It is designed as a source of income that makes up only a small part of the overall household revenues. In this way, locals "can" and should to continue their "real" life as peasants.[50] With its claim to authentic experience, ecotourism capitalizes on a local "lifestyle" as a whole, commodifying it as not yet commodified: the fact that a certain destination is "comparably untouched" (i.e. underdeveloped) is the best ecotourism advertisement. As we will see in Chapter 7, there is an ambiguity in ecotourism's monetary aspect: because tourists enter into a commercial agreement in order to experience seemingly precapitalist, non-monetary lifestyles, they are often undecided whether their money supports or spoils the community they visit. Generally, ecotourists do not want a mere model of real life constructed exclusive-

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[50] As a tour manager in Vietnam stated: "I think tourism [in Pu Luong Nature Reserve] should not be more than one third of the incomes. Because people will just focus on tourism and then they will have nothing to provide beside this. [...] they will have nothing to say except: 'What do you want to drink, what do you want to eat?' [...] One third is for them like a security and it's also a door open to meet the world. But still they can keep their busy taking care for their everyday life. And so [...] the atmosphere is: 'We have come to a family who is busy to do what they have to do.'"

ly for them. Ecotourism is thus paradoxical, proclaiming the experience of some-thing untouched by itself. Intentionally leaving aspects of the destination "un-touched" is an ideal means to "basic needs"-focused development; the romantic gaze "sides with want" (Adorno).

This self-limitation of ecotourism, finally, implies its opposite, expansion: "[the] romantic gaze is an important mechanism which is helping to spread tour-ism on a global scale [...] as the romantic seeks ever-new objects of that gaze" (Urry 2002, 44). It does so, one may add, not because of the nature of that gaze but due to the romantic's presence, which calls for infrastructure and develop-ment, which, in turn, upset the perceptual capacity of successive localities. Such expansion, as consequence of repetition, can also be read as result of the fact that the escape promised by ecotourism (and tourism more generally) is incomplete and must therefore be repeated over and over again (2.1.3; Chapters 7 and 9).

Alternative vs. additional income

On the one hand, ecotourism is thought of as *alternative* income, replacing illegal-ized resource extraction (e.g. wildlife hunting, timber harvesting, opium cultiva-tion, slash-and-burn practices). On the other, the inherent self-limitation just relat-ed means that ecotourism should not make up a major share of local household incomes, also due to the volatility of the tourism market (e.g. Gujadhur et al. 2008, 35). In this regard, ecotourism can only be an *additional* source of income because it cannot and should not constitute the sole source of revenue. This seems a fun-damental contradiction with serious practical consequences: for as long as "tour-ism cannot replace food security and […] villagers need to cultivate upland rice, there will be forest clearance" (ibid, 34): ecotourism might undermine its own objectives if the additional sources of "income" are "unsustainable". This be-comes especially crucial where the target group does not share in the aims of community-based sustainable development to concentrate solely on ensuring food security.

This paradoxical *doxa* is a conceptual premise of ecotourism practice, regard-less of whether or not it is consciously affirmed or criticized by practitioners. In the aspects of the *doxa*, the institutional-epistemic structure of ecotourism be-comes a material force that is to be acknowledged in practice, one way or the oth-er. Where such structures get universalized by being implanted in a local context, the locality becomes, in turn, embedded in these hegemonic constellations. The legalized and enforced existence of the Nature/Society divide in protected areas, the ambivalent structure of the ideal-typical guest's *habitus*, the resulting in-built self-limitation of ecotourism, and its being an alternative-yet-additional income are therefore arbitrary, factual constraints of ecotourism practice, in abstraction from any concrete place.

3.3.3 Host-guest structure

Like any form of tourism, ecotourism models social relations as a service, that is, a contract between client and service provider, between host and guest. Guests are principally Western urbanites who pay to access ostensible authenticity and untouchedness. The hosts, rural dwellers in and around Nature reserves representing the "target population" of ecotourism projects are to offer this access. In that the hospitality contract between hosts and guests embodies unequal societal relations, practice within the host-guest structure represents "globalization in a nutshell".

Box 3: Hostipitality

The word "hostipitality" crossed my mind when I first visited a Lao village on a regular tour, and it struck me as a funny and concise expression of the tangible tension inherent in ecotouristic hosting (see Chapter 7): a mixture of hospitality and, somehow implicit, hostility. I should learn later on, without much surprise, that this term was already coined by Jacques Derrida; and his essay on Hostipitality, largely a linguistic examination, is illuminating for my experience. According to Derrida, the term "hospitality" etymologically "carries its own contradiction incorporated into it, a Latin word which allows itself to be parasitized by its opposite, 'hostility' the undesirable guest" (Derrida 2000, 3). Derrida remarks that the French *hôte* not only denotes both, host and guest, but also the convergence of "host" and "enemy" in the Latin *hostis*. The host invites a guest to pass the threshold of his house, he is "master of the household, master of the city, or master of the nation" (ibid, 6). However, if hospitality becomes a codified right of the guest, "[t]he one inviting becomes almost the hostage of the one invited, of the guest [*hôte*], the hostage of the one he receives […]" (ibid, 9).

   The contractual arrangement of the host-guest encounter in ecotourism (see Chapter 6) obliges hosts to be hospitable any time the guest chooses to appear, and to do so on the guest's terms: she should make herself at home in the very opposite of what is familiar. Likewise, the task to host guests from very distant social spheres is unfamiliar to the hosts. Hospitality thereby serves the reproduction of inequality between ecotourism hosts and guests, as the hosts are not projected to become more like the guests they serve. Reciprocity has turned into a one-way dynamic where hosts and guests are always the same kinds of people. While the hosts are the legitimate, quasi-natural servants, they have only a weak idea of the expectations of their clients, i.e. the nature of the service. They depend on experts to tell them what to do and how to do it. Marginalized ethnic minorities are taught the rules of such hospitality by Westerners or lowland, urban Lao with university degrees. "Doing hospitality" in this context thus implies the actualization of dependence (which includes some benefits as well). Through hospitality institutionalized in an ecotouristic service agreement, global inequalities between resource consumers and producers are thus fixed

and actualized in practice. These tenuous implications of hospitality in general and in ecotourism specifically can be experienced first-hand during village stays (Chapter 7.3). The hostility part of hospitality is mostly latent and turns into action only very rarely in Laos. Nevertheless, tourists have been harassed and even thrown out of villages.

Within ecotourism relations, a contractually mediated "direct", practical contact is established between the centers of the capitalist world-system ("postindustrial" towns and cities) and its peripheries and hinterlands. The expectation of the guest weighs heavier as it must be met by the service in order to generate the desired, deciding revenue. In the overall symbolic frame of conservation vs. development, the guests tend to demand conservation. The hosts also enter this relation with certain expectations deriving from their respective social conditions; they generally tend toward the opposite pole, development. The guests' demand overrides the demand of hosts because it converges with the overall aim of an ecotourism project, conservation. Expectations about guests expectations (based on the social proximity of advisor and guest) pre-decide on some of the basic structures that frame local practice (Chapter 6). The interests between institutionalized conservation and the guests converge (but are not identical!), as do those of some state actors with those of the hosts.

As is implied in above "universe", and as will become clearer in Chapters 5 to 7, the relation between host and guest is mediated by a complex set of institutions. Those intermediaries do not simply stand in between both positions facilitating their interaction, as if "host" and "guest" were somehow natural identities. Rather, they effectively create these positions and their relations, constituting the "medium" or institutional "milieu" in which hosts and guests emerge as social options for nonidentities to take account of their desires. The institutions on the project level that more directly mediate the host-guest relation can broadly be categorized as: state/government; civil society/non-state/-profit; and private (Chapters 5 and 6). These mediators create the conditions under which ecotourism is practiced. But ecotourism must overcome not only internal contradictions of its concept and between concept and practice; it must also negotiate forms of "income" that undermine the general ambition of ecotourism to conserve (Chapter 8). The structural grid of the host-guest relation captures the relation between those who come together on a concrete tour and also, by extension, that within the group of mediators (between foreign experts and national "counterparts") as well as of Laos to the international "community" (see Chapter 6) – it is global social structure "in a nutshell". As will also be argued in the final discussion, ecorational *habitus* may be acquired strategically by some actors from the group of mediators which gives rise to the emergence of new social milieus in Laos in the wake of international development and conservation (Chapter 9).

3.3.4 Ecotouristic instrumentality

The promises ecotourism holds are different for hosts and guests. To the hosts, it promises "development"; to the guests, "authenticity". It appeals to the condition of people living at the social periphery and their need for a better, easier life. Their understanding of "better" is very much the opposite of what guests have in mind, due to the latter's socialization in the centers of the world economic system. Physically bringing together these distant parts of global capitalist society, ecotourism is globalization in a nutshell, as observable, material practice and interaction. The general structural oppositions, symbolic and material, are related in a particular way and for particular ends: the conservation of natural resources.

"Development" as desired by hosts, much in terms of the proclamations of the developmental state government; and "authenticity" as desired by the guests, in accordance with the proclamations of the sustainable tourism business: both are ideological to the core. However, as already argued (2.1.3), these desires are also utopian in that they express a transcendence of the current state of being – they are "allegories of freedom" for human natures socialized as Lao peasants or Western urbanites, respectively. Within the contortions of ecotourism practice, however, neither side finds complete fulfillment; "the structure" remains as "laughing third party": the host-guest relation is finally functional to the integration of conservation and development in order to regulate capitalism's accumulation crisis. Because "authenticity" and "development" are structured by the social context they strive to transcend, they are limited and functionalized by the logics they criticize.

3.4 Linking ecotourism theory and practice

To sum up this chapter, ecotourism is understood in this study as an attempt to integrate conservation and development of nature-as-resource; as long as nature is seen only as resource, the relation between both aspects is oppositional ("to use or not to use"). This contrariness constitutes concept and practice of ecotourism with the problematic ideological and economic implications that were pointed out so far, such as the hegemony of the guest's *habitus* and an inherent self-limitation. These aspects are salient for our analysis of ecotourism practice (Chapter 6-8). The tension between conservation and development constitutes the socioecological dynamics in the Lao uplands; and the hegemony of the tourist *habitus* is founded in national protected area legislation (Chapter 4).

In order to structure this analysis according to my examination so far, I suggested an "epistemic-institutional universe" as interpretive grid of practical orientations in ecotourism. This structure unfolds from the main tension between conservation and development. It is combined with the host-guest structure as the other dimension of ecotourism practice (see figure 2).
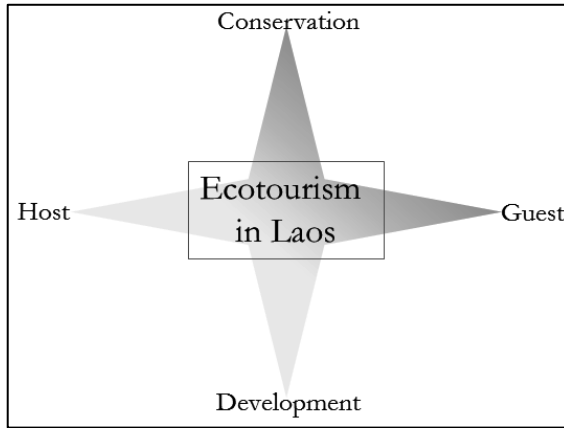
Figure 2: A methodological "dowsing rod"

The conservation-development tension is present not only within the host-guest structure (i.e. tourism) but in other aspects of ecocapitalist practice as well; tourism, in turn, is also conducted outside the conservation-as-development paradigm: it is only at the intersection of both structures that ecotourism practice takes place. Above illustration also indicates that, as mentioned, hosts are more on the side of development and guests more on the side of conservation. Understanding the notion of a "tool" metaphorically, above illustration may be taken for an analytical dowsing rod that will deflect where theory surfaces in matter, and thereby guide us through the preconditions, modes and effects of ecotourism practice along the traces of the conservation-development tension and its implications.

Before I turn to this analysis, however, the following chapter keeps with the presentational rationale of "zooming into" the subject matter by setting the historical scene for ecotourism in Laos. It describes the historical making of the Lao uplands as landscapes for and of tourism, and outlines the way in which these landscapes are constituted by the conservation-development, picking up on the frontier concept already explored (Chapter 2).

4 Recreational landscapes

This chapter serves to situate ecotourism in the concrete landscape the Lao uplands. It traces the historical emergence of the Lao uplands as landscape of tourism – where tourism is situated along other socio-ecological dynamics, and a landscape for tourism – these dynamics as "sight" of untouchedness. The landscape of tourism as relational resource frontier (Barney 2009) is radically euphemized in order to become a landscape for tourism. How this "of-for" tension plays out in practice so that ecotourism becomes an integral element of local ecologies, is further analyzed in Chapter 7. In the following examination, the focus is on the current constitution of the uplands in its diachronic and synchronic dimensions. This chapter, firstly, elaborates on the historical shaping of the Lao uplands throughout various historical phases (4.1), from the precolonial "state"-village-forest (*meuang-baan-paa*) nexus to today's internationalization of the uplands. Secondly, the synchronic, contemporary constitution of this landscape of tourism, the relational resource frontier, is outlined (4.2). It is argued that the historical making of the uplands is a process of the continuity-through-change of statecraft appropriating upland people and forests. The current tension of conservation and development at the frontier is at the same time the result of an historic process and represents a peculiar stage radically different from earlier ones as it signals the completion of the colonialist project of *mise en valeur*. This conservation-development tension indicates that and how the frontier is being actively created (or: underproduced), such as via ecotourism-as-conservation, at the looming end of the frontier (Moore).

4.1 Historical making of a recreational landscape

The history of the Lao uplands is the history of their "civilization" by various forms of statehood seeking to tap the potential of its people and forests. Although colonialism presents a qualitative rupture, this project began in precolonial times and continues until today. Its modes and ways have changed, however. The following section traces this continuity-through-change by examining the historical relations of statehood, upland people and upland forests. For each phase, the examination thus focuses on the relation between upland people and the state; between upland forests and the state; and between upland people and "their" forests.

4.1.1 Precolonialism

Before the advent of colonialism[51] in mainland Southeast Asia, the uplands presented a constant frontier for lowland statehood (*meuang*)[52] which was constitutive for dialectical, mutually excluding and reinforcing relations between both. The range of *meuang* power was limited. Not only was divine rule intrinsically unstable, "aided and abetted by Buddhist belief in karma that allowed regional lords to believe they were destined to become great kings" (Stuart-Fox 2008, 377). "Mandala" power also typically oscillated, according to the power of neighboring kingdoms as well as to "natural" factors, such as the "friction of terrain" or season: "Even the most robust kingdom [...] shrank virtually to the ramparts of its palace walls once the monsoon rains began in earnest" (Scott 2009, 61). Thus, although the kings of Lao P.D.R.'s feudal ancestor, Lan Xang, claimed authority over their subjects (*chao siivit*) as well as over land (*chao phaen din*), *meuang* power was exerted over people rather than territory *per se* (Stuart-Fox 2008, 207; Ivarsson 2008, 26ff; Scott 2009, 58). Village land was accessed mainly through tax, tribute and trade .[53]

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[51] It is clear that the idea of "precolonialism" is itself a colonial abstraction – as if society before the advent of Western civilization was undifferentiated and ahistorical. Of course, there are crucial synchronic and diachronic differences in culture and economy between diverse Southeast Asian kingdoms. Nonetheless, the advent of capitalism represented a fundamental transformation of the principles of economy and power which were at the basis of all the formations before it.

[52] Supra-local power structures – in the realm of Tai culture called *meuang* – emerged mainly in the lowlands where soils would yield agricultural surplus and so support sedentariness, concentration of people and commerce. Powerful local leaders sought to integrate villages into relationships of tribute and protection. These quasi-feudal (petty) states, from local chiefdoms to great kingdoms such as Lan Xang (the predecessor of the Lao nation state), were nodes of economic, political and spiritual power. They were highly socially stratified (e.g. Rehbein 2007, 40ff) with a chief, lord or king at the apex. Their power was legitimized by Theravada-Buddhist doctrine, presenting the monarch as righteous ruler of superior karmic status and protector of Buddhism. A "god-king" (*devaraja*), he was located at the religious-political center of a mandala-like structure (Swearer 1995; Wolters 1999; Tambiah 1976).

[53] Walker (1999, 43; 62f) contents that territoriality was also an aspect of precolonial statehood. To my understanding, this historical accuracy fluidizes the theoretical rupture of precolonial and co-

The state was therefore dependent on the economy of the village, which, in turn, sought to maintain autonomy. To achieve this, villages often went into tributary relations with two or three different *meuang* at a time (Scott 2009, 60). Village independence grew towards the fringes of *meuang* power (in the sense that trade preceded over tribute and tax) and it was greatest in the uplands.[54] Upland political economies thus remained quite different from *meuang* structures (e.g. hard to tax, record etc.; see Scott 2009) and related to these as such.

Mainly thanks to the limited means of *meuang* to unblock and penetrate the uplands, regional ecology was encoded in the dialectical give-and-take between wilderness and civilization (Singh 2012a, 43). Uplanders outside of tributary relations with a *meuang* were seen from its perspective as *khaa* (roughly translating as "slaves"), "savages", whereas *meuang* subjects were regarded as *tai* (people, civilians). Perceived as living in the deep forest (*paa*, *paa dong*), *khaa* were part of its wilderness, disorder and evil spirits. If the lowlands allowed for wet-rice cultivation that could support a large number of people, the upland were suitable mainly for cultivation on steep swidden plots, combined with the hunting and gathering of forest products.

The common Tai phrase "to gather vegetables and put them in a basket, to gather *khaa* and put them into the *meuang*" (*kep phak sai saa, kep khaa sai meuang*; Turton 2000, 16; Badenoch/Tomita 2013, 44; Scott 2009, 40) indicates that the wild was constitutive for *meuang* civility. The taming of the wild by converting forest into fields to establish a *baan* (village) or *meuang* was an auspicious act*;* clearing the forest indicated political potency. A similar civilizational rationale also existed on the local level of villages, both in the lowlands and in the uplands. Upland groups economically as well as ritually reinforced the distinction between forest and village, although, as Arhem states for the Katu of the Vietnam-Lao borderlands,

[…] what scientists would call "virgin forest" [is] closely associated with the domain of [the forest spirit]. The power of the [forest spirit], however, does not end at the edge of the old ("virgin") forest but stretches into the fallows which have previously been used by humans (and which the spirits are in the process of reclaiming). In other words, the Katuic village/forest divide is relative, contextual and fluid. (Arhem 2014, 66)

Furthermore, as much as upland societies may be read as having evaded lowland statehood in manifold ways, as Scott claims, uplanders were also dependent on

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lonial power but does not touch on the validity of the argument of a new type of statehood that arrived with the French.

[54] Scott (2009) adapted the notion of "Zomia" from van Schendel (2002) which points at the relationality of the "area" concept and proclaims to study the upland borderlands between Central, East, Southeast and South Asia as an area in its own right. Scott turns Zomia into the iconic zone of refuge from lowland state power, where the principle of state evasion had become essential socially, culturally and ecnomically.

and attracted to state power for a variety of reasons (e.g. protection). Elements of *meuang* political ideology, including Buddhist religion, were integrated into upland rituals and languages (for Khmu see Badenoch/Tomita 2013, 33). The integration of *meuang* elements and the awareness of one's marginality within the overall political setup are still aligned with ritual enforcements of "khaa" villages as cosmological centers, and with reversals of lowland hierarchies (Sprenger 2006, 81; Tooker 1996, 334).

Khaa, seen as the original inhabitants of the *meuang*, were ritually integrated into the polity as "guardians of the soil", the master of which was formally the king. Deep jungle and their inhabitants contained spiritual potency for *meuang* culture.[55] Moreover, the *meuang-tai/paa-khaa* divide was crossed by all kinds of migrations and mediations, such as, by participation of certain upland groups in slave trade, preying upon weaker groups; but also by all kinds of individuals and groups moving from one realm into the other for multiple reasons. The *meuang-paa* relationship was thus one of mutual exclusion and dependence. It was based (among other things) on the level of practical means of lowland states to unblock and access upland communities which were in accord with an economy of "simple reproduction" (Marx). This is a crucial difference between the precolonial and the current state of the uplands.

The term *khaa* suggests that uplanders were mainly subject to slavery, and slave raids were common *meuang* ways of tapping upland labor power (Turton 2000, 16).[56] Likely, however, trade was a much more common way of "civilizing" the "uncivilized".[57] Simply put, economic and symbolic exchange surpassed political integration into state rule.[58] Such relatively stable *meuang-paa* dialectic, the continuous symbolic-material mediation of upland natures across a, however "pulsing", *sakdina* frontier (Dwyer 2011, 41) should start to come to a halt with the arrival of a much more expansionary and invasive mode of *civilisation*. Today, it is approaching the state of its standstill.

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[55] As embodied in the figure of the forest monk who, by living and meditating in forests and caves, successfully harnesses the powers of the wild for lowland Buddhist culture (Tambiah 1984).

[56] But *meuang* people could also become slaves through war with other *meuang*, such as the population of the Viang Chan area after Siam's attack to smash the Lao rebellion 1826-28.

[57] Andrew Walker showed how exchange of upland forest and agricultural produce for lowland tools, pottery and salt was vital for the kingdom of Luang Phabang, which lacked land to sustain itself; it depended on the surrounding uplands and those further up the Mekong and its tributaries, such as the Nam Tha (Walker 1999, 37ff). For their part, the uplanders were dependent on lowland products.

[58] In fact, as Masuhara (2003) has shown, forest products of the Lao uplands found their way into much broader regional and even global trade networks from quite early on in the history of Lan Xang, due to its tributary relations with China and trade with Khmer and Ayudhya empires.

4.1.2 French colonialism

"Indeed, our whole story could be said to take place in a single unending forest" (Garnier and Tips in Phimmavong et al. 2009, 505): This impression by a leading member of the French Mekong Expedition of the late 1860s signals the advent of a new civilizational mindset in what was to become the nation state of Laos. The French saw mostly jungle in what was in fact a full blown, albeit subsistence-based, political economy.[59] With this new vision arrived a quite peculiar under-standing of statehood and economy hitherto unknown as it was based on ruling and valorizing all lands and peoples within a defined territory for the sake of the mother nation. From the viewpoint of a capitalist national economy, the landscape of precolonial *meuang-baan-paa* relations was unproductive, and the *mise en valeur* of land and labor set in motion a process of primitive accumulation (Gunn 2003) that was coupled with scientific reason and the ideology of a *mission civilisatrice*. The arrival of French colonialism ushered in a new phase in the history of upland-state relations.

However, just like civilization or territoriality preceded colonial rule, precolonial structures persisted profitably during colonialism: like Britain in its colonies, the French ruled indirectly in Indochina. Certain local power structures, such as traditional kingship, were kept in place for effective extraction of taxes and labor. Linking the colonial project with traditional power thus had the effect of fundamental economic change: the tax system "became the most important lever in forcing the population into the money economy" with "chaomuong, […] tasseng, and naiban [as] key collaborators" (Gunn 2003, 78). The money form became compulsory for tax payments and the precolonial category of non-tax payer was removed (ibid). Slavery was abolished while *corvée* became integral to the appropriation of manpower.[60] As a reaction to several uprisings in the uplands the taxation regime was modified to shift the burden of payments, according to a racial grid, towards the more civilized, putting the bulk of *corvée* on upland groups (ibid, 78).[61] Thus, taxation was paralleled by taxonomies of upland groups by ethnographers. Combined with administrative policies, scientific classification led to a "tribalization" of upland people that was politically instrumentalized (Salemink 1999).

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[59] Walker (1999, 37) argues similarly with regards to upland-lowland trade in Luang Phabang: "The overall level of trade in Louangphabang may have been disappointing to colonial adventurers […] but this commercial relationship with the hill-dwellers was a central feature of the precolonial economy".

[60] *Corvée* "probably never embraced less than 20 percent of the population" in colonial Laos (ibid, 59). All males between 19 and 60 years of age were required to conduct *corvée* for 20 days annually, mainly in public projects but also for private enterprises.

[61] State administration was strongly racialized as well: after the Vietnamese, who were thought of as more industrious qua race, it was the lowland Lao (royal) urban elite who ran state administration, formally educated in lowland centers as well as abroad. Formal education, as other policies, took place within the colonial attempt to create and strengthen a "Lao" national identity (Ivarsson 2008) that was highly biased towards lowland culture.

The *mise en valeur* of Laos depended on unblocking its territory with infrastructure, chiefly roads. In fact, "the colonial project […] was almost coterminous with road building" (Gunn 2003, 77) for both economic and military reasons. Most forced labor went into the construction of a network of *routes coloniales* interlinking French Indochina and building upon age-old trade routes along the Mekong and across the Annamite range (Ivarsson 2008, 93ff). State power was territorialized by treaties on border demarcation and by the creation of "political forests" via laws on land, forest and species (Peluso/Vandergeest 2001). The *Code Forestier* laid down the legal regulatory framework for forest areas and their use (e.g. as plantations or watershed protection), and it was

[…] crucial in articulating the relationships between coloniser and indigène through the establishment of the scientific and socio-economic rationales for controlling particular practices and customs within 'scientifically' defined areas. (Cleary 2005, 266)

Colonial forestry thus aimed at rationalizing the forest, suppressing traditional shifting cultivation and relocating upland communities outside of forest reserves. Thereby establishing a divide between labor and land, first attempts were made to empty the forests and isolate natural resources. Teak in particular was to be rationally extracted in Laos.[62]

Colonial forestry intersected with other facets of valorization, such as tax collection: the *montagnard* strategy, reacting to problems with tax collection in the Lao-Annam frontier region, also aimed at settling the "khaa" by delimiting their agricultural land and eradicating shifting cultivation. Thus, colonial forest management was part of colonial population management, including indigenous reserves (ibid, 271), and focusing mainly on commercial exploitation but also on forest protection.[63] The most profitable enterprises in colonial Laos, however, were the colonial monopolies on mining and opium.

A second arm of colonial power on forests focused on species regulation. French wildlife law distinguished pests from useful animals (Guérin 2012). As threats to humans, predators such as tigers, panthers and leopards were categorized as pests, and a bounty system, it was hoped, would eradicate them.[64] Commercial hunting and trade of certain animal parts was already in place but accelerated with colonialism. In addition, a new form of hunting arrived in Indochina, as a leisure activity that was "consubstantial to a position in a remote posting" (ibid,

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[62] The *Compagnie de l'est asiatique francaise* floated "some 12,000 to 15,000 logs of wood […] down the Mekong annually to Saigon" (Gunn 2003, 39 citing Lévy 1974)

[63] The influence of colonial forestry was weaker on Laos and Cambodia, however, than it was on Annam, Tonkin and Cochinchina. Timber and forest products were more important in Laos than plantation establishment, which was introduced only on a small-scale, experimental basis (Phimmavong et al. 2009, 505).

[64] At times, the bounty on tigers was eight times that of the bounty on the wolf in France (ibid, 6) – while today, millions of US Dollars go into saving the tiger from extinction).

8) and aiming primarily at the tiger, supposedly also to make lives of the local population safer (ibid, 9). The ensuing hunting craze and its destructive effects, in turn, spawned protection concerns which led to the introduction of closed seasons, hunting licenses, hunting reserves etc. Although a Presidential Ordinance for wildlife protection was issued in 1927, "Laos as a whole remained a free hunting zone until 1939" (ibid, 13).[65]

While Tonkin, Annam and Cochinchina firmly came under colonial extractivism, the Lao uplands were penetrated by colonial rule only to a limited degree, mostly for reasons of profitability. While integration went as far as drawing one of the remotest upland groups, the Hmong, into monetized economy (in their case via opium), uplanders remained largely subsistence-oriented. Resistance against colonial rule was initially expressed in scattered upland rebellions lacking a unifying political strategy as these drew upon indigenous millenarism and charismatic leadership (Pholsena 2013, 185; Gunn 2003). With the emergence of a regional socialist anticolonial movement, and especially after the return of the French to Indochina in 1945, Lao uplanders became a major focus of a peculiar phase in global capitalist development: its military enforcement and assertion against socialism.

4.1.3 American War

After the 1954 Geneva Accords the Lao state was increasingly governed by U.S. development aid (see Phraxayavong 2009, 50ff), guided by Eisenhower's "falling domino" theory: the spread communism over the whole of Southeast Asia was to be contained. Although formally a neutral state according to the Geneva Agreements of 1962, Laos became the pivot of socialism's containment by the U.S., for if Laos fell, all of Southeast Asia would follow. The internal division between the Royalists and the socialist Pathet Lao in the national government was instrumentalized for the defense of global capitalism. The Lao uplands should be turned into the prime arena of this struggle. After Viet Minh forces had started using the "Ho Chi Minh Trail" through the Annamite range on Lao territory as a supply route for South Vietnam, the U.S. turned the Lao uplands into the site of a "secret war", as hot as the "cold" war would ever get. An understanding of the socio-ecological constitution of Laos' upland landscape needs to fully take account of the disruptive singularity of the "American war":

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[65] Gunn notes that there was "neither private domain, nor public domain, nor reserves, there was only State domain" (ibid, 72). Prince Phetsarath (1890–1959) possessed hunting grounds on the Nakai plateau (Singh 2012a, 88), and other members of the royal Lao elite most likely had similar land claims.

From 1964 to 1973, the U.S. dropped more than two million tons of ordnance on Laos during 580,000 bombing missions—equal to a planeload of bombs every 8 minutes, 24-hours a day, for 9 years – making Laos the most heavily bombed country per capita in history.[66]

These bombs predominantly fell in remote, mountainous areas where rugged terrain served as battleground of a hidden system confrontation in which upland groups became central actors and major victims. Pathet Lao and Royalist forces, each backed by the respective bloc, sought to win over minority groups for clandestine warfare. Adopting structures and strategies of ethnic proxy war developed by the French, the U.S. built up clandestine guerilla armies in order to contain communist expansion (Dwyer 2011, 45ff). *Operation Momentum* focused mainly on the Hmong in the northeast, bringing to the fore the Hmong leader Vang Pao; a similar operation in the northwest centered around Huayxay.[67] The Pathet Lao-Viet Minh forces, on their part, sought alliance with upland people as brothers in revolutionary struggle (e.g. Forsyth/Michaud 2011, 5; Michaud 2009, 26). "Development" was used by both sides to forge alliances with upland groups: the Royal Lao Government attempting to de-populate the communist forests by enhancing living conditions in the lowlands; the Pathet Lao attempting to bring development to the highlands (Dwyer 2011, 33). [68] Those parts of Laos that were subject of my research, such as Luang Namtha, Houaphan and Savannakhet Provinces, have been hotspots of wartime conflicts; the Nam Nern Night Safari leads into central places of former clandestine anti-communist resistance (see 5.3 and box 4).

Box 4: Violent landscapes of and for tourism

In the morning after the night safari at Nam Et-Phou Loei NPA (5.3.2), participants get a glimpse into the history of the landscape. They learn that the town of Houa Meuang was formerly located at the campsite.[69] They are shown a painting of "old-Hua Meuang" as dominated by a vat, painted by a former inhabitant. The guides show tourists a concrete stupa, its top shot off during the

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[66] See: http://legaciesofwar.org/about-laos/secret-war-laos/; also see video on http://www.motherjones.com/politics/2014/03/laos-vietnam-war-us-bombing-uxo, accessed January 11, 2015.

[67] William Young, son of Baptist missionaries to Northern Thailand and Burma, turned his extensive social capital among upland groups into political capital when he established a CIA-backed guerilla force in Northwest Laos (Dwyer 2011, 53ff).

[68] After World War II, development aid became a major aspect of US foreign policy. In Laos, US developmental aid was instrumental to conducting the clandestine war and to governing an officially "neutral", independent nation state. The structure of US Aid in Laos paralleled that of the Lao government (Phraxayavong 2009, 119f); Lao military and police were paid by the US embassy (ibid, 68). Development aid was intricately linked to warfare, both taking place in tandem in mountainous regions (e.g. ibid, 75; Weldon 2000, 257).

[69] Current Meuang Houa Meuang, the capital of Houa Meuang district, is located some kilometers off Road 6 about mid-way between Sam Neua and Meuang Hiam, to the southwest of the site of „old-Houa Meuang".

war. Inhabitants had dug holes at the bottom in search of a treasure. As the walk passes by the remnants of a "French" elementary school, the village guide points out to the former airstrip of "the Americans" relating a story about that Lao military leader who possessed magical powers of invincibility. It is getting interesting, however, the lead guide gets uncomfortable (probably fearing a negative image of superstitious Laotians might be conveyed) and suggests continuing with the walk.

The ecotourism project leaves it at these allusions to history and cuts out the interesting parts. Before 1965, Houa Meuang (the current campsite) was controlled by the Royalist forces which were commanded by Colonel Thong Vongrasamy. As Weldon recalls: "[…] when the struggle for control of Sam Neua was at its height, the center of resistance to the Vietnamese invaders was at Hua Muang" (Weldon 2000, 94). The town was overrun by communist forces in February 1965, forcing the "Meo" (Hmong) troops to leave and "thousands of civilians" were evacuated with the help of Air America (Webb 2010, 171). On September 12 the same year, however, Houa Meuang was retaken by General Vang Pao, heavily backed by US military assistance (Warner 1998, 167ff). In 1966, the population had to be evacuated again (Weldon 2000, 180f). Commander Thong Vongrasamy was the man mentioned by our local guide, "a rare man, a virile mystic who prayed to Buddha for hours at a time, and who liked nothing better than fighting and killing North Vietnamese" (Warner 1998, 140). He was widely respected for his charisma, courage and smart guerilla tactics (e.g. Weldon 2000, 102). Thong was tattooed with magical symbols and wore "a Buddha amulet around his neck" (ibid).[70] Such facts are hardly conveyed during the morning walk, although they might be crucially interesting for tourists.[71]

The violence constitutive of this tourism landscape thus becomes an object for tourism only to a limited degree. On a more subtle level, however, war memories, inscribed in the uplands as much as in Western popular culture, are

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[70] After he had died from an injury on a mission into Northern Vietnam, General Vang Pao, the legendary Hmong leader, reportedly conceded that "Thong's amulets […] just hadn't worked" (Warner 1998, 170).

[71] Another case of potential tourist interest but discarded by NPA management is Pha Thi mountain, also a former Hmong stronghold just a few kilometers north, which became one turning point in the Vietnam war. Because of its strategic location close to Hanoi, Pha Thi represented a prime spot for a TACAN radar station which would allow bombing Northern Vietnam also in bad weather conditions. It was installed in 1967. Hmong locals cut off the top of the mountain for constructing the radar system, a landing strip and a few other facilities. Village militia, Thai security staff, US Airforce and CIA technicians were based at and around Pha Thi clandestinely. As expected, the station should draw the attention of the Vietnamese: soon after its installation, aerial observation reported a road creeping westward from Sam Neua city, and from February 1968 regular attacks occurred. On March 10, 1968, the site was finally overrun and 11 Americans were killed in the battle. Several days later, the US President decided to stop the bombing of northern Vietnam.

conjured by ecotouristic experience. As one tourist to Nam Ha NPA recalls his experience:

[…] in that landscape I got this weird, not weird but interesting behavior. I like movies about war, I don't know, it's a kind of movies I like, and so I've seen a lot […] about Vietnam, and keep thinking when I'm trekking, when I'm in the countryside, some pictures of movies jump into my eyes, some Forrest Gump images for example, it's funny, it's funny. […] And I just thought about a movie where you see GI's coming into a village and just shooting everybody, and I was entering into a village like this and just thinking "why, why do we do that? Why do we send soldiers and kill them?" […] this kind of reflection, it's funny this kind of images coming. (FR, m, 23) [72]

Thus, although exhaustive and precise information on the history of the tourist landscape is rarely provided, so that the specific landscape becomes one for ecotourism only to a very limited degree, touristic experience recalls imageries conveyed through culture-industrial formats such as "Vietnam War" movies.

Upland economies became severely disrupted during the war as customary arrangements were uprooted with people abandoning villages for the lowlands, Pathet Lao strongholds, or nearby forests and caves. Working their paddy fields under the cover of night and switching from paddy rice to upland swidden cultivation or even to nomadic hunting and gathering, the upland populations and their economies experienced a blurring of the village-forest divide (Dwyer 2011, 68) and a consolidation of subsistence-oriented economic strategies. Meanwhile, fields and forests got endowed with a new and lasting lethal danger: unexploded ordnance, killing up to this day and for inconceivable time to come. Moreover, Laos lost about one-fifth of its total forest cover due to bombing and defoliation, construction of military infrastructure, relocation to the forest for survival, and the rapid growth in the industrial forestry sector (Phimmavong et al. 2010, 506). As control was hard to establish, the war period saw an exponential growth of unregulated illegal logging.

The granting of leading positions to upland people and the promise of political autonomy after the revolution combined with traditional lowland-upland tensions and rampant corruption of lowland officials by U.S. development money to ensure the success of the Pathet Lao and its allies in winning-over upland people to fight the imperialists (Michaud 2009, 26; Phraxayavong 2009, 125). While war blurred the distinction of forest and village in the uplands, the revolution also brought uplanders as political leaders into *meuang* centers whereas the uplands were shut-off (Pholsena 2013, 164).

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[72] Interview quotations are provided with "nationality, gender, age". Nationality is indicated according to ISO-3166 country codes.

4.1.4 Socialism

After liberation, revolutionaries descended from their upland strongholds to take over state business. Not only were many of them unaccustomed to city life, they also had to deal with the unprecedented task of running a unified, independent Lao state (Phraxayavong 2009, 135), facing a serious encompassing crisis from the beginning. War had completely destroyed the domestic economy.[73] Experienced state administrators were rare; those few experts remaining were largely related to the old elite, and either fled to Thailand or the US, or were put into re-education camps for sometimes decades (below). Laos was thus dependent more than ever on outside assistance.[74]

Socialist development was based on the idea of a comprehensive cultural and economic revolution of society entailing a centralized planning economy as well as the formal equality of all Lao citizens. The government thus proclaimed ethnic unity-within-diversity, an ideal that was to be compromised by the harsh realities of the task ahead: it was "perhaps inevitable that the 'pluri-ethnic' ideal would take second place to the immediate needs of administrative consolidation and economic growth" (Ireson/Ireson 1991, 920). As in China and Vietnam, the socialist Lao government backtracked from its initial promises of political autonomy for ethnic groups made during resistance struggle, instead focusing more on unity than diversity (Forsyth/Michaud 2011, 5).[75] For the sake of development and national security, upland people were increasingly resettled and encouraged "to adopt ethnic Lao livelihoods, practices and language" (Baird/Shoemaker 2007, 872). Proper

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[73] "100,000 people killed, 3,500 villages destroyed, one out of every four people displaced, 400,000 refugees living in more than twenty countries around the world, 40 percent of the arable land rendered barren, and unexploded bombs littered across the ground (UXO/LAO)." (Phraxayavong 2009, 128)

[74] Its largest donor, the U.S., had withdrawn, and assistance shifted towards bloc partners such as the Soviet Union and Vietnam. Dependence on aid from Western countries (Australia, Japan) and on the IMF continued as well. Socialist assistance went into economic policies, infrastructure (roads, bridges, airports) as well as capacity-building in and gathering data on different economic sectors.

[75] An inclusive approach was thus applied based on a Stalinist concept of nation and nationality (ibid, 4). According to leading Vietnamese ethnologist Dang Nghiem Van, for example, "the idea of a territory reserved exclusively for a single ethnicity or the consciousness of such a reserved territory cannot be said to exist" in emic concepts (Dang 2001, 15). It is only through historical, revolutionary struggle that ethnic groups would become part of a larger unity, the nation; and it is only through the nation state that the idea of a territory exists at all. If the socialist state is thus the sole legitimate claimant of the land within its territory, it is nevertheless "the sacred aspiration of everybody, hoping to see his own ethnicity live on […] from the primeval stage to modern time […]. Without it, a nation could not last long (Pham Van Dong)" (ibid, 111). As cultural identity and folklore, that is, ethnicity is "the highest and most sacrosanct value of man" (ibid, 67), a primeval bond living on in the socialist nation state.

socialist development equaled lowland Lao ways, i.e. paddy rice cultivation in the valleys instead of upland shift-and-burn cultivation.[76]

Given the country's dire post-war condition, natural resources, first of all timber, continued to be of central importance. Since the 1960s, log production had continually increased and the new government relied on maximizing revenue from its abundant forests. These were exploited by state-owned logging companies connected with the military and linked to the Vietnamese comrades. Nine state forest enterprises were allocated logging concessions, each supported by assistance from the Eastern or Western bloc (e.g. Sweden) and the Asian Development Bank, the primary focus being to increase timber extraction "from what was viewed as a vast and underdeveloped forest hinterland" (Barney 2011, 159) – in fact, a hinterland actively created. Until 1989, the export of wood remained Lao PDR's predominant source of national revenue (Phimmavong et al. 2009, 506). Another purpose of appropriating these hinterlands was more particularly political. Former centers of resistance struggle were "left fallow" for the planting of re-education camps (such as in Houaphan and Savannakhet Provinces; Tappe 2013 and Pholsena 2013). In these politically useful peripheries, forced labor, arbitrary justice and political indoctrination went largely unnoticed; escape was difficult. Unexploded ordnance, highly concentrated in these regions, killed or mutilated prisoners and villagers alike.

Meanwhile, collectivization of lowland agriculture was in serious trouble. The emulation of Soviet and Vietnam style socialist development largely failed in Laos as it ran against subsistence structures and orientations that have persisted through, and were nurtured by, colonialism and war (Stuart-Fox 2008, 153ff; Evans 1990; 1988).[77] Implemented in May 1978, the collectivization program was brought to a halt as early as mid-1979 (accompanied by successive crop failures and the Sino-Vietnamese War following Vietnamese occupation of Cambodia) and was effectively abandoned in the early 1980s (Stuart-Fox 2008, 64). This development signaled the failure of the socialist "experiment", resulting in a period of economic liberalization and the internationalized enclosure of the uplands.

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[76] National unification was achieved via differentiation. Soviet bloc ethnologists, based on findings of French anthropology, saw themselves "obligated […] to clarify the [complex ethnic] situation, both for theoretical and scientific reasons and for concrete practical purposes" (Dang 2001, 10). In Laos, the classificatory struggle evolved from 68 to finally 49 officially recognized ethnic groups, including the lowland Lao (Michaud 2009, 33). However, the more practicable yet inaccurate triple ethnic partition according to customary dwelling (*lao lum*, *lao theung*, *lao suung*) is still widely used and reflects the socialist idea of unity in diversity.

[77] Stuart-Fox argues, for example that the rather "loose social structure of the Lao village made it likely that people would be less amenable to […] the regimentation of cooperative methods" (2008, 165).

4.1.5 Market economy

Following the example of Vietnamese *Doi Moi* after the breakdown of the Soviet Union, Laos officially proclaimed its "New Economic Mechanism" (*chintanaakaan mai*: new thinking) in 1986 at the Fourth Party Congress, and began to decentralize its economy, to be driven by private capital yet politically regulated by a centralist one-party government claiming comprehensive social control. State-owned businesses were privatized and the state apparatus was slimmed. Given historically produced underdevelopment, the country increasingly returned to Western aid and foreign private investment with the withdrawal of Soviet assistance, becoming perhaps more than ever dependent on capital and assistance from abroad (Phraxayavong 2009, 273).

The separation of people and land is taking the form of the capital/labor separation which increasingly penetrates the uplands – not least via the practice of resettlement. In this cornerstone of Lao politics, economic interest is intricately coupled with population control. Mainly ethnic minority people, i.e. uplanders, are being concentrated in "focal sites" which serve multiple purposes, such as, to alleviate poverty, provide food security, promote agricultural commercialization, eliminate shifting cultivation, and improve access to development services (Baird/Shoemaker 2007, 874). Clearly, securitization of the uplands is a further purpose (see below).

As upland people are removed from forests or otherwise profitable land, concentrated along roads where education, medical care and political control are easier to administer, transition to a market economy is enhanced (also Rigg 2005, 97ff). Often, people are forcibly moved and poorly compensated to make way for large-scale investment projects. After heavy criticism of resettlement practices, foreign development actors are increasingly wary – while many in fact ultimately support them (e.g. Baird/Shoemaker 2007, Baird/Shoemaker 2005).[78]

While uplanders are moved like pawns on the developmental chessboard, upland customs and traditions are celebrated by state ideology. This is an active remnant of the socialist idea of ethnicity as a purely cultural affair without any material implication, such as, with regard to land (see footnote 75). Recently, state-projected folklorization of upland people has gone together smoothly with the very trend examined here: ecotourism. Nevertheless, the regions with the highest amount of ethnic minorities tend to be the poorest in the country, despite or because of development efforts, official or illicit. Access to health care and formal education as well as to political participation remains very limited. While some groups, such as the Hmong, are present in the higher political ranks, most others are not.

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[78] An ecotourism advisor mentioned that international organizations try to keep themselves away from state-led relocation these days and only take a favorable stance towards it publicly when "big money" is involved, such as with the Nam Theun 2 project.

The uplands are still lethal: about 20,000 people have been killed by UXO since liberation; about a hundred people keep getting injured or killed annually, while only one percent of UXO has been removed up to now. Uplanders are most exposed to the risk, not only because they live in these places but also because their marginality makes scrap metal a valuable resource. Anti-communist resentment is another war remnant among some upland groups. From 1995-2006, the Xaysomboun special zone was set up in which the military quelled conflicts with Hmong guerillas in their former stronghold. As late as 2008, buses from Vientiane to Luang Phabang were accompanied by armed soldiers for fear of raids by Hmong militia. Although or because Xaysomboun has recently been turned into a province of its own, regular attacks on buses or cars of Chinese firms are making a return since the end of 2015. Ethnic conflict is simmering also in other places.

Upland forests also became restructured with the help of international and bilateral aid and expertise. State land was classified, mapped, demarcated, allocated, and titled. In comparison to the early socialist period, log production increased markedly from the 1980s onward (see Phimmavong et al. 2009, 509). The internationalization of the uplands made logging even more lucrative focusing on new locations that became accessible with infrastructure development. During the 1990s, logging reached a peak mostly due to a logging ban in Thailand. State enterprises were granted business autonomy and three military companies conducted most of the logging in the 1990s (Barney 2011, 161f; Dwyer 2011, 70). Large-scale concessions for copper and gold mining as well as plantations for various cash crops, and, most centrally, dam development (not to mention illicit trade in wood and wildlife) increasingly enclose the uplands and create mosaics of ecological plunder driven by foreign capital mainly from China, Vietnam and Thailand.

Concerns about the state of the forest in Laos were raised since the inception of the New Economic Mechanism; a National Protected Area (NPA) system was implemented between 1993 and 1996 (4.2.3). Seemingly in contradiction, forest preservation and exploitation go hand in hand. Thus, uplanders are relocated not only for large-scale development projects but also "by arguing that forest and watershed protection must be supported by putting an end to the widespread and allegedly unsustainable practices" (Michaud 2009, 17). Policies such as the *Land and Forest Allocation* program are biased, moreover, towards the establishment of commercial plantations, such as rubber or eucalyptus, as means to restore "forest" cover (Phimmavong et al. 2009, 507). In short, in recent years, upland people and land were increasingly subject to the appropriation of labor and land by the developmental state and its international collaborators and within the productive tension of resource development and conservation.

To wrap-up this section, the history of putting the uplands into statehood appears as one of unfolding appropriation, increasing in intensity and extent. In precolonial times, the forest itself was not directly an object of the state but was appropriated indirectly via tax, tribute and trade; upland forests remained outside of state-making, furthermore, for their inaccessibility by lowland statecraft. This "*sakdina* frontier" (Dwyer 2011) was gradually replaced by a capitalist one. Colonialists "found" a forest cover of about 90% in Laos (Stuart-Fox 2008, 109), but ran against various obstacles in opening Laos up for capital accumulation; the biggest of these obstacles was not the "friction of terrain" *per se*, but the issue of profitability. Land was cheap in colonialism where road access existed thanks to cheap labor provided by the population. The dynamics of the Indochina Wars greatly upset socio-ecological relationships; the country was "bombed back into the stone age", depopulated and ruined: an actively produced periphery. The forest remained a crucial commercial resource, however. Forest depopulation was continued under socialism in its attempt to industrialize and collectivize agriculture and to eradicate swidden cultivation. Timber became a central commodity for the young socialist government, which had inherited a heavy burden. Tied through aid dependency to an international community of competitors, its forests became more and more accessible to the world market. De-population and isolation of forest resources continues today. Resources remain cheap in Laos for a combination of reasons, including the ambivalences of proclamation and practice (below), as well as the outsourcing of the actual costs of resource appropriation to subsistence networks. Within such frontier space, pre-existing societal constellations (sociocultures) persist through change by tying into and reproducing themselves through it. Patron-client ties and a meritocratic ethic, already present in subsistence village economies, are enhanced as they function as entry points for resource appropriation, while the public health system requires continued reliance on magic and traditional medicine.

The historical constitution of the Lao uplands can thus be read as a process of their appropriation which occurred differently in different phases. Thus, capitalist appropriation is preceded by a certain precolonial frontier vision while symbolic-material remnants remain active. Today, the appropriation of the Lao uplands increases separation of capital and labor (e.g. Thongmanivong et al 2009; Baird 2011; Barney 2009); and it is characterized by the tension between conservation and development. The historical formation of upland landscapes as "relational resource frontiers" (Barney 2009; elaborated below) which embody the tension between resource extraction and protection seems to currently complete the historical project of unlocking and appropriating the uplands in their entirety.

4.2 Current make-up of a recreational landscape

The historical constitution of the uplands results in a situation, where Laos is the perfect source: next door, politically docile, thinly populated, and rich in rivers, minerals and timber. And it is […] on the lands of indigenous villages, where the frontier is being exploited most severely. (Hodgdon 2008, 61)

The capitalist project of unblocking Laos is realized today by a "communist" party, one of whose leitmotifs is to "turn land in to capital" (*han thii din pen theun*; see Dwyer 2011, 29; Baird 2011).[79] This is achieved by linking economic development, population management and national securitization. A mix of socialist-style propaganda and restrictions on freedom of opinion with a capitalist development agenda makes the goal of "graduating from LDC status by 2020" a moral obligation (Creak 2014). Along with such "hybrid" rhetoric goes an increasing assertiveness in pushing large-scale development projects in order to reach this goal, while about half of the population works in subsistence agricultural production (BTI 2014). Access to profitable land, the most central comparative advantage of Laos, is facilitated in a dual mode of legality and illegality, between national legislation and informal patron-client networks. "Corruption", a confluence of sorts between subsistence patronage and capitalist appropriation, became systemic to the provision of "cheap" access to the country's resources. It is very much comparable to the Indonesian "extractive regime" as analyzed by Gellert (2010).

The other side of such cheapened access is the outsourcing of its costs to grassroots structures which again draw from "past" moral-economic relations. If the proverb "to gather *khaa* and put them into the *meuang*" described the precolonial frontier logic (4.1.1), another proverb brings today's frontier logic to the point: "Rich people don't go to jail, poor people don't go to the hospital" (*khon hang mii bor khao khuk, khon thuk bor khao hoong mor*). Elites regularly abuse their positions in order to privatize public wealth while the poor majority is deprived of even the most basic human protection. Such an arrangement keeps profitable doors open and costs low. Education, titles and employment also depend on monetary means. That "rich people don't go to jail" expresses the intricate relation between legality and illegality at the heart of Laos' neo-colonial valorization. Thus, while the country's account balance increasingly grows negative[80], social wealth is privatized in the luxuries of the newly rich, political-economic urban elite. The development business with its diverse landscape of agencies and organizations creates another urban elite, that of Lao development experts.

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[79] According to Dwyer's survey of Vientiane Time articles, the phrase to "transform" or "turn land into capital" is used with regard to land concessions in particular (Dwyer 2011, 165), but it can be read as an overall motto of the government's development line today.

[80] See, for example, http://www.indexmundi.com/laos/current_account_balance.html, accessed March 30, 2015.

Proverbs such as the above are widely known but hardly uttered in public. Lao authoritarianism is an active socialist remnant, a fact that became exceptionally clear in several instances concerning criticism of the state's government agenda[81]. Laos is frequently described as a "socialist" one-party state pressing for its development agenda by deliberately ignoring the needs of the majority of the population. The main channel into the political echelons of the state is the Revolutionary Party, access to which is highly restrictive and the military is "[b]ehind, throughout and on top of the Party" (Hodgdon 2008, 61). This cold war remnant is a political hub around which Lao development proceeds.

Let us not forget, however, that there are not only different factions within "the" government along patronage lines and cutting across ministries and administrative levels; also, the tension between central power and local autonomy, already present in the precolonial *mandala*, is transformed into that between neoliberal decentralization and national sovereignty (Stuart-Fox 2008, 280; Creak 2014). The recent declaration of the *Three Builds* strategy (*saam sang*)[82] may be seen as an attempt at centralizing control (Creak 2014, 160f) since a "lack of communication" between administrative levels is often perceived as a main problem (e.g. Phimmavong et al. 2009, 509). Central directives are sometimes "not understood" at the provincial or local level; powerful provincial governors ignore national legislation; districts are relatively autonomous, as are the villages.[83] To this adds lack of communication, and rivalry, between ministries so that one program may directly run against another.[84] Administration is further complicated by the division of larger provinces or districts into smaller ones, and by the concurrent upgrading of villag-

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[81] In 2012, a popular radio show in which people could call in to raise their issues was cancelled. Most problems were related to land. In the wake of the *Asia Europe People's Forum* in October 2012, Swiss NGO director Anne-Sophie Gindroz was expelled from Laos for complaining about the restrictive and authoritarian climate for development work in the country in a letter to the funding community. The same month, popular Lao development activist Sombath Somphone disappeared from a police stop in Vientiane Capital while CCTV cameras were running. The government applied its hybrid rhetoric to silence criticism instead of contributing to clearing up this issue. International assistance in analyzing the CCTV footage was declined, which spurred further suspicions against the government among international civil society. This political style was not new, but what was remarkable was its open enforcement at a time when Laos awaited accession to the WTO (which occurred in February 2013) and was more than ever exposed to the international community and the world market.

[82] It propagates building provinces as "strategic units" (*houa nouai nyuttasat*), districts as "comprehensively strong units" (*houa nouai khemkheng hopdan*) and villages as "development units" (*houa nouai phattana*); and orders provinces and districts to obey jurisdictions, to implement central directives, and to attract and directly manage investment only up to a certain magnitude.

[83] It is thus easily possible that a province or district grants concessions for rubber plantations inside a National Protected Area (Chapter 5).

[84] Such as the upgrading of a former military road through the core zone of a National Protected Area (such as in NEPL; see below).

es into districts and districts into provinces.[85] Within these internal tensions and dynamics of governance, "the" state is difficult to discern. Furthermore, Lao authoritarianism reflects less the strength but rather the weakness of a state entirely dependent on foreign assistance in maintaining sovereignty.[86]

4.2.1 Relational resource frontiers

As argued (2.1.2), the "peripheries" of the capitalist world-system, its frontiers, are in fact central to capital's historical unfolding; they are the "lifeblood of capitalism" (Moore 2014, 288). By looking at ecotourism in Laos, we are concerned with such a center of cheap appropriation. "Thanks" to the intense and disruptive history of the Lao landscape, investment is able to frame current Laos as disposing over

[a] lot of abundant water resources and natural resources including mineral, sources of energy, forests, which could be developed through proper technology and converted to commodities for export.[87]

Such discourse of abundance, reiterated throughout the community of donors and investors, frames the uplands as "an untapped resource frontier" and "serves as a legitimating ideology for a particular strategy of large-scale resource development and regional integration" (Barney 2009, 147). It is ironic and consequential that these visions of abundance materialize in a landscape upon which colonialism, cold war, and "socialist" reconstruction had inscribed themselves. The diachronic dimension (4.1) is thus to be coupled with the synchronic dimension of upland appropriation; to do this, I adopt Barney's (2009) concept of the "relational resource frontier". He regards resource frontiers as "enacted in specific locations", as "relational spaces, produced through scaled interactions which are simultaneously material and representational" (ibid, 147). Within these spaces of appropriation, "the 'agency' of local natures are [sic] typically unacknowledged, but crucial actors in landscape transformations" (ibid). Coupling economic instrumentality with resource fetishism (2.1.3 and 9.2.4), projections of untouchedness are practices of enclosure and dispossession; local practice is not fully taken into account – which externalizes the "true costs" of resource development (ibid, 151) – but,

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[85] Former Xaysomboun special zone, formerly administered by Vientiane and Xieng Khuang provinces, has recently been turned into a province of its own (January 2014). The former district of Viengkham in Houaphan province has recently been split into Meuang Kham and Meuang Hiam. According to informal conversation with informants, turning Phiin district, Savannakhet Province, into a province is being considered.

[86] The legal system, for example, was created with assistance from ADB and UNDP (see Phraxayavong 2009, 165). Also ecotourism and conservation crucially rely on international expertise.

[87] Lao National Chamber for Industry and Commerce; see: http://www.laocci.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=60&Itemid=29&lang=en, accessed September 23, 2014.

nevertheless, it is present and constitutive of frontier enactment in specific loca-tions.[88] The relational resource frontier, as a set of competing projects, forms "a heterogeneous assemblage of development actors and state interests" (ibid, 149).

To my understanding, the resource frontier is relational in at least two ways: first, particular accumulation projects relate to one another, compete for access to land, stabilize or otherwise influence each other; they partially overlap in a given locality. Second, these projects are relational in that they are a function of the specific interests involved. Land is abundant and underutilized in terms of the respective ways to turn natures profitable (cash crops, dams, or "conservation"). Resource frontiers are not simply out there but neither are they mere illusions: they are material and representational, projections-becoming-projects of specific accumulation interests. Unspoiled nature and its abundance are, as mentioned, relative to the position within the production process (Chapter 1). In these assem-blages, "local practices" are not simply subject to but, at times, active subjects of several projects. Frontier space can thus be conceived of as an assemblage of use-interests relating to land and to one another, which localize their specific frontier project/ions. A symbolic as well as material force of transformation, the relational resource frontier is where capital in its manifold social forms touches down. Eco-tourism creates its own, fairly precarious space close to the domain of conserva-tion, which I refer to as the recreational frontier. As a whole, frontier project/ions have in common their aim of tapping into supposedly untouched abundance, partly integrating and partly neglecting local specifics. They are potentially multi-scale, imply cultural as much as economic aspects, and draw from diachronic, historical depth (4.1), recalling and installing various aspects of the past in specific ways and new forms. In addition, all of these project/ions function through the political-economic fabric just described.

Frontier spaces differ from one another in terms of what is to be "harvested", and also in terms of the relations and practices they entail, among people as well as towards the environment and the state. They differ, furthermore, in terms of their respective historical trajectories, restricting future development options in their particular ways. Two main frontier projects that are often situated side by side in the ecological plunder of upland Laos are extractive and conservation fron-tiers. Ecotourism is "un-/comfortably" situated between them.

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[88] Barney shows that local people do not simply follow a cultural program of traditional swidder-ners vs. wet-rice cultivators. Rather, one and the same community may switch continuously between such practices as a reaction to scaled interventions (Barney 2009, 154); similarly, the privatiza-tion of land and primitive accumulation can come from below (ibid, 155; Thongmanivong et al. 2009, 340). With that relational perspective, Barney disturbs and "defetishizes" notions of a clear cut distinction between before and after or simplistic ideas of impacts.

4.2.2 Extractive frontiers

The long and disruptive process of colonization and "independence" has led from a situation in which land shortage was never an issue (Gunn 2003, 72; Rehbein 2004, 49) to one where it constitutes the hottest commodity of the national economy. Access to land is conditioned on infrastructure. The transformation "from buffer state to crossroads" (Pholsena/Banomyong 2006) fulfills the colonial project of *débloquement* through the construction of economic corridors within Asian Development Bank's *Greater Mekong Subregion* (GMS) development project.[89] Nodes of this infrastructural integration of Laos are the "Friendship Bridges" connecting Laos and Thailand and hailed as materializations of mutuality within the ASEAN Economic Community.[90] Roads alone do not seem to suffice anymore, which is why the Friendship Bridges were designed to facilitate rail traffic as well. It seems as if the dream of a railway, unfulfilled for the French, is soon going to be realized, first of all by China. A high-speed rail mega-project linking Vientiane to the Chinese border has seen negotiation for several years and, contrary to the expectation of some experts, is nearing its groundbreaking at the time of writing.[91] Although such a "Pharaonic" project[92] is hardly profitable, and hardly meets the need for affordable transport of Lao people, it is part of "the first truly trans-Asia rail-link, and the most potent one. […] China is building its commercial and political empire for centuries to come" (ibid).[93]

Because upland transformation becomes increasingly capitalized, a good indicator for the extractivity of the uplands is foreign direct investment (FDI) in land,

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[89] That is, the East-West Corridor, linking Danang (Vietnam) with Mawlamyine (Myanmar); the North-South Corridor, linking Kunming and Southern China with Chiang Rai, Bangkok, and ultimately Malaysia; and the Central Corridor from Sihanoukville to Boten (where it feeds into the North-South corridor). They build on colonial infrastructure, especially National Road 13 (Saigon – Luang Prabang; see Trankell 1999) and road No. 9 (Savannakhet – Dong Ha; see Pholsena 2013), which had, in turn, used precolonial trade routes.

[90] These are located between Vientiane and Nong Khai (1993), Savannakhet and Mukdahan (2007), Thakhaek and Nakhon Phanom (2011), and, most recently, between Huayxay and Chiang Khong (2013). Three more bridges are planned: Paksan-Buengkhan (scheduled 2017), Salavan-Ubon Ratchathani, and Vientiane province-Loei.

[91] It is part of a 23 billion US Dollar train network linking Kunming to Singapore. Creak (2014) notes that during negotiations, the Chinese joint-venture partners pulled out because of profitability concerns, yet, "the LPRP Politburo agreed to negotiate a loan for the project's full US$ 7.2 billion cost with the China Export-Import Bank, more than three-quarters of Laos' 2012–13 GDP" (ibid, 159). This is an unprecedented loan that raises questions about Laos' national sovereignty.

[92] See: http://www.forbes.com/sites/ericrmeyer/2014/09/14/the-end-of-the-chinese-rice-for-train-plan-in-thailand-right/, accessed March 5, 2015.

[93] This is only one of several costly railway projects. Another contract has been signed by the GoL with a Malaysian investor for developing a railway link between Savannakhet and Lao Bao at the Vietnamese border (i.e. along Road No. 9; see Chapter 8), for another 5 billion US dollar (VT 21.8.14).

that is, land concessions.[94] Most central in this regard is hydropower (28% of FDI in 2014[95]). Thanks to the potential of the Mekong and its tributaries, overall, about 80 hydropower projects with more than 10 megawatts (MW) each are planned, in construction, or already in operation; nine of them on the Mekong.[96] Although the precolonial "hydraulic state" was well familiar with damming for irrigation and flood protection, hydropower dams were introduced only in the late 1960s and early 1970s with the construction of Nam Nguem Dam.[97] The biggest operational dam project so far is Nam Theun 2 (1070 MW) in Khammouane Province. It is going to be surpassed by Sayabouri dam (1285 MW), the first on the lower Mekong's mainstream.[98] Built by a Thai company, financed by Thai banks, and with 95% of its electricity consumed by Thailand[99], Sayabouri is actually a Thai project; one that promises high profits and thus high revenues for the Lao state. Even though Sayabouri's energy is not actually needed by Thailand[100]; even though the Mekong has been an economically vital region for centuries; and even though the dam's socio-ecological impacts (not only for Laos but for the whole lower Mekong region) are potentially severe, the Lao government is framing dam construction a moral obligation (Creak 2014). The next Lao Mekong dam in the pipeline is Don Sahong (around 350 MW), which, among other things, threatens the Irrawady Dolphin in the Mekong. It is difficult, however, to simply regard the government of Laos the (only) "bad guy" in this gamble. Not only are Laos' neighbors among the buyers of Mekong electricity, but they also follow similar development paths.[101] After all, large-scale hydropower export can be regarded a way to alleviate poverty through the use of "renewable energy".

Second largest in terms of FDI is mining (24%). Mining of copper, tin, iron, gold, silver, lead, salt and limestone has a long history in Laos, and it is today "the largest subsector […] in terms of both project count and area under investment" (Schönweger et al. 2012, 40).[102] Third, plantation forestry is another form conces-

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[94] Understood basically as areas of state land given to developers in return for fees and taxes.

[95] For this and following numbers of FDI shares see: http://www.investlaos.gov.la/index. php/resources/statistics, accessed March 7, 2016.

[96] See: http://www.internationalrivers.org/files/attached-files/laohydro2010_sept_final.pdf, accessed September 25, 2014.

[97] Its first phase was completed in 1971; it evolved through three more until 1996 and is being further expanded under the current policy.

[98] When the Lao Government pushed for the construction of Sayabouri Dam, part of its strategy was to start road construction to the dam site before negotiations among the *Mekong River Commission* members were concluded. In this way, facts were established before starting the actual dam construction.

[99] See: http://www.internationalrivers.org/campaigns/xayaburi-dam, September 24, 2014.

[100] See previous footnote.

[101] See: http://www.internationalrivers.org/campaigns/mekong-mainstream-dams, accessed September 24, 2014.

[102] Mining has existed since the bronze-age. Iron was extracted from around the second half of the first millennium BCE. Also gold, silver, lead, salt and limestone have been traditionally mined (Stuart-Fox 2008, 216). In colonial times, it was tin mining which promised to be most profita-

sions take (12%). Introduced under the French on an experimental scale (Phim-mavong et al. 2009, 503), today, 3.5 million hectares (out of a total national territory of around 23 million hectares) are estimated to be under agri-business concession agreements and contracts (Barney 2011, 5). In upland appropriation, the notion of "degraded forest" represents "a crucial new administrative category" (Barney 2011, 182) expressive of a "cheap nature" strategy: it is a "key method of rent creation […] via underpriced access to 'degraded' forestland"; although customarily managed, this land is considered as state land and no compensation has to be paid (ibid, 187 and 191f). Given the lack of transparency in the granting of concessions, and inadequate compensations for relocated communities (if any), on-the-ground effects of concessions often entail violent exclusion of local communities and their re-integration as cheap labor force (Baird 2011).

Closely related to large-scale development projects is timber production. Since French colonialism, the production of teak has steadily increased. Today, timber export is still a major earner of foreign exchange, and the logging industry is regulated by a complex allocation of quota, which has been criticized as opaque and open to individual "rent-seeking" (see Baird 2010 for details). While official quotas indicate a decrease in logging, an actual increase is more likely since commercial logging is done not only in production forests but also around sites slated for development. Relatedly, the amount of illegal clearing renders government quotas "meaningless" (EIA/Telapak 2008, 5).[103] Despite a ban on the export of unprocessed logs and further tightening of the legislation, "[n]early all exports of Laos' timber are still in the form of logs or sawn wood" (ibid).[104]

A particular trend in the political economy of Southeast Asian forests is soaring Chinese demand for luxury wood furniture made from rare kinds of timber, resulting in booming market prices. Whereas in Thai National Parks illicit rosewood logging proceeds as a methamphetamine-fueled war between poachers and park rangers (ibid, 4), in Laos the rosewood frontier is already closing (see 8.1.2.) – with prices rising by 3,000 per cent and stocks "so depleted and so valuable" that a Chinese merchant "would travel anywhere in the country for as little as 2 m³" (EIA 2014, 5). This seems a far cry from colonial times when

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ble, "far outstripp[ing] mining exploration elsewhere in Indochina" (Gunn 2003, 36). Good prospects lead to land speculation at Nam Pathene which effected "fabulous personal fortunes […] even at the exploration stage" (ibid, 37). By 1930, however, the bubble had burst and "[t]in production in Laos never rose higher than just over 1,000 tons annually" (Stuart-Fox 2008, 216) during French occupation. Only in the mid-1980 mining was resumed on a larger scale.

[103] According to EIA/Telapak, official logging quota for 2006 was only 31,700 cubic meters. At the same time, they estimate around 600,000 cubic meters logged illegally; a quota of 300,000 cubic meters for the clearance of Nam Theun 2 dam added to this (and it entailed illegal logging in the adjacent Nakai-Nam Theun NPA) (ibid).

[104] And Baird argues: "There are so many places along the timber commodity chain where it is possible for officials to gain 'illegal' benefits that it seems unlikely that any timber is exported from Laos without at least some technical level of illegality being involved" (2010, 31).

[…] the key factor determining the success of the timber industry was access rather than the quality of the wood itself; large areas of potentially valuable wood [...] were quite simply too remote and inaccessible to be commercially viable. (Cleary 2005, 272; also Peluso/Vandergeest 2001, 795)

A related extractive activity is wildlife trade. Hunting of wildlife was intertwined with monetization already in precolonial times[105]. The Chinese nexus with Lao wildlife was omnipresent in the country's history and continues today. Illegalized in the meantime, wildlife trade was profoundly affected by decentralization and market liberalization after 1986, leading to "increasing penetration of rural areas, starting with those nearest to major roads" (Nooren/Claridge 2001, 20). This increase in commercial trade was related to economic growth in China and Vietnam.[106] Since 1986, the complex and ambiguous relation between official wildlife legislation and realities on the ground often turned farcical[107], and although wildlife trade with China raises massive concerns, high prices are reached for tiger bones, bear gall bladders, sambar antlers and other animal parts deemed potent. Wildlife trade with Vietnam and Thailand is also significant. But it all already went beyond the regional scale since Laos is home to one of the most influential wildlife traders, Vixay Keosavang, or the "Pablo Escobar of wildlife trafficking"[108], and his Xaysavang Network, which is involved mainly as an animal "launderer" in the trade of African rhino-horns, elephant tusks, lion bones.[109]

4.2.3 Conservation frontier

Large-scale extraction exists side by side with cutting-edge conservation efforts. Thanks to the involvement of international experts and advisors, the Lao P.D.R. commands one of the most up-to-date and progressive protected area systems worldwide, such as, in terms of its ecological-scientific base as well as the ap-

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[105] As Walker (1999) notes Chinese traders "would "pay 'fabulous prices' for deer antlers [and] the gall bladders of bears, which were eagerly sought by Chinese pharmacists" (ibid, 32; quoting Bock 1884 and Izikowitz 1979; see also Nooren/Claridge 2001, 17).

[106] The convertibility of the Renmimbi in 1989 led to a rapid increase in wildlife imported to China (Nooren/Claridge 2001, 21).

[107] Such as the official publication of a book on Lao medicine listing protected species as ingredients (Baird 1995; Nooren/Claridge 2001, 24) or the sale of deer at a bus station in Northeastern Laos directly underneath a banner prohibiting the sale of the very same animal (observed first hand)

[108] See: http://www.nytimes.com/2013/03/04/world/asia/notorious-figure-in-animal-smuggling-beyond-reach-in-laos.html?_r=0, accessed March 5, 2015.

[109] In November 2013, Secretary of State John Kerry "honored" Vixay with the US State Department's "first-ever reward for information leading to the dismantling of a transnational criminal organization," namely the Xaysavang Network; the reward was one million US dollar, and is still pending. It seems notable that this step by the Department of State was justified, among other things, with reference to eco-tourism as feature of local livelihoods; see: http://www.state.gov/secretary/remarks/2013/11/217558.htm, accessed September 27, 2014).

proaches endorsed by the government. One fundamental principle in the planning of a national protected area system was to represent the full range of the country's ecosystems. The system dates from 1993 and is thus comparatively recent.[110] Even before Lao P.D.R.'s accession to the *Convention on Biological Diversity* in 1996, biogeographic analyses of potential sites for conservation were carried out (MacKinnon/MacKinnon 1986). Subsequent surveys by IUCN and the Lao government led to the First National Forestry Conference in 1989, which affirmed the importance of biodiversity conservation and culminated in the formulation of the *Tropical Forestry and Action Plan* in 1990. This plan made it the government's goal to bring 10.5% of the total land area under protection (see Robichaud et al. 2001).

From initially 68 sites proposed by various parties, 29 were considered suitable, which were further reduced to 17. These sites, plus one added for its historical significance, were officially announced as National Biodiversity Conservation Areas (NBCAs, later termed NPAs) by Prime Minister's Decree 164 in 1993 (along with several provincial and district protected areas). Selection criteria involved the presence of key species of conservation significance, habitat conditions and low disturbance, and 500 km² of contiguous forest minimum per protected area (Dwyer et al. 2016, 210). Today, 24 NPAs and two biodiversity corridor exist (GoL/IUCN 2016, 55f.) which account for about 15% of total land area. Provincial and district conservation areas add around 5%.[111] NPAs are managed by the Department of Forestry and its provincial (PAFO) and district bodies (DAFO), as well as through local assistance (Robichaud et al. 2001; ICEM 2003). Crucial for managing NPAs in an "inclusive" way is the dividing of the land into total protection zones, controlled-use zones, corridors and buffer zones (Forestry Law, Art.60).[112] Zoning ties into land classification and allocation, as well as into "village consolidation" programs (see above; ICEM 2003, 36f).[113]

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[110] Laos' "older brother", Vietnam, for example, had its first National Park (Cuc Phuong) inaugurated in 1962 by Ho Chi Minh himself.

[111] See: https://www.giz.de/en/worldwide/17453.html, accessed September 29, 2014.

[112] "*Total Protection Zone* is the forest area that is main habitat, feeding and breeding place for various wild animals and it is the place of diverse and dense vegetation. In this zone, it is strictly prohibited to conduct any forestry activity, to harvest any forest products, including unauthorized entry in this zone. […] *Controlled use Zone* is the forest area adjacent or close to the total protection zone. These areas must be protected similar to the Total Protection Zone, but people are allowed to use wood and forest products according to the management plan. *Corridor Zones* are managed areas for preserving tracts of forest to provide passages for animals […] *Buffer zones* are managed areas for preventing any encroachment and destruction in the Conservation Forest" (Forest Law, Art 24).

[113] Pioneered by the FOMACOP project of the Lao-Swedish Forestry Program in the mid-1990s (among others in Dong Phou Vieng NPA, Chapter 8), land classification and allocation was rapidly expanded throughout the country. German governmental development agency GIZ and its integrated rural development approach became instrumental for land allocation in Laos. See: https://www.giz.de/en/worldwide/17443.html, accessed March 30, 2013.

This is what the NPA system looks like on paper. It is noted throughout the reports and papers on environmental protection in Laos that there are significant gaps between discourse and reality. Due to lack of capacity for environmental protection on all levels of government and a prioritization of development objectives which puts the environment second or third, such cutting-edge policy is hardly enforced. Land allocation has widely been criticized for doing more harm than good to local sustenance in the context of commercialization and land competition (e.g. Vandergeest 2003; Baird/Shoemaker 2005; Baird 2011). Moreover, "only three NPAs in the country have reasonable levels of site management" (GEF 2012, 15), such as zoning, demarcating and enforcing totally protected zones, and even in these NPAs (such as Nakai-Nam Theun and Nam Et-Phou Loei) conservation seems to fight a losing battle (see below). Furthermore, actual NPA management is tightly linked with the military: as Dwyer et al. (2016) explain, conservation overlaps with the army's dual task of securitization and development, so much so that conservation efforts are at times seriously hampered by the military's claim to Lao forests. In fact, some of the first NPAs – especially along the borders with Thailand, China and Cambodia, as well as those close to Vientiane Capital – were (and partly remain) sites of insurgency, and became included into the system precisely for security reasons (ibid, 210). Because settlement in these places was discouraged for security reasons, their "remoteness" was actively produced. The military's "dual mission" means that the security rhetoric also provides "a means to access the resources of the protected area" (ibid, 212), such as high-value timber.

How is conservation a "frontier" (a zone of appropriation) if Lao NPAs involve local participation (ICEM 2003, 25) and explicitly call for "integrated conservation and development projects" (ICDPs) such as ecotourism (see 3.2.1)? Aside from the general issue that the enclosure of pure nonhuman Nature constitutes an act of ignoring and appropriating past reproduction work, first of all, NPAs are legally conservation forests.[114] The "inherent interest" of "travelers, tourism operators, investors and professionals" in biodiversity as codified in the CBD (see 3.1.1) is also expressed in the purpose of conservation areas in Laos, which consists in the maintenance of biodiversity not least for scientific research and leisure opportunities (Art. 11 and 24, Forestry Law 2007). Thus reflecting and legitimating the occupations of the educated (Western) middle-class, NPAs therefore do not simply limit "sociality" *per se*, but certain socialities (e.g. peasant) more than others. Local subsistence interests of local populations are not ignored, but

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[114] Conservation forests are distinguished from protection forests, which are seen as "more or less unmanaged and vaguely defined areas in steep terrain along international borders" (ICEM 2003, 45). Protection Forests cover 8.2 million ha. Despite the legal distinction, there seems to be considerable overlap between conservation and protection forests in legislation. Both overlap in their functions of protecting watersheds as well as national security, and are divided into total protection zones and buffer use-zones, and explicitly invite ecotourism and other ICDPs.

they come second. This is also indicated by the fact that Nature conservation predominantly exploits the socio-economic difference between periphery and centers, affecting weakly developed areas in particular. Secondly, the practice of zoning exemplifies how protected areas function as "inclusive fortresses", allowing locals to remain close to or even inside of them while still being driven by an exclusionary logic (3.2.1): the total protection zone (or core zone) is constructed closest to the ideal of pure Nature, i.e. with the highest degree of exclusion of subsistence activities. Since a Lao Nature reserve must somehow accommodate the subsistence needs of surrounding populations, the exclusivity of the core zone is graded down towards local development by controlled use zones.[115] Tourism and research are, of course, allowed inside (parts of) the core zone, so that locals can legitimately enter only as tour guides or research assistants. Furthermore, local populations become prime "targets" under exceptional scrutiny of quasi-/state regulation (Chapter 6). For these populations, conservation often exacerbates their marginality, "adding layers of governance that simply complicate being poor" (Dressler et al. 2010, 13).[116]

4.2.4 Conservation and extraction

Intuitively, Nature protection and conservation are opposed to extraction. However, such intuition falls short of the rationale of environmentalism itself which considers protected areas as productive units. The value of undisturbed ecosystems is commonly framed as "services" provided to society, such as, climate and water regulation. The "total economic value" approach regards NPAs as "productive units" rather than as areas putting a lock on valuable resources (ICEM 2003, 56ff). The economic values harbored by an NPA, ranging from the most immediate to the most general, global level, are expressed in monetary terms, in order to feed back into conservation work. Such valorization of untouched Nature is expressive of how ecocapitalism makes "nature pay its way".

Although such integration of ecosystem services into the overall account balance is still rudimentary, there is one productive link of conservation to extraction that is acknowledged: that of NPAs and hydropower dams. Healthy watersheds and functioning water catchments are essential for profitably operating hydropower dams; keeping such catchments intact for constant water flow is an ecora-

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[115] The difference between buffer zones and controlled use zones indicates further gradation, so that conceptually, we have a lower grade of prohibition on the part of "conservation" (controlled use zone) and a higher grade of prohibition on the part of "development" (buffer zone). Personally, I have not heard practitioners talk about "buffer zones", and if so, then identifying them with "controlled use zones" (like total protection zone and core zone). Corridor zones are more an exception.

[116] An indication is the reaction of villagers adjacent to Nam Ha NPA in a group interview, who openly expressed their discontent with the NPA, eager to "discuss again" and very much in favor of earning their living through rubber as well as with tourism.

tional prerogative recognized by the Lao government in the form of hydropower levies, though not as official policy but on a case-by-case basis (ibid, 68ff; Mainusch et al. 2009). An example is the Nam Theun 2 project which pays one million US dollar annually to the Watershed Management Conservation Agency of Nakai-Nam Theun NPA, which safeguards the "protection […] of the Nakai Nam Theun 2 watershed […] to supply enough water with low sedimentation to the NTPC multi-purpose project […]" (WMPA-SEMFOPII, 10). This way, one of the biggest hydropower projects in Southeast Asia is directly related to preserving one of the most important Nature reserves in the region. Thus, the "management" of local livelihoods in the park by WMPA is directly subject to profitable electricity production. Where no levies are paid, the importance of protected areas for hydropower and irrigation is still widely accepted.[117]

A simple dichotomization of conservation vs. development would thus miss the specific character of environmental governance in Laos. In turn, however, nature and society do not go together seamlessly either. Analytically, hydropower levies exert a "double inclusion" of people into NPAs and of NPAs into electricity production. Thus, on the upper end of the production line the management of people within NPAs is subjected to the conservative healthy watershed premise of large scale hydropower while, on the other end of the production line, social and ecological relations are fundamentally transformed. Nam Theun 2, for example, was widely criticized for its various negative impacts, from the problems of resettlement and logging prior to inundation up to current downstream health issues, increasing CO_2 emission, and increased pressure on the NPA because of easier access (e.g. McDowell et al. 2014). Rather than the resolution of a contradiction, such integration of conservation and development is socio-ecologically conflictive and economically productive. Dam levies are a function of profitable accumulation and cannot possibly be higher than what is profitable for the dam operators – the NT2 levy "represents less than half of one percent of gross revenues" (ICEM 2003, 69) – a cheap natures strategy after the end of cheap natures (see Chapter 2).

Conservation is systemically integrated in Laos' extractive landscape in much more twisted ways as well. Not just dams, but also illegal timber and wildlife trade stand in a productive tension with conservation. Illicit trade is not just directly undermining conservation: it can do so only as a function of conservation. As Nooren/Claridge's (2001, 214) illustration of wildlife trade flows in Laos impressively shows, NPAs are primary source areas of illegal wildlife. Such interplay is systemic yet highly complex as it is entwined with the multiple ambivalences in Lao administration (4.2). Illegal trade in endangered species is, furthermore, spawned by an increasing rural-urban divide with rising affluence in urban centers. Forest products are in great demand by thriving urban upper classes mainly in

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[117] An M.A. student of geography working on rubber in Luang Namtha told me about an interview where a forestry official from Luang Namtha Province unofficially stated that Nam Ha NPA is maintained only "because of the [Namtha] dam".

China, Vietnam and Thailand seeking distinction through conspicuous consump-tion of rare, expensive and wild things. Trade focuses on protected areas because the concentration of valuable (endangered, prohibited, rare) species is per defini-tion highest there. Generally speaking, prices rise with protection since transaction costs increase. Rising prices increase distinction value, and so, the incentives for extraction.[118] Related to this context are internal dynamics within protected areas: adjacent people are, by integration into ICDPs (3.1.1), subjected to a logic of re-stricted development that keeps them near the poverty line and isolates them from the resources for subsistence. An impoverished population thus lives alongside high-value resources, rendering poaching even more likely.

"The biggest threat to conservation is roads", a leading conservation biologist in Laos stated in a conversation (Robichaud, per. comm.). Indeed, the ambivalent (mutually supportive but also mutually undermining) relationship of conservation and extraction is facilitated by the infrastructure network that integrates centers of supply and demand ever more conveniently. Major roads pass by or even through each of the NPAs considered in this study.[119]

To sum up: while the preceding section (4.1) traced the shaping of the Lao up-lands diachronically, this section focused their synchronic constitution, adopting Barney's (2009) notion of relational resource frontiers. Extractive and conserva-tion frontiers reflect the ecocapitalist tension of conservation and development. Rather than being in opposition to large-scale extraction, conservation is a pro-ductive element in an overall extractive landscape. The tension between conserva-tion and development is installed in upland ecologies through the materialization of various frontier projects in the form of enclosures that disenfranchise local populations from their means of production. NPAs are thus crucial aspects of upland appropriation. As argued (2.3), the conservation frontier actively under-produces resources to be appropriated, and excludes local populations through inclusion. Ecotourism as a means of such productive "participatory exclusion" (Agarwal 2001) represents a recreational frontier, and it signals the completion of the historical appropriation of upland human and nonhumans by global political economy.

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[118] The relationship between legal protection and market demand varies, however. While protection status itself sometimes fuels demand, this is not always the case: although an exceptionally rare and endan-gered species, the Saola, for example, did not trigger much commercial interest as it has no value for Chinese medicine (Robichaud, pers. comm.). The Saola is nevertheless threatened by extinction be-cause animals are killed as by-catch; see http://www.tomdispatch.com/post/175968/ tomgram:_william_debuys,_a_global_war_on_nature/#more, accessed March 30, 2015.

[119] Nam Ha NPA lies at the junction of the North-South corridor leading directly through (linking China with Thailand) and the central corridor leading to Vientiane – two major destinations for Lao wildlife and precious timbers. Nam Et-Phou Loei lies along the northeastern corridor con-necting Thanh Hoa and Hanoi in Vietnam with the central corridor. Nakai Nam Theun NPA is situated close to the road linking Lak Xao (into Vietnam) with the North-South corridor and the Friendship Bridge at Thakhaek. Dong Phou Vieng lies relatively close to the East-West corridor linking Vietnamese and Thai port towns.

5 Ecotourism field of Laos

The previous chapter examined the diachronic and synchronic constitution of the Lao uplands as tourism landscape. This chapter zooms further into the ecotouristic field of actors in Laos, and it introduces those ecotourism projects which form the basis of further analysis. These will be situated within province-specific socio-economic dynamics. We will find the conservation-development tension within Lao tourism as a whole, i.e. between "sustainable" and "unsustainable" forms (5.1), and within ecotourism, i.e. between more "community-based" and more "wildlife-based" approaches (5.3).

5.1 Tourism in Laos

Colonial tourism to Indochina was well organized by the late 1930s.[120] Not least, the "hill tribes of the central and northern highlands of Vietnam and Laos […] held a fascination for French tourists" (Biles et al. 1999, 211). Although recreational centers such as Dalat, Bach Ma or Sapa do not seem to have existed in co-

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[120] Weekly flights of Air France from London via Saigon and Hanoi to Hong Kong brought tourists to Indochina on a regular basis (Biles et al. 1999, 209). Appropriate accommodation and cuisine developed in Saigon, as did the *Revue du Tourisme Indochinois,* which provided information on where to go in the colonies (ibid). It was possible to rent cars, book guided bus tours, and travel via the colonial railway network to Dalat, Hanoi, Phnom Phenh or Battambang (ibid, 210).

lonial Laos to the same degree, nor any structures amounting to what can be termed a tourism "industry"[121], the colonial infrastructure that did exist brought Western travelers also into Laos. During the American period, individual tourists visited the country (Marquardt 2010, 162) and the occasional traveler on the "hippie trail" may have made his or her way to Vientiane or into the Golden Triangle (Dakin 2003, 132; Wheeler/Wheeler 2005, 16f and 69f). During the socialist period until the New Economic Mechanism, the country was closed for foreign visitors, and it was not until in 1989 that it timidly opened up again.

The opening-up of Laos for tourists in the late 1980s was met with concerns on part of the government about harmful impacts as observed in Thailand. So as to avoid the influx of independent backpackers that had explored South and Southeast Asia since the 1960s and 1970s, the first national tourism plan (1990) strictly regulated tourism and was exclusively geared towards expensive package tour groups to select places like Luang Phabang (Harrison/Schipani 2007, 200; Neudorfer 2007, 100; Marquardt 2010, 162). Individual tourism was as good as impossible. In 1995, the government had recognized tourism's economic potential and made it one of eight national development priorities (Yamauchi/Lee 1999, 1). Visa restrictions were gradually lifted from 1990 onward; from 1994, tourists did not require booking a package tour and could travel independently; and the introduction of on-arrival visas (1997 for 15 days and 2006 for 30 days) further lowered obstacles for entry (ibid, 4). The *Second National Tourism Plan* (1998) highlighted four major types of tourists equally valuable: conventional sightseers, special interest tourists (e.g. ecotourists), cross-border tourists, and domestic tourists (Harrison/Schipani 2007, 200). From the early 2000s on, there was a growing focus on small-scale "quality" tourism. The *National Growth and Poverty Reduction Strategy* (2004) reflected the influence of ADB's policy when favoring "pro-poor, community-based tourism development" (ibid). Although the subsequent *National Tourism Strategy* returned to a broader scope, pro-poor community-based tourism remains a central pillar of Lao tourism planning. Tourist numbers grew steadily since the early 1990s. The average growth rate between 1993 and 2013 was 19% (GoL 2014, 5), turning the tourism sector into one of the largest foreign exchange earners (ibid, 20).[122] Total arrival numbers include short trips from neighboring countries, such as for business, religion and family purposes. While the number of such "regional tourists" surpassed that of "international tourists" by a factor of 5.8, the latter provided for 54% of total tourism revenue in 2013, spending an average of almost 70 US dollar per person per day (ibid, 7; Marquardt 2010, 165). Campaigns such as the *Visit Laos Year*(s) (2000 and 2012) and the *Stay Another Day*

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[121] In general, Indochina tourism "between the two World Wars wasn't mass tourism. One needed a few months to travel to Indochina and come back to Europe or America, and therefore the means to do so" (Biles et al. 1999, 211).

[122] Tourism earned 275,515,758 US dollar in 2008, about 5% of that year's GDP. Since then, tourism revenue has more than doubled, figuring at 595,909,127 US dollar in 2013 (5.3% of GDP).

initiative helped "unblock" Laos for recreation. In 2013, Laos was elected as *World's Best Tourist Destination* by the *European Union Council on Tourism and Trade* (ECTT) – not least due to the country's focus on Nature-friendly community-based tourism.

5.2 The ecotourism field

Government concerns regarding certain types of tourism were not unjustified. Backpackers, who travel independently and for extended periods of time on a limited budget, ostentatiously "off the beaten track" and carrying a counterculture mindset, increased opium tourism to the North (Neudorfer 2007, 112). In order to contain such forms of tourism which were seen as destructive, and to instead utilize tourism for poverty alleviation, the Lao tourism strategy sought to attract "good quality" travelers (ibid, 101). Consecutive surveys by the Lao National Tourism Association (LNTA) suggested a pronounced interest in nature as well as Lao and ethnic culture (e.g. GoL 2011; 2013). Thanks to Laos' dependency on the international aid "business", state-of-the-art models of sustainable tourism were quickly implemented (5.3.1 and Chapter 6). Accordingly, marketing focuses on high-spending responsible tourists, the so-called "Backpacker Plus" segment (Marquardt 2010, 171).

Although low-budget backpacking poses a problem to the viability and effectiveness of ecotourism projects which almost by definition imply rather high tour prices, conventional backpackers are still tolerated as clientele of the future (ibid). Despite the emphasis on sustainability, high visitor numbers are also welcome. This not only true for popular heritage tourism such as in Luang Phabang but also for less distinguished pursuits such as party and drug tourism to Vang Vieng or Sii Phan Dorn. Since as good as no-one is only an ecotourist when in Laos, sustainable and unsustainable kinds of tourism not only exist side-by-side, but they entwine. This is also true for some of the main actors of Lao tourism and ecotourism to which I now turn.

5.2.1 National Tourism Administration

Until recently, the *Lao National Tourism Administration* (LNTA) was the central administration body regarding tourism, in charge of tourism planning and administration, legal matters, marketing, training and coordinating with other ministries. It directed Provincial and District Tourism Offices, developed the national tourism strategy, produced information material, and trained and certified national guides (Harrison/Schipani 2007, 207). Initially part of the Ministry of Commerce, the LNTA was turned into a separate entity with ministry status, directly subject to the Prime Minister's Office (Harrison/Schipani 2009, 175; Marquardt 2010,

185ff). At present, it is being integrated into the Ministry of Information, Culture, and Tourism.[123]

The beginnings of the LNTA reveal the entanglement of the recreational frontier with extraction and conservation frontiers, as well as with Laos' troubled history. From 1998 until the end of 2002, its president was Cheng Sayavong who previously led the infamous *Bolisat Phatthanakhet Phoudoi* (BPKP), a powerful remnant of the dismantling of State Forest Enterprises (Barney 2011, 161 and 230). BPKP, i.e. Cheng, was to bring "development" to the uplands of Khammouan by way of large-scale logging on the Nakai plateau (in preparation of Nam Theun 2 construction, within and outside official concessions) as well as wildlife and drug trade (see Nooren/Claridge 2001, 95). At Lak Xao ("Kilometer 20"), Cheng and his BPKP turned *paa* into a literal *meuang*, with General Cheng as undisputed *chao*: "company offices, villas, a hotel, a nightclub, a restaurant, a large Buddhist temple, a market, a 110-bed hospital, and an airstrip" and even a small zoo were built (Stuart-Fox 2008, 171).[124] Cheng's zoo "included species which never or rarely appeared in the wildlife market in town" (Nooren/Claridge 2001, 94) and was developed as a tourist attraction. As a consequence of such development, the population exploded and Lak Xao turned into a major hub for wildlife (ibid, 165ff).[125] The General's power derived from a concentration process that merged, with donor pressure, two former state forest enterprises into BPKP. It was further boosted "through IMF rules in the late-80s that made provincial government budgets depended on the military timber monopolies" as well as "by the World Bank's concession to BPKP to log the inundation zone of Nam Theun 2" (Barney 2011, 165). In 1997, Cheng "lost his job" at BPKP (Stuart-Fox 2008, 220) and in

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[123] At time of writing, it is still too early to foresee the consequences of this reshuffling. It may mean a stricter streamlining of visitors' perceptions with government ideology (along with the recent tightening of NGO and internet policies), but also a more efficient bureaucracy.

[124] The documentary "Logging Lord - Laos" (see: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wrr4-HuVdF8, accessed October 2, 2014) provides insight into Cheng's kingdom. It reports on how the BPKP, in charge of about half of the national timber cut, destroyed the forest while Cheng gathered wild animals in his zoo. Overseeing not only the logging business but also the relocation program and development in general, Cheng also flew in children from all minority groups with his helicopter, presumably for education.

[125] The BPKP guesthouse reportedly served species to visitors that have never been observed in the wild (Nooren/Clardige 2001, 167). The General helped an American organization, the *Carnivore Protection Trust*, establish a conservation and restoration center at Lak Xao, a zoo-cum-breeding center for tigers and other endangered animals, but simultaneously engaged in wildlife hunting and trade (ibid, 175ff; Bourgeois Lüthi 2012, 155). Furthermore, "Given a key contract for highway maintenance in and around Vientiane, the BPKP logged […] most of the mature Honduras mahogany trees lining the road into the city. These trees, highly valued for their shade and beauty, were planted by French colonial landscape architects nearly a century ago. Commercially extinct in the wild, it is worth as much as US$ 6,000 per cubic meter as sawn timber, experts say. The general has allegedly also been involved in the trade of rare hinoki cypress wood, which his companies are said to have extracted by helicopter and shipped to Japan via Vietnam." See: http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Southeast_Asia/LJ05Ae01.html, accessed October 1, 2014.

1998 became Deputy Minister of Commerce and Tourism and Head of the National Tourism Authority (Nooren/Claridge 2001, 94). Dakin (2003) depicts the General as building homes all over Laos and receiving foreign guests like the Prime Minister. Consequently, he became "a bit too ostentatious for his fellow Party cadres" and was finally parked at the LNTA (ibid, 21). Meanwhile, the central government regained control over BPKP and its business operations. In 2002, BPKP was removed from the Ministry of Defense and placed under the Ministry of Finance (Barney 2011, 162) and "… new timber empires simply moved into the void" (ibid, 165 quoting Whitington 2008). The same year, Cheng retired from his presidency over LNTA.

5.2.2 Donors

A major donor in tourism development in Laos is the Asian Development Bank (ADB) of which Laos has been a member since its inception in 1966. From 1999 onward, ADB funded and assisted regional tourism development. In its Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS) framework that is directed towards regional economic cooperation (ADB[126]; see above), tourism is one of nine sector strategies, centering on poverty reduction according to the Millennium Development Goals; it should be "economically viable, ecologically sound" and have "minimal negative social impacts on the local community".[127] Through implementation of the *Mekong Tourism Development Project* (2002-07), Laos received approximately one third of a 30 million US dollar loan (Harrison/Schipani 2007, 204).[128] Overall, 20 community-Based Ecotourism (CBET) projects have been implemented in cooperation with other organizations, such as SNV (below) and UNESCO (Marquardt 2010, 207). Between 2009 and 2013, a further 10 million US dollar were granted for an extension of the project.[129] Recently, the ADB granted another loan of 40 million US dollar for the *Greater Mekong Subregion Tourism Infrastructure for Inclusive Growth Project* (November 2014–June 2019).[130] ADB's funding, focused on regional integration (especially along the economic corridors) and pro-poor tourism, remains a major driver for sustainable tourism in Laos and the region. Further ecotourism-related donors include the World Bank, the German Bank for Reconstruction (KfW), New Zealand Aid, and the Japanese government.

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[126] See: http://www.adb.org/countries/gms/overview, accessed October 1, 2014.

[127] See: http://www.adb.org/countries/gms/sector-activities/tourism,accessed October 2, 2014.

[128] High priority was placed on developing pro-poor, community-based tourism, focusing on infrastructure development and sustainable projects and regional cooperation in Luang Namtha, Luang Phabang and Khammouane Provinces.

[129] Into the provinces of Champassak, Salavanh, Savannakhet, Vientiane, Houaphan, Oudomxay, Sayabouli and Bokeo.

[130] Especially in Champassak, Khammouane, Luang Phabang and Oudomxay Provinces it will help "[…] to stimulate the creation of 27,000 additional tourism-related jobs by 2025. Based on current workforce participation rates, it is expected that 50% of these jobs will be held by women."

There is a tension in donor policy with regard to ecotourism and the GMS program of ADB would be one case in point. The involvement of the World Bank in Houaphan is another: NEPL NPA management staff pointed out that the World Bank plays contradictory roles, on the one hand supporting development through the Northern Upland Development Project (NUDP), which focuses on infrastructure (which negatively affects conservation), while on the other supporting conservation by funding the WCS project.

5.2.3 Technical Assistance

Technical assistants and advisors are perhaps the most crucial actors in terms of project implementation (Chapter 6). Dutch SNV used to be central not only in building up pro-poor tourism projects but also in designing national ecotourism policies. Operating in Laos since 2000, it provided mainly technical assistance to tourism development on both provincial and central levels. Although SNV focused primarily on the development of destinations off the main tourist trail, such as in Savannakhet and Houaphan, its advisors were also instrumental in the design of the *National Ecotourism Strategy and Action Plan 2005-2010*. This policy propagates forms of tourism which "benefit natural and cultural heritage conservation, local socio-economic development and spread knowledge of Lao's unique cultural heritage around the world" (LNTA 2004[131], 6). In this strategy, the model role of the Nam Ha project (5.3.1), in which also SNV advisors participated, was acknowledged (Harrison/Schipani 2007, 205). SNV provided technical assistance also to the inter-ministerial Ecotourism Technical Cooperation Group and the Lao Sustainable Tourism Network, and assisted (with UNWTO) in the formulation of the Tourism Law of 2005 (Harrison/Schipani 2007; 2009). Given its importance in pro-poor tourism in Laos, SNVs sudden withdrawal from this endeavor (around 2011) surprised even insiders.[132]

The German Development Service (DED) was an actor similar to SNV, until its integration into GIZ in 2011. One of the first ecotourism projects was established by a former DED staff employed to assist the LNTA in implementing a scheme similar to the Nam Ha project (below). His role within the LNTA was unspecific, however, as staff from SNV already filled the position (Marquardt 2010, 227f). A trained biologist, from 2000 on he set up a project in Phou Khao Khuay NPA just north of Vientiane Capital from where human-elephant conflicts

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[131] See: http://www.ecotourismlaos.com/directory/publications/lao_nta_ecotourism_strategy.pdf, accessed October 2, 2014.

[132] SNV was the largest deployment of staff in Lao tourism development (Marquardt 2010, 210). The new (2014) SNV Laos website does not mention tourism at all among its activities, not even under its past projects. Instead, a re-focus on "smart development" seems to have taken place, the aim being "[…] not only to improve individual lives, but to contribute to global challenges in three key areas that strongly impact the poor - food, energy and water".

had been reported.[133] Further DED staff was dispatched for capacity-building at the PTOs of Oudomxay, Xieng Khuang, Sayabouri and Phongsaly.

German governmental development agency GTZ was mainly involved in ecotourism through its *Rural Development in Mountainous Areas (RDMA) Project*[134], which focused on northern Laos. In 2004, GTZ established the *Akha Experience* in Meuang Sing, the first tourism-related private-public partnership (PPP) in Laos.[135] The restructuring of German developmental aid resulted in a merger of DED, InWent, and GTZ into GIZ. GIZ runs its own projects in Laos, as well as the CIM program (Center for International Migration and Development), which places development staff in Lao government institutions. GIZ implements many of its projects through independent agencies, such as IP Consult for the Integrated Nature Conservation and Sustainable Resource Management project in Hin Nam Nor NPA (2013-16), funded by the German government (EUR 3.8 million[136]). This project has an ecotourism component and tours have started recently.[137]

An exceptional project is the Gibbon Experience at Houay Xay in Bokeo Province.[138] It is the largest of just a few concession-based nature tourism projects so far, and is considered by some practitioners as the best ecotourism product in Laos; it is certainly one of the most popular.[139]

5.2.4 Private sector

There is by now a great diversity of tour providers in Laos. However, the largest national company, Green Discovery, is virtually the only private actor who operates tours developed and managed by the company on the national level.[140] The

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[133] Today, tours within the project are run by major companies such as Green Discovery, Exotissimo or Tiger Trail (below), and it is a destination for environmental education of Lao children and students, e.g. through Green Discovery's "Green Care Fund" initiative.

[134] See: https://giz.de/de/downloads/en-laos-Rural-Development-in-Mountainous-Areas-project-flyer.pdf, accessed March 7, 2015.

[135] In order to attract high-end Nature and Culture tourists, a 15-year exclusive contract was given to Exotissimo as the sole sales agent of the trek (Mumm/Tuffin 2007, 62f; see below).

[136] See: https://www.giz.de/en/downloads_els/Dt_EZ_Portfolio_Laos_EN1409558501427_47.pdf, accessed October 02, 2014.

[137] Concurrently, the Lao government is applying for the recognition of Hin Nam Nor NPA as *UNESCO World Heritage* and *ASEAN Heritage Park Site*.

[138] The ecotourism company Animo was granted more than 120,000 ha and established Bokeo Nature Reserve in cooperation with the forest authorities "with a practical approach and no external funds" (website). Animo sees itself as mandated by the Lao government "to facilitate the sustainable and profitable conservation of the Bokeo Nature Reserve in conjunction with the indigenous inhabitants of the protected area". This is achieved through a tourism project that involves overnight stays in tree-huts, zip-lining, monkey spotting, trekking and so forth.

[139] So much so that Green Discovery adapted the zip-line concept for a product in the south of Laos.

[140] Only Green Discovery maintains walk-in offices throughout the country. Many other providers either act only locally or as agencies that sell products of others, such as those of Green Discovery.

company's experience and infrastructure are thus exceptional which makes it a prime partner for donor-assisted ecotourism projects. Another well-established company is Tiger Trail. This Luang Phabang-based company, co-owned by a German, is not primarily involved in ecotourism into NPAs, although it sells tours such as the Night Safari (5.3.2). A further international player within the field of sustainable and ecotourism is Exotissimo, which caters mostly to high-paying customers. Exotissimo held an exclusive contract with the Akha Experience project in Meuang Sing (see Mumm 2006; Mumm/Tuffin 2007; Neudorfer 2007; Marquardt 2010). After GTZ had faded out of this project by 2006, however, tour quality declined due to lack of monitoring and quality management on part of Exotissimo (Marquardt 2010, 256). According to advisors that were centrally involved in the project, the Akha Experience is currently in disarray as it poses more of a cost factor and is of minor interest to a large international company. Nonetheless, Exotissimo features also the Nam Nern Night Safari (5.4.2).

This example of a private ecotourism actor, who is financially strong but weak in terms of sustainability, indicates a central dilemma of involving the private sector: on the one hand, its profit orientation is pivotal in making projects self-sustaining. On the other hand, the same orientation contradicts ecotourism when applied as conservation tool that become necessarily established in peripheral areas which automatically include high costs and low returns. The tension between conservation and development within ecotourism is thus again tangible in the role of the private sector. It is also present in the following introduction of the projects on which subsequent chapters draw.

5.3 Projects visited

In order to methodically trace the contradictions and conflicts that ecotourism in Laos is empirically struck with, a certain rationale of site selection was employed for this study. I chose projects that are seen as "best practice" models to be followed. They also bear distinct and explicit links among each other, in terms of approach as well as personnel. The projects visited are: first, the Nam Ha Ecotourism Project (NHEP) in Nam Ha NPA, Luang Namtha Province; second, the Nam Nern Night Safari (NNNS) in Nam Et-Phou Loei NPA (NEPL), Houaphan Province; third, a pending project at Nakai-Nam Theun NPA, Khammouan Province; and, fourth, the Katang Trek at Dong Phou Vieng NPA, Savannakhet Province. The first is certainly the best established and best documented ecotourism project, intended as a national model. It overlaps with the second in terms of personnel, but NNNS also represents a conceptual critique of the NHEP model (below). The pending third project intended to adopt the approach of NNNS. The Katang Trail, in turn, has personnel and conceptual links to NNNS; it holds a special position in this examination as an intricate example of ecotourism's frontier entanglements (Chapter 8). Since the third project did not develop far, I will

mainly draw from the first two projects, NHEP and NNNS, in Chapters 6 and 7.[141] In order to link back to the theoretical discussion, the remainder of this chapter highlights Lao ecotourism's internal differentiation along the conservation/ development line as embodied by NHEP and NNNS.

5.3.1 Nam Ha Ecotourism Project

Located in the northwest of Laos, the province of Luang Namtha has a dynamic and complex history as trade node and zone of refuge. Home to a great diversity of ethnic groups and a locality of overlapping spheres of influence from precolonial times until the wars of independence (see Walker 1999; Badenoch/Tomita 2013; Dwyer 2011), the region was and remains a much contested place next-door to China, Northern Thailand and Burma's Shan State.[142] Today, the area is being firmly integrated into regional socio-economic development. Highway No.3, part of ADBs North-West Corridor, was built on a main precolonial caravan route (Walker 1999, 31) by Thailand and China with grants from ADB, and it opened in 2008. It is rapidly changing lifestyles among a great number of communities as it improves access to and from villages.[143] Until recently, rubber cultivation was a major force of Luang Namtha's transition to capitalism (Alton et al. 2005; Manivong/Cramb 2008; Cohen 2009; Shi 2009; Schuhbeck/Chanthaphoumee 2012). Rubber was planted in the province since the mid-1990s, and it witnessed an expansion with price hikes in the early 2000s. It has swept across the province

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[141] Where appropriate or necessary, I will make additional reference to the other two (as well as to a Vietnamese project at Pu Luong Nature Reserve, examined in my M.A. thesis).

[142] For the kingdom of Luang Phabang the northwest was an important backyard (Walker 1999, 37). Commercial trade consisted of rice and other primary produce for salt, pottery, or Western manufactured goods for the uplanders (ibid, 39ff). Luang Phabang was in competition over the Namtha region with Nan, Mengla and Meuang Sing. The French sought to secure control and to disrupt Siam-centered trade relations by redirecting commercial flows towards its Vietnamese colonies. During the "cold" war, the region became one central focus of clandestine ethnic warfare. As a result of the Battle of Namtha in 1962, the US increasingly applied decentralized, proxy war guerilla strategies combining anti-communist warfare, espionage and USAID-sponsored humanitarian aid (see Dwyer 2011; Weldon 2000). After the "fall" of Luang Namtha, the northwest was divided. The communist north oriented economically towards China and Vietnam while the royalist south along the Mekong became integrated into international commercial networks (Walker 1999, 52ff). Chinese and Vietnamese road building created an east-west link that supported much of the northwest and remains a crucial infrastructural nexus until today (ibid, 55). After Pathet Lao's "liberation" of Houay Xay in 1975, a period of closed borders, heavy trade restrictions and border tensions with China ensued which ended in the 1980s.

[143] Road No.3 influences, for example, the cultural dynamics among Khmu villages by linking ethnic households and moral-religious community obligations with urban government networks of national development: "Ambivalent identities of civil servants and their troublesome efforts to integrate 'family' and 'government work' are manifested in their permanent back and forth movement on the highway […]" (Schopohl 2011, 252). Such newly fashioned, hybrid social identities, e.g. of Khmu civil servants, come with increasing social distinction and affect customs such as drinking rituals (ibid, 265) as well as the structures of local elites.

and the country. Chinese investors and the Lao government present rubber plantations as an alternative to opium and slash-and-burn cultivation. Despite a provincial ban on large rubber concessions, the crop was planted in smallholder and contract farming schemes, perceived by many as a path to development and wealth. In 2012, a GIZ report observed that in Luang Namtha, "rubber is covering a larger area than rice. Historically it is probably the first time that any crop is covering a larger area than the main staple food rice" (Schuhbeck/Chanthaphoumee 2012, 24). Plantations encroached into Nam Ha NPA which also poses a threat to ecotourism (Schipani 2007a). The persistent drop in oil and rubber prices, however, has already reversed this trend, and farmers increasingly switch to the growing of bananas, watermelons or sugarcane, instead (e.g. Friis/Nielsen 2016).[144] Regardless the specific crop, cash crop production results in the separation of land and labor and the concentration of the former among the more affluent (Vongvisouk et al. 2014, 2; Thongmanivong et al. 2009). The presence of large-scale monoculture cash crop cultivation, in combination with the persistence of subsistence economies (shifting cultivation, hunting), represents a conflictive context for forest conservation and ecotourism.[145]

A further problem for conservation and ecotourism lies in dam development. In November 2014, green light was given to the construction of Nam Tha 1 in Bokeo province (VT 11/21/14), a project that was under consideration for several years. According to a recent report on the New Mandala blog, the dam will affect more than 10,000 people from 37 villages, mainly in Nalae District; they are resettled and some may also move into the NPA.[146]

Nestled in the middle of the province's tenuous social ecology, Nam Ha NPA covers 222,400 ha (the fourth-largest in Laos) spreading over all five districts (Sing, Namtha, Long, Vieng Phoukha, and Nalae). In 2003, it was designated an *ASEAN Heritage Park Site*.[147] Nonetheless, Nam Ha is encroached by rubber plan-

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[144] According to the Vientiane Times: "The raw rubber price in the province had risen as high as 15,000 kip/kg in 2010 but by the beginning of this year it had halved to 7,000-8,000 kip/kg and is now only just over 4,000 kip/kg. About 60 percent of rubber growers are keeping their plantations and stockpiling the rubber waiting for the price to go up again but 40 percent have had to sell because they can't survive that long without income. The drop in price here simply reflects the situation in the world market […]" (VT, 10/21/14). The Vientiane Times further reports that some farmers have already sold and others even "destroyed their plantations and switched to growing other commercial crops" and many "are not expected to continue with this business" (ibid).

[145] For example, tour operators in Luang Namtha lamented that rafting was impossible during tourist season; the Nam Tha was too shallow as a result of the massive use of water by the rubber fields.

[146] See: http://asiapacific.anu.edu.au/newmandala/2015/11/24/the-silenced-river/, accessed: December 2, 2015, and: .http://www.internationalrivers.org/resources/nam-tha-1-3591, accessed March 7, 2015.

[147] See: http://chm.aseanbiodiversity.org/index.php?option=com_wrapper&view=wrapper&Itemid=110, accessed March 7, 2015.

tations and the North-West Corridor is right pulling through. Another road from Luang Namtha town to Nalae, which passes by the NPA along the Namtha, was recently upgraded by a Chinese construction company. According to various informants, a further road is planned to run parallel to the Ha River right into the NPA and connect Road No.3 with the one to Nalae, integrating the villages inside Nam Ha into the infrastructural grid. While the Nam Tha 1 dam may not completely wash away tourism in Luang Namtha, it may certainly change its face fundamentally. Overall, this dam exemplifies the contorted relationship of conservation and development in Laos: the NPA is useful for dam operation as it regulates water flow (see 2.4 and 4.2). The partial inundation of the NPA and surrounding areas, however, lead to resettlements into Nam Ha NPA which, paired with other dynamics (encroaching cash crops), might finally do away with the NPA as such.

Situated right within such multiple frontier tensions, communities in and around Nam Ha NPA become the focus of manifold political-economic forces. One individual may at the same time cultivate upland rice, paddy rice, and rubber, as well as take part in ecotourism activities and illicit wildlife trade. Struck with poverty, they become targets of development projects for sanitation systems, agriculture, health education. A more clandestine dynamic among the rural population is a slow but gradual and persistent rise in Christian converts, mainly among the Khmu but also Lanten, Hmong, Akha, challenging established political and social structures. In the person of "Pawn", this issue directly relates to ecotourism in the province.[148]

Since its inception in the early 2000s, ecotourism has been an important element of the frontier in Luang Namtha. An ecotourism market was created mainly in Luang Namtha town, but also in Meuang Sing and Vieng Phoukha, offering a wide range of trekking tours to ethnic villages in and around the NPA as well as rafting trips and bike rides. Ecotourism in Nam Ha NPA is the single main draw for Western tourists in the province. After international tourism to Laos took off, the government approached UNESCO in 1996 to establish a national test community-based ecotourism project that would help manage tourist influx in ways beneficial for poverty alleviation as well as for forest conservation, and that would avoid or reverse socially harmful effects of unregulated tourism (prostitution, drug

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[148] In January 2007, Somphone Khantisouk ("Pawn") disappeared on a road in Luang Namtha province and has not reappeared since. Co-owner of the Boat Landing Guesthouse (one of the first ecolodges in Laos) and a tour guide, Pawn was well-known in Luang Namtha. Without any official statement, many concluded that he had been abducted by the authorities for illegal religious activities. Several guides suggest that he and his partner used ecotourism as cover to make converts. One of the guides claims to have found the *Jesus Film* (see 8.2.1) on the office computer of Green Discovery which Pawn had supposedly worked with. Such gossip indicates how ecotourism in Luang Namtha is entangled with more encompassing symbolic-material forces of development at the frontier. Regional media suggests that Pawn's case was also related to the rubber industry (see: http://atimes.com/atimes/Southeast_Asia/LL23Ae01.html, accessed March 31, 2015).

tourism). "Because of its high degree of ethnic diversity, growing number of visitors, strategic geographic location and the presence of the Nam Ha National Protected Area, Luang Namtha Province was selected" (Schipani 2008, 71), and in October 1999 the UNESCO-LNTA Nam Ha Ecotourism Project was launched. A major project goal was

[…] to utilize tourism to assist in the social and economic development of ethnic villagers that otherwise had limited access to free market commodities or social support services. […] An equally important project goal entails using tourism as a tool for forest biodiversity conservation. By giving villagers a larger economic base, ecotourism helps to reduce their reliance on forest flora and fauna resources. (Lyttleton/Allcock 2002, 4)

In its intention to provide access to and establish "free market" conditions, NHEP perfectly fits the definition of a frontier project. This included countering slash-and-burn agriculture as well as illegal hunting and opium cultivation (Harrison/Schipani 2007, 212). The LNTA and the Provincial Tourism Office implemented the project while UNESCO's Bangkok office channeled funds and employed technical advisors. The project evolved through two phases (1999-2002 and 2005-08). [149] The NHEP pioneered model procedures and tools, such as, site-selection methods (Selection Matrix, SWOT analysis, customer survey); structures distributing rights, duties and benefits among actors (co-operative agreements, funds, fees); awareness-raising and education tools (guide manuals, trainings and workshops); measures to involve and monitor the private sector; and the setting of carrying capacity limits to the amount of visiting tourists (see Chapter 6). The Nam Ha project set precedents in terms of personnel as well; a number of its advisors remain influential in sustainable tourism development in Laos.

Presently, there are around 14 local and national private tour operators in Luang Namtha town, each running their own trails and working only with "their" respective villages in and around the NPA. While the Provincial Tourism Department (PTD) still offers its own tours, it has largely retreated as competitor focusing more on regulation through licensing guides and agencies and monitoring the practices of several actors. Project funding and assistance have phased out but a quasi-third phase was run in the context of New Zealand Aid's *Community Based Tourism for Sustainable Economic Development* project.[150] Though generally hailed

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[149] The first phase established structures are from scratch; the second phase served to re-adjust and consolidate the structures and procedures so that foreign technical assistance could be phased out and Nam Ha ecotourism would become self-sustaining. The first phase was funded mainly by the New Zealand government and the International Finance Corporation (IFC), the second by the governments of New Zealand and Lao PDR. Smaller or in-kind inputs were further provided by WCS, SUNV, GTZ, EU, UNDCP, Where there be Dragons (Lyttleton/Allcock 2002, 17).

[150] Launched in May 2011, this three-year project was funded with 4.2 million US dollar and aimed "[…] at ensuring communities share in the economic benefits from increased tourism by using the resources they have in a sustainable way and supporting the Lao Government objectives of

as successful creation of a working model, with almost one technical advisor per target village in the first phase, "it is unlikely there is a development project in the world that has maintained this level of expertise relative to the number of target communities" (Lyttleton/Allcock 2002, 47). Some say that exactly this massive investment into a model project made it barely replicable elsewhere.

More central to our concern, the mediation between conservation and development, is that, despite such spirited effort, one of the main goals of the project was not successfully reached: "Tourism has not replaced any livelihood strategies per se – no evidence goes to support that tourism has replaced swidden agriculture or wildlife hunting […]" (Gujadhur et al. 2008, 45). The view that NHEP did not contribute substantially to conservation is shared among other tourism advisors as well, and the fact that the word "ecotourism" is omitted from the title of the "third phase" (see above) is referenced by some practitioners as indication of the failure to support conservation activities in Nam Ha NPA. Largely "due to factors out of the project's hands" (ibid, 22), such failure is telling for the contradictory situated-ness of ecotourism in Laos more generally.

A diverging tourism trend in the province comes from its neighbors Thailand and China. Casinos such as the Golden Triangle in Bokeo and the Golden City in Boten are testimony to and drivers of a form of regional tourism that drops busloads of sightseers at the small night market in Luang Namtha, delights in fake cultural shows and ethnic villages, and generally excludes local communities from the revenues generated (ibid, 37f). This recent trend has hardly been analyzed so far but it seems decidedly different from carefully managed village tourism. Not only does the Golden City offer medicinal and culinary products from wildlife (EIA 2015): "A sex trade has already developed due to the construction of the North-South Corridor" that is not unlikely "to become a permanent fixture of the new highway's 'attractions'" (Gujadhur et al. 2008, 37). To which degree such tourism really differs from ecotourism in terms of commodification and folklorization (ibid) remains open to further research. However, "lawless" border casinos or artificial cultural villages have yet to show the benefits to local communities, something that the Nam Ha project already succeeded in demonstrating. Its failure to increase protection is where the project reaches its limits, and successors, such as the Night Safari, set out to transcend the classic model.

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poverty alleviation, heritage conservation, and inclusive economic development" (see: http://www.aid.govt.nz/media-and-publications/stories-and-features/april-june-2011/community-based-tourism-lao-pdr, accessed October 10,2014). The focus of the project includes the provinces of Luang Namtha, Xieng Khouang, Bolikhamxay, and Khammouan, and it explicitly "follows on from a successful community based eco-tourism project at Nam Ha in Luang Namtha province and is designed to scale up the Nam Ha experience in the other provinces" (see: http://www.aid.govt.nz/where-we-work/asia/asean-regional/lao-pdr, accessed October 10, 2014).

5.3.2 Nam Nern Night Safari

Ecotourism in Houaphan Province is more recent and much more small-scale than in Luang Namtha but it is equally nestled within comparable upland frontier tensions. Like Luang Namtha, the northeastern part of Laos was a traditional and troubled "crossroads" region (see Stuart-Fox 2008, 303; Tappe 2013). Although Houaphan had served as a bridgehead for the Indochinese communist revolution[151], and was considered a "liberated zone" after the Geneva Agreement of 1954, the revolutionary forces could not establish full control over the whole province until the late 1960s.[152] Former anti-communist pockets are today part of Houaphan's touristic landscape[153]. After war, Pathet Lao party cadres descended from their caves at Vieng Xay and the province was "left fallow" and turned into a center of re-education camps (Tappe 2013, 51f; Tappe 2011, 178f). With market liberalization, Houaphan remained a marginalized region of Laos and it is still one of the poorest in the country (Messerli et al 2008, 16).

Around the time that Viang Xay, "the birthplace of the Lao PDR", was turned into a tourist destination with SNV support (Tappe 2013 and 2011), agricultural transformation arrived in the form of maize contract farming. Village economies in the district of Houa Meuang (the district where the ecotourism villages are located) and in Houaphan Province as a whole are now heavily influenced by the production of maize for Vietnamese companies. According to Vongvisouk et al. (2014), maize contract farming has so far failed to improve livelihoods for various reasons (ibid, 9).[154] Maize is planted in Houa Meuang on a contract basis and mostly in a shifting cultivation-like fashion (ibid, 2). Expanding corn fields go in hand with an increase in upland rice fields further away from the roads (ibid, 4f) and, according to NPA management staff, are encroaching NEPL NPA. Since

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[151] A former US doctor sums up the infrastructural situation and importance of "Sam Neua" Province: "Sam Neua province in Northern Laos borders on North Vietnam. Sam Neua city […] had been the Pathet Lao headquarters since 1953. Colonial Route 6 starts at Hanoi, travels southwest into Laos at Sam Neua City, then turns south to join Route 7 […] [which] forms a junction with Route 13 south of Luang Prabang […] and ends at Vinh […]. Route 6 is an important line of communication and supply route into Laos from Vietnam – and during the Vietnam war also fed into the Ho Chi Minh Trail" (Weldon 2000, 93).

[152] Houaphan was not only heavily bombed since 1964 by the US. The Royalist forces, and namely Hmong *batallions volontaires* 26 and 27, occupied pockets in the area in close proximity to the Pathet Lao strongholds of Xam Neua and Viang Xay (Weldon 2000, 94). Both, Phou Pha Thi as well as the site of former Houa Meuang, former anti-communist strongholds, are inside of the core zone of current NEPL; the location of historical Houa Meuang is precisely the site of the tourist camp for the Nam Nern Night Safari (see box 4).

[153] Phou Pha Thi as well as the site of former Houa Meuang, former anti-communist strongholds, are inside of the core zone of current NEPL; the location of historical Houa Meuang is precisely the site of the tourist camp of the Nam Nern Night Safari (below).

[154] According to Vongvisouk et al., "27% of interviewees in the Houa Meuang District perceived that they produce an insufficient amount of rice for their own consumption, and 12% of the respondents indicated that they work harder compared to ten years ago but are still unable to produce sufficient amounts of rice for their household needs" (ibid, 6).

maize competes directly with upland rice, cultivation of the former goes in hand with shortages in the latter. According to the inhabitants of tourism villages, Vietnamese companies sell seedlings to villagers at an exclusive price if produce is sold back to them exclusively for a guaranteed price. The companies also provide general credit without interest to those working for them (with interest for others). Moreover, companies build roads to access the fields. Some villagers are inclined to expand corn plots at the expense of rice for subsistence and to meet the difference through market means (selling corn to buy rice). Some shop owners from one of the visited villages not only sell wildlife under the table but have also come to mediate between villagers and maize companies, buying the produce from their fellows and selling it to the company at a profit. This process, in which a few villagers gain from their position as intermediaries, seems to be going on also in neighboring villages.[155]

Nam Et-Phou Loei NPA, the largest NPA in Laos, covers 422,900 ha, mostly in Houaphan but also in Luang Phabang and Xieng Khouang Provinces. Former Nam Et and Phou Loei National Biodiversity Conservation Areas (NBCAs) have merged and the NPA is currently proposed for extension. As it is considered an "important site for the conservation of tigers, leopards, and their prey in Southeast Asia" (WCS), or plainly "the last remaining home for tigers in Indochina" (NEPL website), Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) has been working together with NPA management since the early 2000s to protect the Indochinese Tiger from extinction. [156] Thanks to the presence and efforts of WCS experts as well as funding from multiple sources, NEPL is one of just a few well-managed NPAs in Laos.

It is not only maize and upland rice planted by the villagers which increasingly encroach into NPA land. A recent headache of the NPA management is the upgrading of Pha Thi road.[157] Within the context of recent administrative reshufflings and the splitting up of Viengthong District into Meuang Hiam and Meuang Son, the Pha Thi road is envisioned to provide a shorter connection between Sam Neua and the new district capital of Meuang Son. However, it will cut right through the NPA's core zone – exactly where most tiger signs and traps are reported. The road would also provide access for maize cultivation. Furthermore, as

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[155] The profits from this particular shop and its maize business are re-invested into the production of cash crops such as ginger and mangos – for which the owner couple claims a plot of common, "unused" land planning to employ villagers for tending and harvesting (they participate in the work themselves). This is a striking example of how the process of enclosure springs up from the locality in an apparently seamless way. The couple proudly explains its economic success entirely with personal self-discipline and industriousness betraying a meritocratic justification of intra-communal inequality.

[156] See: http://www.namet.org/, accessed January 25, 2016; and: http://www.wcs.org/saving-wild-places/asia/nam-et-phou-louey-lao-pdr.aspx, accessed May 10, 2015.

[157] A road that was constructed by the Lao-Vietnamese allies in order to destroy the US radar station on top of Pha Thi mountain in 1968 (see below).

has been decided recently, several dams will be built on Nern River. Experts fear that the reservoir of one of these dams could flood not only current upland fields[158] but possibly also parts of the core zone, such as where the tourism camp is situated (at the site of old-Houa Meuang). According to an advisor of the Night Safari project, "the dam […] would likely kill the tourism program because it might have to be closed during construction and would probably ruin the natural feel", and "the park's image would be marred by it" (pers. comm.).

As mentioned, the NHEP did not quite succeed in terms of conservation. An NNNS advisor formerly involved with guide training in the Nam Ha project put it this way:

[…] the idea with ecotourism in Laos is that, by raising the people's income and raising their standard of living, they then will not really need to go and hunt. […] They prefer to just make money from tourists. But it hadn't really been proven to work. […] the Nam Ha model didn't necessarily really show there is less hunting and there is more wildlife. […]. So the projects […] just create income for people. And that income doesn't necessarily result in a positive change [for] conservation […]. So we tried […] to pioneer a new system to make it a lot clearer that the money that you and the guides are getting from tourism is actually based on wildlife.

Established in 2009 with funds from GIZ's CliPAD[159] project, NNNS represents a conservationist answer to Nam Ha seeking to become a model itself for more conservation-centered approaches to ecotourism. A central difference between NHEP and NNNS is already inscribed in the respective institutional set-up. While the NHEP was implemented through the Tourism Department – "and their mandate isn't nature" (advisor) – NNNS is integrated into NPA management at Nam Et-Phou Loei as one among several units: an enforcement team patrols the NPA and surrounding markets for wildlife hunters and traders; conservation out-reach raises awareness about regulations and values of the NPA; a monitoring and research unit keeps track of the outcomes of conservation efforts; land-use man-agement aims to increase agricultural production while minimizing forest degrada-tion and wildlife conflicts; and ecotourism seeks to establish structures of alterna-tive income based on wildlife protection.[160]

The advisor quoted above differentiates between "indirect incentive struc-tures" such as the NHEP and "direct incentive structures" such as NNNS. Indi-

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[158] Upland fields are planted in this area on the basis of temporary settlements called *sanaam* where those who work in the fields live for the most time of a year, apart from the main village. Ac-cording to the *naibaan* of Son Khua, about two-thirds of the village's population lives in these *sanaam* semi-permanently. Many of these settlements will be flooded by the dam. I thank Neil Dawson for information on the Nam Nern dam.

[159] "Climate protection through avoided deforestation", see: https://www.giz.de/en/worldwide/17 463.html, accessed March 31, 2015.

[160] See: http://namet.org/conservation.html, accessed October 10, 2014.

rect incentives are based on the assumption that villagers will regard their income from hosting tourists as an incentive to conserve the forest. NNNS, on the other hand, sets out to directly link tourism revenues and wildlife preservation: "So, in WCS we started to call the kind of tours that we are doing […] wildlife-based tourism, instead of 'community-based' […]. So all the incentives [are] based on the wildlife that you see."

The central feature of the Night Safari is floating down the Nam Nern by night, spotting different kinds of wildlife in the core zone of the NPA. It further involves an introduction to the project and to WCS's work in NEPL; a village walk through Baan Son Khua; upriver travel and bird-watching; dinner on a bank of Nam Nern and story-telling by the Khmu guides; an overnight stay at a campsite inside the core zone; and a morning walk around the camp (see box 4). The NNNS project centers on wildlife-spotting. Local revenue depends to a significant degree on a point system that prescribes the amount of money paid by tourists for the quantity and quality of wildlife sightings: the more and rarer the wildlife that tourists get to see, the higher the revenue (see Chapter 6). In the words of the advisor, "the incentive system is more direct than just being like: here you go, here is some income hoping that you're gonna get switched on and you understand that I wanted you to protect wildlife". Rather, working in tourism is propagated as prestigious and comes with obligations to follow NPA regulations (see Chapter 6). A further specialty of this project is that all villages that depend on the NPA for subsistence are integrated into its revenue mechanism, whereas only one village provides for the actual services, i.e. operates the host-guest structure[161], which it is paid for separately.

In 2013, the Night Safari won the *World Responsible Travel Award For Best Responsible Wildlife Experience*, and in 2014 the *World Responsible Tourism People's Choice Award*. Another tour currently opened by WCS in NEPL centers on trekking to Phou Loei. The international recognition of the NNNS derives not least from its peculiar approach, which is based on a critique of the NHEP. WCS's critique of NHEP's and other projects' shortcomings in terms wildlife conservation led to a new model that partly integrates tools from Nam Ha and partly attempts to transcend its limitations:

[…] in Luang Namtha […], the community-based model we started there [has] done pretty well, we were able to show good distribution of benefits with the villages and the income generation for villages, but the missing link was towards conservation. So we've sort of taken out that model from Luang Namtha and just like, take the lessons learned and stuff and try to do it better there [with the NNNS; M.K.].

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[161] For my differentiation between distributional and host-guest structure see Chapter 6.

Although it stresses Nature (wildlife), NNNS is still in fact "community-based" as it necessarily tackles the relations of local people to the forest. It stresses Nature in part because "the reason why there's money from a donor […] is to protect wildlife". The Night Safari is a young project that has yet to show its effects on wildlife conservation and local development. It is clear, however, that it competes with the attractions of other frontier projects, such as income from maize or wildlife. The Nam Nern dam will probably flood the current campsite and might necessitate a restructuring, if not the total discontinuation of this tour. Given that this product was awarded internationally twice already, one is left to ponder the chances of even internationally recognized ecotourism projects in Laos' extractive landscape.

These two projects reflect the inherent tension between conservation-focused and development-focused approaches within the ecotourism concept. I have argued here that, from the variety of ecotourism forms in Laos, at least two forms are distinguishable: one focusing more on rural development, with conservation being rather secondary ("community-based", exemplified by Nam Ha), and the other putting conservation first, e.g. through creating direct links between conservation and tourism benefit ("wildlife-based", exemplified in NEPL). Both versions include local communities and are community-based as well as wildlife- (or pristine forest-) based. However, the first version tends to be employed by development cooperation actors and the second rather by conservation NGOs.

Both versions equally distinguish themselves as "sustainable" from "unsustainable" forms of tourism (5.1). It is, perhaps rightly, supposed that local ownership of the tourism business and low "negative" cultural and environmental impact are principally better than appropriation by non-local actors and large-scale landscape disfiguration, environmental disruption, and local dependency. Moreover, sustainable tourism advocates and ecotourists tend to see tourism *per se* as problematic: it should not only be strictly regulated, but also avoid making local peasants overly dependent on a volatile industry which reacts to events entirely out of their reach – a reflection of ecotourism's self-limitation (Chapter 3). Nevertheless, ecotourism in Laos is ultimately conditioned by and reinforces its "unsustainable" other. Major actors such as the ADB, in turn, go with the current trend of crossing that gap between sustainable and unsustainable tourism by attempting to mainstream sustainability in more conventional forms of tourism.[162]

Thus, the tension between conservation and development, which is inherent in the current relational resource frontier, and which became a factual constraint with the realization of the Nature/Culture divide by NPA establishment and management (4.2.3), also structures the Lao tourism field. As I am going to describe next, this tension is further acknowledged and reproduced by the implementation of a link between conservation and development.

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[162] The "supply chain" approach is one such mainstreaming attempt, seeking to locate possible points of entry for local produce (e.g. handicraft, food), knowledge and service into the value chain of a tourism product.

6 Implementing ecotourism

Following last chapter's outline of the internal structure of the Lao ecotourism field, this chapter examines in detail one separate aspect of ecotourism practice: implementation. According to the overall rationale of the analysis, it traces the conservation-development tension further into ecotourism's practical realization. To the degree that ecotourism is realized, so is its epistemic-institutional universe (see Chapter 3). This and the following chapter demonstrate the practical entanglement of this set of homologous oppositions by an ideal-typical course of ecotourism practice constructed from the examples introduced in 5.3. The findings in the respective field sites are thus combined here in order to depict similarities rather than differences between projects. I suggest that, analytically, ecotourism practice consists of three relatively distinct but overlapping structures (see figure 3). These are: the implementing structure, described in 6.1, as the constellation of actors and activities which install the second, distributional, structure so as to integrate Nature conservation and rural development, as described in 6.2.; third, the host-guest structure, that is, the actual practice of an ecotour (Chapter 7) which brings the whole construction to life.

		Distributional structure	
Implementing structure	Funding Agencies	Project management	Technical cooperation
		NPA management	
Host-Guest Structure	Villages	Tour operators, guides	Guests
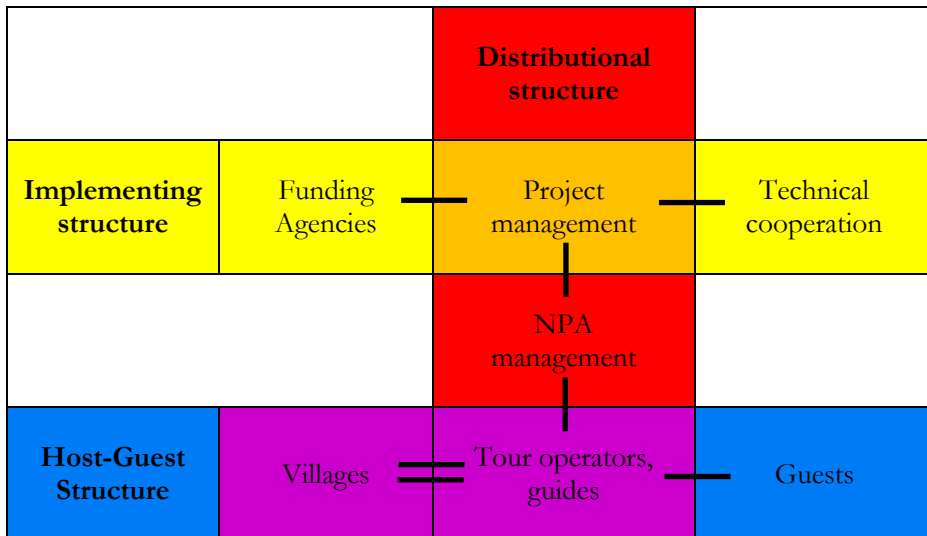
Figure 3: Tripartite structure of ecotourism practice

This tripartite structure of ecotourism practice involves distinct social actors, procedures, tools and activities. The implementing structure includes project management, technical cooperation and funding agencies; the distributional structure links the ecotourism project with NPA management, the tourism industry and the villages; and the host-guest structure links villagers with urbanites through the tourism industry and ultimately the whole distributional structure. The illustration indicates that villages are part of both distributional and host-guest structure, whereas tourist visitors and technical advisors belong only to one specific structure each. On a higher level of abstraction, however, it can be argued that the social differentials implied by the host-guest relation not only constitute the host-guest structure but also actor relations within the other two: clearly, relations of external technical advisors with Lao "counterparts" are structured according to analogous differentials.

6.1 Implementing structure

The purpose of the implementing structure is to put certain institutional arrangements in place so that Nature conservation and village development are practically integrated via the revenues flowing from touristic authenticity consumption. The goal is a structural arrangement which distributes duties among stakeholders as well as benefits arising from tourism revenue. The implementation of ecotourism projects in Laos, as in other development projects, involves the cooperation of government bodies (ministries and their provincial and district departments) and government funding (sometimes realized through loans by international financial

institutions), bi- or multilateral funding agencies, and implementing organizations and/or technical advisors. Foreign organizations and agencies respect national sovereignty and thus, in principle, concur with official government interests. Conducting conservation-and-development projects thus tends to serve enforcement of national legislation. However, the lack of economic and cultural capital puts the state into a dependent position vis-à-vis its external advisors and financiers. "Technical cooperation", while respecting national sovereignty, more often than not involves a relation of epistemic power inequality[163] where local realities are measured against "international standards". In the Nam Ha project, "[i]nternational advisors […] brought expertise in participatory development, anthropology, ecotourism, protected area management and training methodologies, and effectively transferred knowledge to their Lao counterparts" (Schipani 2008, 73). Without knowledge "transferred" from advisors to Lao counterparts no such project would be self-sufficient. Especially in the implementing stages, "the foreign advisors are the visionaries and the facilitators" (advisor, pers. comm.). Officially, decisions are made by the government, of course.

In Nam Ha, the project implementation team consisted of LNTA and its Provincial and District Tourism Offices (now Departments), and the Department of Information and Culture; on the technical assistance side, advisors were employed by UNESCO's Bangkok Office; funding came mainly from the New Zealand government but also IFC and the Lao government.[164] In the case of NEPL, the ecotourism team was integrated as a task force into the NPAs co-management by government actors and WCS's tiger preservation project; funding for the Night Safari comes mainly from GIZ through its CliPAD project, and another tour currently being developed will be funded by the World Bank through the GEF.[165] A combination of legalistic state power, experts' visionary power, and world-making financial power thus creates the institutional grounds to make ecotourism a reality.

Among activities regarding the implementing structure itself, capacity building is certainly the most central, that is, the training of project staff in administration and implementation matters, including clarification of bureaucratic procedures, expectations and formal requirements of donors, technical assistance and funding application in order to build up a project management in line with international standards (planning, monitoring, reporting, budgeting). In the case of Nam Ha,

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[163] This becomes evident in the fact that national legislation is itself often heavily influenced by foreign advice and interests.

[164] Moreover, a National Supervisory Committee and a Provincial Steering Committee were set up, consisting of representatives from several ministries and bodies at the respective levels (see Schipani 2008 for details), regularly providing review, feedback and guidance on future project procedure.

[165] It has been pointed out by an NEPL NPA management staff that the World Bank plays somewhat contradictory roles, on the one hand supporting development through the Northern Upland Development Project (NUDP), which focuses on infrastructure (which negatively affects conservation) while on the other supporting conservation by funding the WCS project.

internal workshops resulted in six-month work plans which provided grounds for the UNESCO "to establish periodic activity-financing contracts with the LNTA, and release funds to the project team after mutually agreed-upon milestones were met under each contract" (Schipani 2008, 75). This measure of establishing clear administrative procedures is not only intended to secure smooth project management but also to keep up morale among project staff who might soon become dissatisfied with complicated procedures (ibid).

After meetings are conducted among the implementation team to revisit and clarify project goals and procedures, inaugural public meetings are held for the local private sector, government staff, and development organizations working in the respective localities in order to introduce and promote the project, its intended goals, objectives, work plans, etc. to a wider audience of (potential) stakeholders. Schipani points out that

[w]hen the project team first proposed the development of several locally-managed multi-day forest treks to ethnic minority villages and suggested the potential benefits that this type of tourism could bring, many people in the room openly expressed reservations [...]. After citing several successful examples [...] meeting participants were still skeptical, but did come away with a better understanding of the economic potential of ecotourism and how it could contribute to heritage protection and management in the province. (ibid, 74)

It does not become clear what the concrete objections were in this case. Apparently, however, these reservations were of minor importance since the project finally proceeded and participants at least "came away with a better understanding". Schipani thus sees such meetings as "an important step in [...] ensuring that decision-makers clearly understand, or at least are informed about, the contribution that well-designed tourism initiatives can make" (ibid).

In order to show that sustainable tourism development is not just a pipedream but has real, positive effects on Laos' national rural development, projects naturally seek cooperation with other development projects working in the same geographical area and/or on the same issues. In Nam Ha,

[the] Wildlife Conservation Society was involved with training ecoguides and developing parts of the project's monitoring protocol. International volunteers from New Zealand's Volunteer Service Abroad and Canada's Sustainable Development Research Institute helped to develop and market community-based ecotourism products and the Netherlands Development Organization (SNV) provided a handicraft design and marketing expert. The UN Office of Drugs and Crime (UNODC) helped to fund the original Do's and Don'ts in Lao PDR poster. The European Union (EU) and the German Agency for Technical Cooperation (GTZ) helped to co-finance small-scale infrastructure, training and marketing and promotion. The Institute for Cultural Research conducted a range of initial research that was used to produce guide training handbooks and accurate promotional materials for tourists. (Schipani 2008, 96f)

The actors of the implementing structure install the distributional structure to allocate tourism benefits among villages as well as NPA management so as to integrate the two poles, conservation and development.

6.2 Distributional structure

The task of implementation is to create a distributional structure that allocates duties and benefits regarding ecotourism work. Crucially, it integrates conservation and development by distributing revenue to participating villages as well as to NPA management. The project's *raison d'être* are the village communities, who are perceived as environmental threat to be turned into environmental "guardians" by becoming part of ecotourism's distributive structure; cooperative agreements seek to enforce environmental behavior also beyond ecotourism practice (below). Further stakeholders are tour operators and guides to safeguard sound and sustained touristic practice. Let me now elaborate on some of the activities of setting up the distributional structure.

6.2.1 Locating the project

Ecotourism as discussed here is founded on top-down NPA establishment. Similarly, when it comes to deciding on the concrete location of a project, locals are almost never directly involved in the initial stages (which is why they are not registered in the implementing structure). As far as Laos is concerned, it was rarely if ever the local population who came up first such idea of establishing a project (this may seem banal but it is in fact not, given the ideals of local self-determination and ownership in sustainable development). A leading advisor of the Greater Mekong Subregion Sustainable Tourism Development Project, for example, concedes in an interview that the motivations of locals are taken into account usually after external organizations and government institutions have decided upon a locality. While this has obvious practical reasons, it also means that villagers' expectations and motivations tend to be taken into account only after the fact.

In case of the Nam Ha project, the initial impulse for creating a model came from the Lao government which approached UNESCO which, in turn, tapped finances from the government of New Zealand, and worked with the New Zealand-based organization Tourism Resource Consultants on the initial project design (Schipani 2008, 71). Because of high ethnic diversity, rising tourism numbers and the "strategic geographical location", Luang Namtha was finally selected (ibid). Given the mentioned social differentials within ecotourism's practice structure as a whole, consultations take place under the pretext of the power of external expertise. This is expressed in an advisor's narrative about the first steps of the Night Safari:

[…] before choosing the Nam Nern we [WCS] actually had some district officials and private sector people, local private sector people coming, we had sort of a half-informational meeting about tourism stuff and then we talked about the potential places that we should develop, and we arrived at the Nam Nern (laughs), probably with some coaching (laughs), but, you know… So then Nam Nern was chosen at the district level. Then we went to the villages […].

This statement points towards the scaling of decision-making: the district is approached first, followed by the villages. Because of the experts' epistemic and institutional power, consultations with Lao partners are often "half-informational" and contain at least "some coaching" by experts. When locating a project, furthermore, gaining objective and quantified data is considered important. Among the tools pioneered by the Nam Ha project was the Community-Based Ecotourism Site Selection Matrix "created to allow surveyors to assess 12 key subject areas that should be considered when selecting a site or community-based ecotourism development"[166] (Schipani 2008, 106). Whether in this specific form or not, such kinds of quasi-objective assessments and selections are made in any ecotourism project; and they serve as central mechanism to reproduce, through scientific methods, preconceived models. In the case of NEPL ecotourism, the site selection was based on a "Business Plan for Ecotourism" conducted by M.A. students from the Haas School of Business, University of California, Berkeley (Bhula et al. 2009), which was basically oriented along similar selection criteria (ibid, 22).[167]

Furthermore, expectations of potential customers are assessed either through visitor surveys, as in Luang Namtha (Schipani 2008, 107f) or Khammouan (Schipani 2009, 15f), or through *a priori* classification of tourists as "Backpackers", "Backpackers Plus" (also "Flashpackers"), "General Interest", "Special Interest", or "Other tourists", as in the case of NEPL (Bhula et al. 2009, 14f). Such analyses basically arrive at a consumer target group from Backpacker (Nam Ha) to Backpacker Plus (NEPL), both mainly differing in age, budget and need of convenience, while concurring in the interest in Nature, Culture, Authenticity, uniqueness and education. Taking preconceived notions of tourist demand as criteria for suitable sites mainly proofs the expectations of advisors regarding customers' expectations. The possibility of creating something truly unprecedented is virtually ruled out by relying on multiple-choice surveys and statistical categories. The possibility that tourists might be as much or even more interested in the reality of the place they visit as they are in pretended pristineness finds only marginal recognition in this circularity. In an informal conversation, an advisor commented on

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[166] Such as access; the community's motivation to develop tourism; scenery and landscape; cultural resources; variety of tourism resources; infrastructure; the ability to link to other tourist attractions; market demand (based on visitor surveys); safety; potential benefits for environmental conservation; potential benefits for cultural heritage protection; poverty alleviation potential (all rated from 1 to 10).

[167] Such as, product features (e.g. uniqueness, natural/cultural attraction, risk, accessibility), market attractiveness (e.g. willingness to pay, obstacles of entry), impacts on stakeholders, and logistics.

whether Pha Thi Mountain, close to the site of NNNS, would make for an interesting destination:

[…] because of the road construction that's already gone ahead, it didn't score that well and was ranked last. [...] There's also the issue of the villagers inside the NPA along the road, which doesn't exactly showcase a model NPA, which is something we probably don't want to promote with tourists or send mixed messages to villagers.

It seems that success is based on reinforcing stereotypes that visitors are likely to have about untouched Nature and Culture by selecting sites according to the criteria mentioned. Given the permanent mediatized reproduction of Nature as spectacle (2.2.4), it is not surprising that the resulting product will meet some actual demand. Such circular reinforcement of expectations may easily proceed from bottom-up as well: visitor expectations may already be in line with what advisors expect. But one central element of tourist demand remains largely unmet: to learn about the actual local conditions.[168] When it is not the specific situation in a certain place which it makes unique but an abstract notion of "iconic destinations" (Bhula et al. 2009, 15), the promise of learning about the lived realities of a place is taken back from very early on in the establishment of a project.

A further site-selection tool beyond the site-selection matrix and market analyses is the assessment of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) of potential localities. Since the visitor survey only indicates a general interest in community-based tourism in NPAs and given the subjectivism that the site-selection matrix entails, both must be aligned with a SWOT analysis of the respective ecotourism project (Schipani 2008, 77; on NNT: Schipani 2009, 30; for NEPL: Bhula et al. 2009, 12ff). Furthermore,

When a proposed site or circuit shows promise after these three initial levels of analysis (Selection Matrix, Visitor Survey, SWOT analysis), a community-based ecotourism resource mapping exercise and capacity assessment of the village's ability to host tourists follows. (Schipani 2008, 77)

Resource mapping generates further information about envisaged villages and entails an inventory of the area's "tangible heritage" as well as "the cultural do's and don'ts in a village, the agricultural calendar and where and when tourists are permitted to visit the community" (ibid). In addition, a Village Tourism Capacity Assessment gathers information on village demographics, organization and solidarity, sanitary conditions, hospitality skills as well as on the labor available for

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[168] Only in the face of obvious and undeniable large-scale mono-cultivation did the report of Nam Ha ecotourism's second phase recommend to openly discuss the issue of rubber with tourists in order to maintain the project's long-term viability (Gujadhur et al. 2008, ii and 36).

hosting tourist and strategies to provide for food, accommodation, guide service and local souvenirs (e.g. handicraft).

    We see that the early stages of project implementation involve top-down processes and the introduction of "Western" bureaucratic and economic standards as well supposedly scientific tools. Legitimized by the government, preconceived models and procedures are implanted by international experts and finance to finally turn local peasants from environmental threats into environmental caretakers. Environmental instrumentality is thus based on power inequity.

6.2.2 Forming hosts

Once potential products and localities are selected, awareness raising workshops are conducted with hosts-to-be in open fora to discuss aspects of tourism in simple and illustrative ways (Schipani 2008, 79). During such events, project staff and villagers have the chance to establish more personal relations so that concerns can be brought forward more openly (ibid). These workshops aim at working towards an informed consent by villagers on basis of equality (as much as possible), and, thereby, as a way of verifying villagers' willingness to engage in tourism. Villagers tend to embrace the economic opportunities of ecotourism and novel experiences of meeting rarely seen Westerners. Personal reservations tend to remain unexpressed in open-forum contexts, however, if village leaders are in favor ("The *naaibaan* decides, we follow.").[169] Democratic open fora are thus largely unable to even out village-internal power differentials (see 3.1).

    The community's willingness was further confirmed in the Nam Ha case by a secondary logistics survey of the potential tours, which measured walking times, costs for village-based services (food, lodging, guides), and transportation cost, and determined a price "for the first trial tours, with commercial viability heavily influencing where the project would develop its first tour programme" (Schipani 2008, 80). The case of NEPL is slightly different in that there was from the outset only one village envisioned to be actively involved in ecotourism, whereas 12 villages (all of which have an impact on the amount of wildlife that can potentially be seen) participate passively by receiving a share of the revenue into their village funds.[170] The logic of selection was somewhat different here, but the general problem of "economic viability" was also at the heart of the selection process.

    Village hospitality trainings (e.g. on how to cook for tourists) precede seeking villagers' consent to run first trial tours with a limited number of tourists.[171] Led

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[169] Commenting on basic democracy in project villages more generally, an advisor at NEPL says that "you say 'raise your hands' and then people raise their hands 'cause they see their friends, their next door neighbors, raising their hands".

[170] Hence the analytical differentiation between distributing structure and host-guest structure.

[171] Depending on the project design, the involvement of the private sector may already start here. In the case of the DED-designed ecotourism project in Pu Luong Nature Reserve (Vietnam), select tour operators were invited to such trial tours to get in touch with villagers and exchange

by the project team, which gathers feedback from trial tourists and information about host-guest exchanges on views and expectations, such tours are crucial.

For example, when discussing sleeping arrangements, more than half of the village indicated hosting tourists in their homes might get tiresome and suggested a purpose-built lodge should be built in the village. The project later co-funded the construction of a traditional Kmhmu-style house […]. (ibid, 81)

This type of information might not be attainable without the actual hosting experience of locals. Such seemingly small decisions – homestay or lodge – have a central impact not only on the concrete practice of tours (that tourists may become tiresome for hosts), but also on the way income is distributed in an ecotourism village; private homestays mostly imply a more unequal distribution than communally managed lodges.[172] Whereas such decisions are alterable, others necessarily establish disparities that cannot be amended. An established product (a tour) necessarily contains route-internal differentials that stand against the ideal of distributing revenue widely and evenly. There is usually only one village within a given tour which profits most, usually the one where tourists stay overnight and spend money for eating and drinking – or, in the case of NEPL, the one in which tourism working groups (boatmen, handicraft, cooking, accommodation) are active. The installation of such working groups is a further step in the implementation of the distributional structure, which spawns similar village-internal differentiations.

Although subsistence villagers are well acquainted with the hosting of guests, the satisfaction of international guests from the educated middle-classes of Europe and North America requires certain skills and knowledge which are locally not commonsensical. According to Schipani, in Nam Ha "the service standards in terms of sanitation, variety of food and cleanliness in general needed to be improved before a village was ready to accept tourists" (ibid, 84f) – the standards had to be "raised" during trainings in order to keep up with the tastes of the clientele. This implies a qualitative difference in hospitality, as was argued in Chapter 3 (see box 3): touristic hospitality is, in principle, a complete reversal of subsistence hospitality, which is granted on a basis of reciprocity and enacted within a whole symbolic universe of honor and respect, gift and credit. In Nam Ha, hospitality trainings

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thoughts and expectations. During such a tour, a French-Vietnamese agency owner went his own way, establishing exclusive contacts with villages not included in the management's plan (see Kleinod 2008).

[172] The specific lodge referred to by Schipani here meets, as is shown in Chapter 7, the interests of hosts as well as guests because of its location at the edge of the village.

[…] focused on teaching both men and women sanitary food preparation and presentation, meal planning, housekeeping and basic accounting. Hospitality training also involved a degree of cross-cultural instruction for host communities so they could better understand the preferences of international tourists and ways to ensure that hosting tours would be commercially viable. Village-level service providers were taken on study tours to Luang Prabang and given short practical exposure training in guesthouses in Luang Namtha. (ibid, 85)

Furthermore, such trainings entail crash courses on first-aid and legal issues. Although hospitality trainings focus more on building specific skills needed to appropriately satisfy demand, and on selecting individuals, such trainings have a general impact on village behavior as the imperatives of cleanliness and aesthetic appearance pertain to the host village as a whole. Often, it is the local tourism workers who feel in the position to educate their fellow villagers in such matters. Thus, the effects of hospitality education go beyond ecotourism *per se* and tend to reinforce social differentiation at the village level.

This is so mainly because the process of selecting individuals for the service teams tends to be based on "traditional" inequities. Women are responsible for cooking, accommodation and handicraft production (e.g. weaving) while men are guides and communicators. This division of tourism work is based on traditional working patterns, in which women tend to bear the bulk of the everyday workload as it is, which tourism adds to. Women seem to embrace the additional work uncomplainingly, however, and even express happiness about these comparably "easy" tasks which earn them and their families some extra money. Regarding the chance of working in tourism, the question of workload is a more general selecting factor as are habitual disparities based on economic and cultural inequalities between villagers. As an NEPL advisor explains:

[…] we had an opening hiring process, so we announced everyone in the village coming. That's a village […] that's had a hundred and fifty-nine families and we only had spots for maximum fifty. […] But then anyway, only thirty something people showed up. I think a lot of the villagers thought that they wouldn't be able to do it because they had to be out in their rice fields […].

This links back to basic democratic procedures just referenced. The ultimate selection is basically left to village-internal dynamics. In fact, the only practicable way of establishing community-based tourism such as the projects discussed here is to build on, rather than to counteract, certain internal disparities. The poorest of the poor are unlikely to become active figures in ecotourism work, due to lack of household members that could be spared from necessary subsistence labor. This comes "naturally" with a certain habitualized insecurity regarding new endeavors, as the same advisor indicates:

You could say that just by having a differential of benefits within one village creates a problem. Even though we had an open hiring process still a lot of villagers didn't come. Some of them probably didn't come because they did think correctly: "I won't be able." Some villagers probably thought: "It's not for me," like, or they didn't feel confident to go to the interview. And I have the suspicion that some villagers told other villagers "nah, you shouldn't go".

Most community-based tourism projects necessarily build on those individuals who are most entrepreneurial and enthusiastic about risking to pursue something new. Ecotourism practitioners are thus always caught in a dilemma: on the one hand, there will be always differentials between villages and villagers whereas, on the other, the more families participate and the wider tourism income is spread the better for conservation and/or local development. The inclusion of as many participants as possible is thus desirable – possibly up to the point where this purpose overrides market-economic reason:

[For] each one of these [village tourism] groups we said: ten families, [...] maximum ten people in each group, that's a lot. That's fifty people doing the job that probably three or four could do. And one family can only have one person working in any one group. Just split the income among families. Now that's [...] the role of the advisor is to come in and get these ideas and people say "oh yeah that sounds fair, that sounds good" [...].

The distribution of roles and benefits established in village-service teams is an example of how ecotourism monetizes livelihoods by allocating monetary income to certain hospitality tasks. The village lodge at NHEP was also constructed through paid local labor. This process does not necessarily imply, however, that ecotourism subjects these places to a total neoliberal regime where only market forces rule. Rather, these forces are managed and dosed in favor of fair income distribution, even against rationales of efficiency. Nevertheless, village-internal socio-economic differences are partly alleviated but necessarily also reinforced by the establishment, selection and training of village tourism service groups.

6.2.3 Guide training

Partly separate from the activities related to prospect host villages is the training of guides since, according to the schema presented in 6.1, there are two basic kinds of guides: those coming from a district or provincial center and village-based guides; the first belong to the mediators, the latter to the village working groups. In all projects visited both types were involved. In the case of Nam Ha, town-based guides are mainly employed by private tour operators, and are further distinguished according to seniority: the more experienced represent lead guides, youngsters function as their assistants. Normally, but not always, a single tour consists of a lead guide and an assistant. Their tasks are multiple: to make tourists comfortable and safeguard their security; to prepare meals and accommodation; to

communicate, entertain and develop good relations between hosts and guest; to interpret and translate; to maintain friendly and honest relationships with villagers over a longer period of time, etc. It is a position which thus requires a range of abilities, from sociability and group-psychological sensitivity, alertness, and out-goingness to the knowledge of different languages (especially English but also minority languages), cooking techniques and the cultural particularities of hosts as well as guests. Town-based guides are thus professional, comparably highly skilled workers. Village-based guides, in contrast, have rather low-skill tasks, such as the carrying of foodstuff from one village to another or helping to prepare lunch along the trek. High- or low-skilled, becoming a guide involves formal training and selection. In NEPL, guides have to

[…] participate in a 30–45 day training programme and pass a written and oral examination administered by the Provincial Tourism Department before receiving certification as a Provincial Tour Guide. The provincial tour guide curriculum […] consists of subjects ranging from history, ethnic groups, nature interpretation, guiding techniques, community participation, first aid, tourism and protected area laws and regulations, tourism impacts and monitoring as well as English language instruction. Guide training consists of four hours of technical instruction and two hours of English language training each day. There are several field trips to existing tourist attractions and established trekking trails during the training. At the end of the course each trainee is required to create and lead their own tour programme as part of their practicum. (Schipani 2008, 83)

Schipani does not mention whether trainees had to pay or were paid for their participation. The procedure of guide licensing establishes the rules of rational and objective, formalized and strictly regulated qualification and acquirement of cultural capital as the legitimate way to access ecotourism practice and distribution. The procedure established by the Nam Ha project "is cited as good practice for both national and provincial tourism strategies" (Phommavong 2011, 53). The individuals are mainly drawn from the younger population of provincial towns. Often, as in Nam Ha, also government staff is trained to work as tour guides to supplement their salaries (Schipani 2008, 83).

While town-based guides belong to the mediators between host and guest, village guides, on the other hand, are exclusively on the side of hosts. Basically, they are members of village tourism working groups that generate direct income for involved individuals and households. Ideally, such as at NNNS, village guides also interpret local history, indigenous use of plants, etc., and provide their abilities (e.g. as boatmen) so that the product draws to a great extent from local, unique knowledge. In more classical trekking tours, however, village guides tend to remain peripheral to the experience in that they mainly assist the town guide and the group.

My suggestion of a town-village differentiation within the group of guides is a structural argument that is not contradicted by the fact that, at times, village-based

guides can and do become employed by town-based agencies; the Nam Ha project clearly established the opportunity for them to become promoted "if they enrol in the training course and pass the examination" (ibid). This is not often the case, however, which is not surprising given the lack of formal education in remote villages in Laos. Town-based guides hailing from the area, in turn, possess cultural capital via their formal education as well as by their upbringing in conditions not dissimilar from that of the villages visited. Although the town-village distinction becomes empirically blurred, it is nevertheless a structural feature. This is evident in the training of village guides which is only "an abbreviated version of the provincial guide training" (ibid). The difference is also evidenced by the salary: while, in NHEP, provincial guides earn 9-15 US dollar a day, village guides receive 5 US dollar a day plus the chance to be promoted (ibid). Such unequal relations between these types of guides are turned upside down at times in practice, however, for instance when town-based guides are underequipped to service remote village in an economically feasible way (see Chapter 8.4).

Guide training in NHEP is a clear example of how project-related international expertise has impacts beyond the project via the practice of implementation: "The current system of licensing national, provincial, village and site-specific tour guides was influenced by the Nam Ha model and is now included in Lao PDR's Decree on the Implementation of the Tourism Law" (ibid). This shows how, through the implementation of an ecotourism model project, which is informed by the international regulatory discourse and practices of (sustainable) development, "international standards" materialize as factual constraints locally as well as nationally.

6.2.4 Constructing tourist facilities

Remote villages cannot be visited with trained villages and guides alone. There is no off-the-beaten-track without beaten tracks, that is, with infrastructure and facilities to serve the habitual *hysteresis* of customers (3.3.2). Trails need to be upgraded and maintained to ensure safe trekking for visitors who are usually not well acquainted with "jungle" conditions. Tourists, furthermore, need toilets and washing opportunities as well as appropriate accommodation (clean blankets, good mosquito nets etc.). In NHEP, the project constructed "clean water supply, small suspension bridges, purpose-built village-based ecolodges, village museums, handicraft markets, viewpoints and tourist information centres" (Schipani 2008, 85) mostly via employing local labor on a monetary basis and using local materials. Four water pumps in the initial host village of Nalan were provided through EU and BMZ cooperation. Such infrastructure obviously not only serves visitors but also villagers and is thus a more general contribution of ecotourism to rural development. Unsurprisingly, villagers often made direct, positive connections between tourism and development projects in the sense that ecotourism is good because it brings in development projects.

As already argued, the introduction of new structures often trigger unintended dynamics: trails are not just used by tourists but also traders and hunters so that upgraded trails may facilitate dynamics such as wildlife or timber trade, or easier influx of plastic products sold, for example, by mobile traders, Chinese or Vietnamese. The impacts of tourist infrastructure depend on local specifics as well as on specific choices, such as between private homestays or village lodges. For example, the Pu Luong ecotourism project in Thanh Hoa Province, Vietnam (Kleinod 2008 and 2011) opted for private homestays, naturally preferring the more spacious and cleaner, that is, wealthier households. In this context, the construction of toilet and shower facilities by the project brought in a very peculiar dynamic of internal competition where the exact spot of these facilities decided over the success of certain homestays as guests tended to pick the homestay with shortest walking distance to the toilets. Some homestay owners, due to their positions of influence, managed to have constructed the toilet (which was financed by the project) close to their homes (against initial plans); others who could afford so financed such facilities at their own expense. Generally, tourist facilities, while "basic" from the view of the guests, may turn into contested local resources since from the perspective of villagers they often represent luxuries. In terms of the accommodation-sanitary facilities combination just referenced, it seems that the particular problem observed in Vietnam was avoided in the case of the Lao projects when villagers openly uttered reservations about private homestays and opted for co-managed lodges (above). This model generally seems to enable more equitable distribution of benefits, since several households take part in its management regardless of the condition of their private houses. Also communal lodges come with strings attached, however, such as reinforcing traditional gender inequity since women are responsible for cleaning and preparing the accommodation. Private homestays, in turn, may be more likely to counter such stereotypes.[173] Likewise, a village lodge may as well increase local inequities by exploiting the aspect of walking distance, for instance by privileging the village shop closest to the facility.

The case of tourist facilities highlights how the conservation-development tension, as institutionalized in the host-guest relation, materializes in physical structures on the ground: while facilities must be "basic" in order not to clash with tourists' expectations of pristineness, they are also an unconditional necessity for receiving tourists to begin with. "Basic" as they are for guests, these facilities can appear as the opposite from the hosts' perspective, as expensive and possibly even unnecessary (such as toilets), but also as beneficial for everyday life (as in the case of upgraded paths or water wells). One way or the other, these facilities bear the

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[173] As was the case in the Vietnamese example: at one homestay, whose owners where quite young, gender roles were reversed and the woman managed the family tourism business – an arrangement which is close to impossible in a community-managed facility.

potential to profoundly influence village dynamics in the effort to conserve as much local culture as possible.

6.2.5 Distributing duties and benefits

The smooth cooperation of different stakeholders, their compliance with the tenets of sustainable development and conservation as well as the distribution of tourism revenue are regulated by formal contracts and agreements (for specific contents see annexes in Schipani 2007b). In NEPL, income from tourism for village funds depends on compliance with NPA regulations, so that reported infractions negatively impact the amount of payments. As the advisor puts it,

[…] we set up a system of contracts, so it's clear that your responsibility as a guide is not only to give information to tourists and [so on], but that your responsibility and of everyone in your family who is benefiting from your income is to protect wildlife. And if you or anyone in your family gets caught breaking the rules of the protected area then you lose your job as a guide at least for year. I mean the idea is that it's a privilege to work in tourism.

In the pioneer project of NHEP, cooperative agreements were formalized to manage stakeholder cooperation (see Schipani; 2008, 89; Schipani 2007b; Schipani/Marris 2002; Gujadhur et al. 2008). Practitioners and observers describe the formulation process as participatory, involving

[…] a straight forward series of meetings between villages, authorities and tour operators to co-draft and negotiate the content of each customized document. […] A working draft of the agreements passed a final review between signatories, and was then co-signed by the concerned company, village leadership and relevant public agency […] with articles on the provision of food and lodging, trail maintenance, waste management, permit fees, use of local guides, village fund allocations, training opportunities, monitoring, tourist education and orientation, and conflict resolution. (Schipani 2007b, [4])

Such agreements are seen as necessary to secure fair stakes for villagers as "many stakeholders [are] consulted and involved in their conception, creating localized ownership" (ibid). Through such contractual creation of economic stakes for local communities, the latter are, furthermore, singled out as prime targets of law enforcement and surveillance:

An important conservation component of the agreement includes an article obliging the village to abide by selected national wildlife and protected area regulations […]. While obeying such laws are [sic] the responsibility of all Lao citizens, the introduction of the ecotourism agreement provides an effective forum for raising awareness about the existence and rationale behind such laws and of the need to respect them. Furthermore, by including such laws in a stakeholder cooperation agreement as a specific obligation in return for the opportunity to participate in and benefit from

ecotourism development, there is likely to be a greater community resolve to abide by such laws. (Schipani/Marris 2002, 6)

Stakes created by ecotourism for local communities in or next to NPAs thus provide levers for conservation: compliance with conservation laws and activities becomes a condition for local development through tourism. The community may not only become obliged to "not [cut] trails up to 200 meters to either side of trails and reporting illegal wildlife hunting" (Gujadhur et al. 2008, 16), but also to assist in conservation more directly:

Additional protected area co-management responsibilities included in the agreements require the village to establish a Village Conservation Team for the purpose of collecting information on the illegal activities of outsiders in the village area and on the presence of threatened wildlife species. The agreement also requests that the community assists the protected area staff when able in field management activities conducted in the village area such as patrolling, natural resource surveys, and demarcation of core zones and village boundaries. (Schipani/Marris 2002, 6)

More succinctly put: "The immediate economic benefits that arise from ecotourism can provide a very effective 'spring board' or entry point for engaging local communities in the co-management of the protected area" (ibid, 8); participating in tourism is dependent on taking the position of "stewards and custodians of biodiversity" (CBD).

Perhaps the heart of any ecotourism project is the mechanism which distributes revenue according to the conceived integration of conservation and development. This normally occurs in three distinct ways: first, the funding of NPA management activities, e.g. via NPA entry fees; second, the distribution of revenue among a range of villages and villagers, e.g. through village funds; and third, the funding of tourism management (private and public) and infrastructure maintenance. Without these channels, a tourism project can hardly be defined as sustainable or as ecotourism. An exemplary breakdown of income distribution of the Nam Ha project is illustrated in figure 4. Through this scheme, 69% of the revenue goes directly to the villages via village services, handicraft, food, transport, accommodation and guiding (Marquardt 2010, 213, but see Gujadhur et al. 2008, 17[174]). NPA funds are raised through deducting a certain percentage from tourists' payments in the form of an entrance fee. In Nam Ha, this item constitutes approximately 4% (or 1 US dollar per tourist per day; Marquardt 2010, 222) of the overall tourism revenue; according to the account balance of NEPL, NPA fees averaged approximately 3% between 2009 and 2013.[175]

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[174] Gujadhur et al. calculate with an estimated 35%.

[175] I thank Paul Eshoo for providing the numbers. It is generally not possible to provide exact breakdowns that apply to every single tour because of the scaled arrangement involved: the
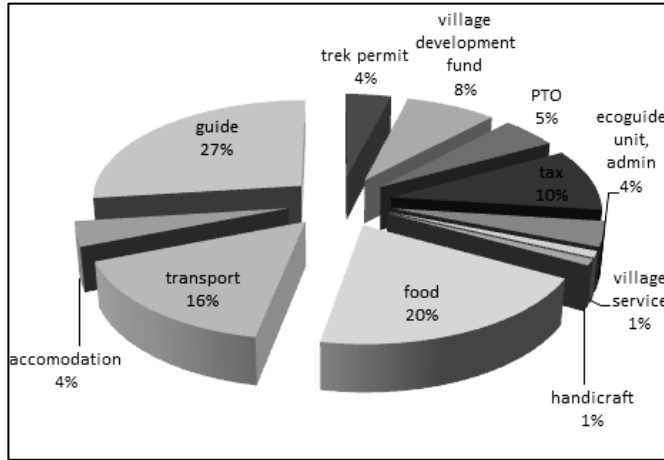
Figure 4: Revenue sharing in NHEP (see Gujadhur et al. 2008, 15)

Tourism revenues further go into provincial tax and administration costs. Important from the scope of this examination are those aspects of distribution that benefit conservation and village development, i.e. community funds and entry fees. Both conservation and development benefit from tourist revenues within the practice of the host-guest structure (Chapter 7) so that the distributional structure must be seen as institutionalized integration of conservation and development.

Village revenue usually constitutes a major share of total tourism income. There are two kinds of village revenue: firstly, money goes to individuals actively involved in tourism service (the working groups). This money belongs to the respective households and is mostly invested in purchasing household items, medicine, and so on or is saved for situations of need (see Ounmany 2014, 110 for NHEP). Secondly, revenue mostly flows into village funds, either those found in every Lao village or funds established by the project. In the case of the Nam Ha project, 8% flow into a village development fund – which in that particular case is "a bit of a misnomer as it is […] not used so much for general village development activities […] but for maintenance of village tourism infrastructure and equipment" (Gujadhur et al. 2008, 16). Host villages in Nam Ha also dispose of village bank accounts into which accommodation fees are paid; the books remain with town-based actors such as the Provincial Tourism Department or the respective tour operators (ibid). The use of these revenues depends on the agreed-upon needs of the villages and is thus susceptible to village-internal power differen-

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price of a tour depends on the number of participants, so that different tours (also depending on length) produce different revenue outcomes.

tials.[176] Depending on the project, funds may have slightly different functions. The conceptual difference between Nam Ha and NEPL projects (indirect vs. direct conservation benefit; 5.3) is reflected in the regulations of revenue distribution via village funds. In the case of NEPL, funds are used strategically to integrate all villages impacting on the wildlife in the given area (13 in total) while only one village participates actively in tourism work (and thus receives direct household income). The responsible advisor narrates:

[…] we hope that the idea of the fund is: you aren't gonna go in and hunt and your village gets some communal benefits. So, the amount of communal benefits you get depends on how much money is in the fund. […] for every tourist that goes on the tour, the village […] will get five thousand Kip. […] and then if tourists see wildlife they will get more money.

The NEPL project seeks to create direct incentives for the non-extraction of protected wildlife (especially tigers and their prey) through tourism, and village funds are the central mechanisms to create and distribute these stakes in untouched wildlife. An intricate regulatory scheme makes revenue dependent on the actual wildlife seen by tourists. The various price tags attached to Nature by the project were fashioned in the following way, according to the advisor:

[…] we had a few different people go up there and we knew how much wildlife they saw. So we can now estimate the average number of wildlife that you'll see. And then […] we set a price for the village development fund that will be included in the tour price. So we chose like ten dollars. So ten dollars per tour would go into the village development fund that would be split by nine[177] villages. […] the way we arrived at ten (dollars) was it was written in […] the feasibility study of the business students [see Bhula et al. 2009, 26] […]. Okay, you know how much maximum you can spend and we figured […] that it would be fair and easy to understand that half, about half, would be guaranteed. So it turned out that nine times five thousand is forty-five thousand.[178] […] And then we figured, based on the average number of wildlife seen the previous year, how much […] would likely be spent. And we just figured […] sambar deer and otters […] should be twice as much as the others: those are landscape species. […] they may or may not be more rare but in terms of what we're trying to do in [NEPL] those were the top five species […] we're trying to protect. Otters represent the health of the river, sambar deer represent the health of mixed deciduous forest, tiger the overall health. […] So we figured out those prices and it just seemed also easy to villagers to explain […]. And then […] tigers wasn't actually

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[176] A Green Discovery manager related how in the past, bank books were kept by village headmen who regularly embezzled money, so that now the books are at the Green Discovery office in Luang Namtha and headmen usually collect the money once a month, justifying how it will be put to use.

[177] It was only recently that four more villages were integrated.

[178] Roughly assuming a USD-LAK parity of 1 to 10,000, LAK, 45,000 is "about half" of 10 US dollar.

included in the fixed fee for tourists, so we explain to tourists: "well if you do see a tiger we'll ask that you as a group pay like two hundred dollars into the fund" […].

Such construction of village funds represents an intriguing mix of goals and constraints. The overall amount slated for village funds was determined from the business plan, based on assumptions of financial viability, with a 5% revenue from the overall tour price (calculated with 200 US dollar) (Bhula et al. 2009, 25f). Now, the project's aims enter into the calculation by splitting up the total viable amount into a "guaranteed" and a conditional part. The latter is structured by the project goals to protect tigers and their prey by quantifying qualities. Whereas in Nam Ha conditions for fund revenue were rather simple (a general deduction from tourist payments), in the NEPL case fund revenues become more explicitly used as regulatory tool to make villagers conform to NPA regulations and project objectives.

6.2.6 Including the private sector

Any project must seek to include the private sector in order to be sustainable. This is common sense among tourism developers in Laos. A CIM staff working for tourism marketing in the Lao National Tourism Administration, for example, held the view that current ecotourism projects in Laos are, like development cooperation, insufficiently concerned with commercial viability. Running projects successfully over a longer period of time, especially after experts and external funding have been removed, requires professionals with sustained economic interest in the destination; who develop it according to the prerequisites of sustainable nature and culture tourism; and, most importantly, who advertise as well as run and administer tours on a regular basis. The private sector is not simply a "necessary evil" but actively contributes to the supposedly positive outcomes of a certain project design, as in Nam Ha, where "[p]ublic-private cooperation resulted in a rapid expansion of tour circuits and the economic, social and environmental benefits they deliver" (Schipani 2008, 96).

That the private sector is to be included is thus common sense; how and when this has to happen varies, however. In Nam Ha, the provincial (i.e. governmental) eco-guide units used to run the treks during most of the first phase. After Green Discovery was successfully brought in as a national company, the diversification of the local market through promoting small-scale local inbound tour operators became a focus of the second phase. In NEPL, the project was designed as an "incubator" (advisor) to "breed" a viable product and was, at the time research, hoping for the private sector to take over[179], but this proves to be problematic. Major reasons seem to be related to the tension between rural development and the tourism business as referred to by the CIM staff above: regularly, and almost

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[179] After ranking all potential operators, Green Discovery was again the company of choice. No contract was signed during research, however.

by definition, ecotourism is established in remote places involving high transporta-
tion costs. Running distant locations, although exactly what ecotourism focuses
on, tends to not add up for competitive commercial enterprises which, neverthe-
less, are seen as vital for long-term success.

One major reason to integrate the private sector is its proficiency and interest
in promoting the tours, raising their visibility on the tourism marketplace. Before
the private sector is included, marketing is the task of the respective project. Sev-
eral strategies are applied, including word-of-mouth and social media promotion
via tourists; printing and distributing brochures, flyers, and posters, creation of
websites, and hosting of familiarization trips (e.g. with the media, potential tour
operators, or potential funding partners[180]). It is certainly true beyond the case of
NHEP that such initial project-conducted marketing is "[…] focused on drawing
the type of tourists and tour operators that show an interest in nature, culture and
behaving in a way that show sensitivity towards local sensibilities" (Schipani 2008,
95). For instance, the NEPL-managed Night Safari printed posters that were hung
up by a volunteer in central spots likely to be frequented by potential clientele.[181]
One of the few pictures of a tiger taken in the park by a camera trap is used in
publications of WCS as well as on huge posters, put up throughout the villages
adjacent to NEPL NPA and headlined: "We are proud to have tigers" (see Chap-
ter 7). The form and content of marketing frames actual tourist experience as
marketing promises prestructure what is expected from a certain product. The
communication with the customer about the product usually confirms predicted
prejudices of tourists (which, in turn, derive from the spectacularization of Nature
and ethnicity in cultural industries; 2.2.4).

To sum up this chapter, an integrated conservation and development strategy is
implemented through a set of organizational structures: the implementing struc-
ture emerges from national and/or international interest in sustainable develop-
ment and consists of government actors, international expertise and (national and
international) funding. This structure implements the distributional structure
which integrates conservation and development by involving villages as "target
groups" as well as project and NPA management. The process of implementation
is clearly dominated by international expertise and finance, i.e. the world-making,
generalizing power of making local realities conform to diverse kinds of "interna-
tional standards" – from bureaucratic funding procedures and substantive capacity
building among "Lao counterparts" to the installment of contractual agreements,
formal licensing procedures, and quantifying selection criteria. The power inherent

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[180] I had the chance, for example, to take part in a "fam trip" organized by the NEPL team for the
country manager of the World Bank to Laos and some of her colleagues.

[181] Such as, at the entrance of the Tourist Information in Luang Phabang, or in the restrooms of the
newly constructed in-place of Nam Phou in downtown Vientiane. This latter idea may have
been a lesson learned from Tiger Trail, which produced stickers to put on toilet lids.

in such procedures is ultimately geared towards integrating natural resource con-
servation with village development in a proactive way. The moral-economic stake
in untouched resources, created for villagers through benefit mechanisms, must be
seen as an artificial construct deriving more from the interests of supra-local ac-
tors than from local ones.

The dominating force in this stage of ecotourism practice is the alliance of in-
ternational expertise and capital with national legislation. Advisors are central
figures as visionary, trained and experienced experts, often with charismatic drive
to realize a vision of sustainability. The implementation process involves expecta-
tions about customers' expectations which turn out as largely self-fulfilling proph-
ecies due to overlaps of the social milieus of advisor and guest. Advisors' defini-
tional power is delegated by the institution of the implementing structure. Up to
this point, however, there is no actual tourism project since without paying cus-
tomers the distributional structure created by the implementation team is only
virtual. All arrangements examined here are "made flesh" (Bourdieu) only within
the third aspect of ecotourism practice: the host-guest structure. Its emergence
ideal-typically concurs with the fading-out of the implementing structure and of
the foreign advisor who "hands over the keys" to the NPA and its legitimate use
(4.2.3) to his socio-structural fellow, the tourist.

7 Practicing ecotourism

The distributional structure just examined comes into effect only when paying customers arrive. Ideal-typically speaking, the tourist enters the field when the advisor leaves or at least fades into the background. The structures are in place and from now on ecotourism practice is determined by the customer's demand and *habitus* (3.3.2). The practice of a tour realizes the integration of conservation and development installed by the distributional structure, which is enlivened by tourists' money. Given the dominance of the ecotourist's *habitus* and demand within the host-guest relation (3.3.3), this chapter asks: How is supply matched with demand and vice versa? Or: How do troubled and dynamic places, such as those under consideration here, come to pass as localities where authentic experiences can be made? This means asking for the way in which the landscape of tourism (Chapter 4) becomes a landscape for tourism. By focusing on this question, we continue to follow the conservation-development tension further into practiced ecotourism.

   This chapter therefore looks at host-guest practice as the central moment of ecotourism as integrated conservation and development: it is here that a certain societal nature relation – the reproduction of relatively "cheap" nonhuman nature in the rural periphery via the reproduction of human nature in the urban center – is enlivened through bodily, partly habitual partly nonidentical, practice. Thus, in this as well as in the next chapter, all that has been said so far gets bundled. Pick-

ing up the analytical dowsing rod introduced in 3.4, this chapter traverses the ideal-typical territory of an ecotour in Laos from beginning to end and "dig deeper" where our instrument deflects either along the host-guest axis, or the development-conservation axis, or both. As argued in Chapter 3, since guests tend towards conservation and hosts towards development, the conservation-development tension reproduces global inequities. Therefore, I aim to pin down how localities at the capitalist resource frontier successfully get to represent "as yet untouched" Nature and Culture, and how inequality is thereby (re)produced. In line with the preceding chapter, the following interpretation focuses more on commonalities and regularities rather than on individual diversities of ecotourists' experience.

My examination of host-guest practice follows the customer in the doing of an ecotour. The ideal-typical development of the various aspects of tour practice starts with its preconditions, such as the formation of expectations (7.1) and of the tour group (7.2.); it delves into Nature and Culture experiences (7.3. and 7.4) and ends with tourists' reflections of their experiences (7.5). A final section discusses how the demand of "authenticity" is met in "inauthentic" settings (7.6). During this examination we witness how false-and-real epistemic-institutional contradictions become re-actualized and affirmed. We will see that the "ecotourist bubble" (Carrier/MacLeod 2005) consists of a "jinxed" relation of the tourist to the specific locality which facilitates authentic experience in authentic settings. Chapter 8 will zoom out of ecotourism practice and in on the complex intricacies of a certain locality, thereby also shifting the focus from the guests' side to the hosts' side of ecotourism.

7.1 Preconditions of host-guest practice

Let us start this examination with a brief look at the demographics of the guests. Almost all the tourists interviewed (n=26; 15 interviews) derived from industrialized countries.[182] 54% of the interviewees were female. The average age was 35.5 years, the youngest person being 21, the oldest 58. Similar numbers can be drawn from the statistics of the Night Safari[183] and the feedback forms of the Katang Trail.[184]

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[182] The only exception in my sample is a couple from South Africa, which is commonly seen as an industrializing country.

[183] Average age: 40 (n = 181); over 90% international visitors (including non-GMS countries); I thank Paul Eshoo for providing the data.

[184] Average age: 37; gender proportion almost exactly half-half; over 70% from EU countries alone (n = 384).

7.1.1 General motivations

The main motivation to come to Laos was its being "less developed", "less tour-isty", more "quiet" and "chillaxed" than both life in the home country and travel-ling in Thailand or Vietnam. This perception is much in line with the state-directed national tourism marketing of Laos (see box 2). All those interviewed were on a journey through several countries in the region, typically involving Thai-land (13 out of 26), Cambodia (14), Vietnam (13), and Burma (7). For some, Laos was mainly picked because it was on the route and turned out to be a quiet, laid-back country. For most, ecotourism was not the main, let alone the sole reason for coming to Laos but only one of many activities pursued, including visiting Vang Vieng or the Four Thousand Islands (8) and Luang Phabang (12).[185] Vientiane Capital is less popular overall. The ideal holiday would generally involve a combi-nation of several things, such as, diving and hanging out at the beach, travelling off the beaten track, learning about foreign cultures, "good food", and, more rare-ly, volunteering for a local development project. Interestingly, many noted that it was not of primary importance to them that what they had booked was an "eco-tour". In fact, about half had only a vague idea of what ecotourism meant to them. However, most said that giving something back to local communities was a major plus of the respective tour, whether this was a main motivation or just "the icing on the cake" (DE, f, 24). Those for whom the "eco" part was decisive were as old as or older than the average age and/or had a background in sustainable develop-ment/tourism study or work.

Expectations are thus quite vague generally, roughly revolving around the jun-gle and remote ethnic villages. This is unsurprising since, structurally speaking, guests "fall from the sky" of the abstract global marketplace and into a certain locality. Due to the whole setup, tourists are necessarily foreign to any concrete place they visit, with no connection to it other than their choice for this tour ra-ther than another one. As we will see, fundamental unfamiliarity with the place and a detached position within it is characteristic of the whole tour experience. Thus, having no expectations is the best strategy for many so as to prevent disap-pointment: "[…] if you have expectations or a clear picture of something, then it can only be worse or like you imagined because you already have expectations"[186] (CH, m, 29). Thus, having no expectations is a way of making sure that the pro-spective experience will exceed expectations. However, some travelers do have quite concrete expectations based on former experience. This is again the case

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[185] Numbers are based on tourist's statement of the exact category. The number for "Four Thou-sand Islands" or "Luang Phabang" might be even higher, as also those who just stated to travel through Pakse or "Laos from North to South" (or the other way around) may have stayed in the respective localities.

[186] "[…] immer wenn Du Erwartungen hast oder wenn Du ein klares Bild von etwas hast, da kann es eigentlich nur schlechter oder gleich gut sein mit Deinen Erwartungen. Weil Du ja schon Vor-stellungen hast."

among those of the average age or older, or with a sustainable background, respectively. Having a concrete picture in mind from a similar experience makes satisfaction a more precarious affair, as the respective tour competes with first-hand experience of a comparable product.[187] Concrete comparison does not automatically mean a clearer expectation, however:

I think it's kind of hard to set expectations for something like this because how do you compare a tour in Lao to even a tour in Vietnam or a tour in Myanmar. [...] what is a National Protected Area here could be something very different anywhere else in the world. So it's hard to set expectations like that. But having tried a lot of things I had an idea in my head of what I hoped would be included and what I hoped would not be included, and I think in that broad sense it [...] exceeded expectations (US, f, 27).

This quote anticipates an outcome of touristic experience: the general satisfaction of the customers interviewed. This satisfaction is premised on the initial expectations and how they are reflected upon. When compared with certain standards or experiences elsewhere, expectations of a tour may need some "readjustment" in order to not thwart satisfaction from the outset:

I actually [had] really high expectations and I was comparing it to our company, expecting over the top American customer service [...] but taking a step back and realizing [that] this is Laos and embracing it for what it is, it far exceeded everything. [...] once I readjusted those [expectations] and saw it for what it was, which you have to do in Southeast Asia, then it was perfect. (US, f, 32)

By taking a step back and taking it for what it is, finally, "[the tour] felt more naturally actually"– a strategy that succeeded in even "far exceeding everything" (ibid). Although not all expectations may be met by a tour – such as the hope to see wildlife – there is a general interest among guests to handle their (vague or informed) expectations in ways that are possible to be met by supply.

7.1.2 Forming concrete expectations

From the perspective of the conservation-development tension, and in line with the contradictory *habitus* of ecotourists (3.3.2), two aspects might be seen as crucial for customers: authenticity and accessibility. A project finally hinges on the satisfaction of both aspects, but these are in a tension with one another, as is exemplified by information provided by the Lonely Planet (2014), a central shaper of guest's expectations. Concerning trekking in Nam Ha NPA, the guidebook writes:

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[187] Inside of Laos, this may not be the case for the Night Safari, as its mode of experience is quite unique, but the Nam Ha trek is easily comparable to other national and regional eco-trekking products.

[…] Nam Ha NPA is one of Laos' most accessible natural preserves. That accessibility is a blessing and a curse. Both around and within the mountainous park, woodlands have to compete with pressure from villages of various ethnicities […]. But the inhabitants of these villages are also learning the economic benefits of ecotourism. [The NHEP] has tried to ensure that tour operators and villagers work together to provide a genuine experience for trekkers while ensuring a minimum impact to local communities and the environment. (ibid, 106)

This passage addresses the actual messiness of an ecotourism locality instead of simply employing jargon (but also leaves it at that). It presents a glimpse into the complexity of ensuring "a genuine experience" and is (although more indirectly) open about the debatable success of the project. A closer reading of this passage (closer than that of a regular tourist, possibly) nevertheless reveals the eco-capitalist universe: accessibility is a blessing insofar as it brings ecotourism reve-nue, and it is a curse where it leads to pressure on woodlands. Those effecting the curse are villagers of "various ethnicities" who are to be taught the positive way of using accessibility, i.e. for ecotourism. In a wording identical with the tone of de-velopment cooperation, the reader's expectation is led towards the notorious im-aginarium of noble-and-ignorant savages, pure-and-threatened Nature, and to-wards the logic of self-limitation to reduce "impact" (3.3.2).

Lonely Planet's openness regarding the limits to authenticity in Luang Namtha is not the best advertisement for an ecotourism destination. However, the guide-book changes its tone when addressing the tension between pristineness and ac-cessibility with regard to NEPL NPA:

In the vast [NEPL NPA], rare civets, Asian golden cats, river otters, white-cheeked crested gibbons and the utterly unique Laotian warty newt […] share 4200 sq km of relatively pristine forests with around a dozen tigers. Approximately half is an inaccessible zone. The remainder includes 98 ethnic-minority hamlets. Two-day wildlife-watching excursions have been pioneered to the park's remote Nam Nern field station, a roadless former village site where a campsite and surrounding walking trails have been professionally cleared of UXO. […] [The payment system] is a cleverly thought-out scheme that encourages the local population to work actively against poachers. (ibid, 83)

It is notable how the same discourse takes on a different color with perceived differences in accessibility.[188] In NEPL, rare, even unique species "share" pristine forest with the charismatic king of the jungle, the tiger (see 8.3.3). Such fetishistic notion of pristineness, directly related to inaccessibility, again is mixed with hints

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[188] There is at least a difference between Nam Ha and NEPL NPAs in terms of touristic accessibil-ity, for the first is part of a well-established circuit whereas the latter is more difficult for tourists to reach. In terms of more general accessibility (for locals, external traders, in terms of road construction, cash crop encroachment etc.) the difference between both NPAs may be harder to pin down (see 5.3).

at local particularity (presence of UXO, a former "village"[189] at the present campsite). It is important to note the discursive gradation of purity as explicit in the phrase "relatively pristine": the guest either is reminded or made to know that absolute pristineness is not to be expected – and who would reasonably assume so, anyway? Still, the chance to access "an inaccessible zone" promises a relatively extra-ordinary experience of untouchedness, also in the case of NHEP.

In the above quote, the local population is depicted as needing a "cleverly thought-out scheme" to support conservation efforts – a specification of the savage as ignorant-but-not-stupid. These ideological elements come in a tone of factual information rather than with the "discursive paint" (Adorno) of jargon. It is again locals and their poverty that are singled out as threats. Nevertheless, they live in "ethnic-minority hamlets", indicating untouched culture. Both descriptions above thus revoke the binaries of the symbolic universe laid out in 3.3.1, here under the rubric of authenticity vs. accessibility. They provide the customer with a somewhat clearer idea of what to expect and which NPA to choose. Reading such information in guidebooks is almost the maximum effort that the usual guest goes to in making a decision for a specific product. Importantly, despite the rather bad publicity for Nam Ha compared to NEPL in the Lonely Planet, it is the latter which has trouble with economic viability exactly because of its more remote location.

7.1.3 Willingness to pay

The decisive element ensuring that ecotourism practice enlivens the distributional structure is an individual's willingness to pay a certain price for a certain expected experience. In order to be effective for conservation, ecotourism must tap the tourists' pocket by matching supply and demand. The activities sought and offered are in themselves unrelated to conservation work (and can also stand in opposition to it, Chapter 8), whether it be trekking, a village stay, a combination of both, a wildlife safari or a kayaking tour. A tour is usually booked when the experience to be expected is considered worth a certain amount of money. Prices are usually rather high, ranging roughly between 100 and 200 US dollar per person, first of all depending on the number of days and persons.

Product information in guidebooks, on websites and online platforms aims at approximating demand to supply, while the previous implementation process (Chapter 6) as well the constitution of the tourist landscape in general (Chapter 4) approximate supply to demand. How the customer's payment, the "final arbiter" of a project, is brought about depends on the specific situation. In Nam Ha, where the ecotourism market is most developed, the first step is usually customers walking into one of the agencies' offices expressing their general interest. Folders with the products on offer and questions regarding the client's preferences (such

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[189] That "village" was Houa Meuang (see box 4).

as length of the tour) further pin down what suits the client. The customer is further informed about price, schedule, revenue scheme (see 6.2.5) as well as risks involved. Typically in Luang Namtha, customers will visit several providers and compare "value for money".[190]

Overall, the information at Green Discovery in Luang Namtha is largely in line with what is realistic, so that customers generally know what they are in for. However, the case of NNNS aptly illustrates a "discursive overflow" of the (explicit or implicit) promise of primal contact with pure charismatic Nature and/or unchanged ethnic Cultures. Since NNNS is integrated into NPA management, and since one major goal of conservation efforts there is to protect the Indochinese Tiger, impressions of this charismatic animal outshine everything that can reasonably be expected from a tour. Despite that fact that guidebooks and tour managers emphasize the improbability of actually seeing a tiger on the night safari, hopes nevertheless rise regarding the (perhaps ultimately dangerous) situation of a tiger sighting, so that dissatisfaction is pre-programmed to some degree. This is true at least for walk-in customers (i.e. those who did not book the product in a package, e.g. with a national or an international tour operator). Customers will enter the ecotourism office (if they can find the NPA headquarters) and be greeted by numerous large photos of rare animals on the office walls, many but not all of which photographed at NEPL. Most prominent are cat species, first of all, the tiger. Clients are informed about the (un)likeliness of seeing certain animals, such as deer, otter, monitor lizards, or leopards. Yet, the silent wish to "maybe see a tiger" is nourished in subtle though perhaps unintended ways[191], such as through guidebook descriptions and tiger posters spread throughout the area: a tiger image taken from a camera trap inside NEPL is printed on entrance tickets as well as on large posters erected by the awareness raising unit of the NPA management in almost all settlements adjacent to the NPA, declaring: "We are proud to have tigers."[192] Furthermore, the NEPL wildlife-based revenue system requests an additional 200 US dollar per group in the unlikely, yet not totally impossible, event of a tiger sighting.[193] Such symbolic excess is also used in Green Discovery's office in

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[190] Moreover, the limit of tour sizes in NHEP, for example, is 8 persons per tour. If a tour is booked or interest was expressed by less than this number, it is announced on a board in front of the office so that potential further clients have a chance to join. Because the individual tour price decreases with the increasing overall number of tour participants, first customers often only express their intention to go if more people join, and might even set out themselves to convince other visitors. As tours will not take place under a certain minimum amount of people either (usually 2), some tours do not take off, finally, and consequently not every actual demand meets satisfaction.

[191] On a "fam trip" with World Bank officials, when provided with information about the species to watch out for, one member exclaimed: "I want to see a tiger" and the advisor complained that "everyone says that".

[192] During my stay, this specific kind of poster was replaced by different tiger pictures most likely not taken in NEPL.

[193] Appropriate behavior in case a tiger is seen at the river is not explained.

NHEP. Pictures on walls and in folders convey moments of direct, genuine contact with ethnic villagers, the fun of outdoor activities and the attractive landscapes of Luang Namtha. On a more subtle level than that of the plain facts of itinerary, revenue-schemes and tour price, a subliminal field of desire is actualized that indicates arrival at a gate to promised lands.

7.2 Formation of the tour group

The tour usually starts the morning after booking. This is when habitual peers meet and a *habitus* group becomes physically enacted.[194] Initial group formation is a ritual of getting acquainted with and recognizing each other as part of "us", both as tour members and habitual peers.[195] The arrival of the guide marks the official start of the tour. Clients may have become acquainted with each other already[196] or will do so soon after the guide's introduction. After initial broad introductions, further details about tour fellows are elicited during the tour in varying constellations and situations. Gender and age are mostly observable, as is a certain behavior and style of dress. Occupation or profession, hobbies and interests as well as previous relations to other tour members are markers of one's identity and position within the group.

While mutual recognition among the trekking peers is largely a smooth process of reinforcing the values of certain milieus (see 3.3.2), the integration of the guide into this group is more ambivalent. In fact, through his function as local expert, interpreter and intermediary he is per definition not part of the group as actualized social milieu. This is compellingly expressed and objectified in the gear of guides and customers, respectively, iconized in differences in footwear: the flip-flop wearing yet agile guide as opposed to the trekking-shod yet clumsy guest is a real-existing stereotype. It signifies social difference between both actors and was actu-

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[194] As Bourdieu notes, *habitus* groups are theoretical and statistical constructs and not empirically observable phenomena. Ecotourists do not *per se* form a discreet *habitus* group defined by a certain amount and composition of social resources. Rather, they may share milieus with other proponents of the educated middle classes who might express their social belonging differently. For example, a given group or network of friends as a whole likely belongs to a certain social milieu (or *habitus* group) but not all in that group will become ecotourists – some may, for example, become ecotourism advisors or critics. Put differently: doing ecotourism is a middle-class pursuit but may be part of several middle-class milieus.

[195] Before habitual self-actualization can proceed, however, participants must get to the point of tour departure. The degree of self-initiative demanded from the customer in order to get to the start of the tour can substantially differ. The NEPL customer will have to take local transport for about 50km into one of the remotest parts of Laos, as the tour price does not cover transport. In case of Green Discovery's Nam Ha valley trek, the tour conveniently starts at the office, just a short morning walk down the main street. Showing up on time is an early sign of respect for the amount of money paid by the others and may influence group atmosphere from early on.

[196] They might even already have crossed paths during their overall trip, even several times.

alized in every trek I took part in.[197] The lack of economic capital on the part of guides is apparent in terms of other equipment, too. Tourists sometimes comment along the lines of: "The company does not pay for a proper backpack? They should!", and occasionally guides may be presented with a (used) backpack by clients-turned-friends.

The shoe example expresses an interesting twist in the guide-guest differential: the poorly equipped guide is admired by trekkers for his ability to scale slippery slopes or thick jungle with simple means much more easily than they can with elaborate gear. The credibility he earns for this is that of "localness", which approximates him to local guides (see 6.2.3). It is notable, however, that local guides are rarely introduced well (if at all) to the trekking group: their names are often not even mentioned. The provincial/district guide, on the other hand, becomes integrated into and recognized by the group of tourists for his localness, and he may even become good friends with some of the participants. The position of the guide mirrors an individual's social position and aspiration: those working as guides often derive from the same or similar conditions as the hosts, but they seek to advance on the social ladder through getting in contact with and gain recognition from *falang* (Westerners). Their function as intermediaries thus reflects an ambivalent relation of sameness and difference regarding trekking peers on the one side and locals on the other. Knowers of local as well as of Western worldviews and languages, guides seek to move socially upward and to become more "developed" by *acquiring* a *habitus* close to that of the guests (including language skills) and exploiting their sameness and difference regarding hosts and guests, respectively.

Given the guide's socio-cultural ambivalence between host and guest, it is not surprising that the way guides are welcomed by the group is often slightly ostentatious, as clients feel honored to include into their round a representative of "the Lao". The tone and volume with which guides are addressed, at least in the beginning, is often quite different from intra-habitual communication: the guide is addressed slightly louder and almost overly friendly.[198] Sometimes, being the first to actively address the guide – or even the local guides through him – presents an occasion for displaying one's adeptness in situations of encounter with the social "other". To get on a personal, relaxed and friendly level with the guides not only serves a pleasant group climate but also self-actualization as open-minded and

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[197] When preparing a visit to a sacred forest (Chapter 8), a guide asserted that I might just go in slippers – which turned out to be a rather inconvenient affair: I was clearly not habitually predisposed.

[198] In the case of the Night Safari, the guide will give a PowerPoint presentation (on a project MacBook) about the work of WCS in NEPL and the purposes of the ecotourism project, giving participants a more concrete feeling of being part of a concerted effort towards the greater good, here: wildlife conservation. This is done in a mode of communication that most guests are accustomed to, at least more so than the guide – who is, in turn, overly congratulated for his achievement of going through the slides in English, and who is thankful for that recognition.

experienced individual, thereby displaying important values within the social milieus that "responsible" tourists derive from.[199]

First but comprehensive impressions of the others (*habitus* peers and the intermediary) build initial tentative coalitions, tolerances and avoidances by immediate habitual cooptation, affinity or aversion, as well as by constant reflection on one's own behavior. Internal differentials notwithstanding, it is usually in each participant's interest to support friendly relations in order to safeguard a satisfying experience not least for oneself (especially given the comparably high price that was paid). Official tour groups are, after all, the only legitimate ways to enter the NPAs I was looking at.[200]

7.3 The Nature part

It was instructive to observe that ecotours are regularly divided into rather distinct parts of Nature and Culture experience. Although both overlap, the experience of the forest is usually constructed and perceived as being of a very different character than experiencing village life: "I came away with different experiences in the village than I did in the forest" (DE, m, 28).[201] Although interview questions prescribed the Nature/Culture divide ("What did you like most, the nature or the culture part?"), such questioning already resulted from having experienced this gap, and answers always indicated that this was appropriate also according to tourists' experience. Some guests set out to experience Nature primarily, not caring much for the cultural part; but they eventually became convinced about its importance. Others were more interested in village culture but also did not want to miss out on the Nature side. Unsurprisingly for tourism in NPAs, the Nature part is the dominant feature of tours at Nam Ha and NEPL, regardless of high levels of interest in village life.

The distinction between Nature and Culture in ecotourism practice acknowledges and puts into effect the exclusionary logic on which NPAs are founded (4.2.3), and which is objectified in the structure of a tour as well as in the minds of

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[199] Not all clients are the same, however, and guides are most aware of the varying dynamics in several tours. The guide seeks to harness and create good vibrations and even-out potential disruptions. In the case of trekking tours and other outdoor activities that demand individual fitness, the degree of physical ability is often a potential friction within the group. Occasionally, people might deliberately behave to the detriment of group climate. A good guide will sense such potential frictions as early as possible and apply strategies to counter them.

[200] There were rumors in Nam Ha about a Westerner who was killed (allegedly by villagers) attempting to enter the NPA on his own.

[201] "[…] in dem *village* hab ich was anderes mitgenommen als in der Natur." The existence of this experiential gap is testified, for example, by the fact that village guides, as representatives of the Culture part, are rarely questioned about their life and culture during trekking where they only function as carriers or Nature interpreters.

tour participants, guides oftentimes included.[202] For the sake of clear structure, the following examination starts with the ideal-typical "Nature part", although actual tours normally start from a village, where first (sometimes the only) experiences of rural life and ethnic people are made before heading into "wilderness." Since most of the "Culture part," in classic eco-treks such as Nam Ha at least, takes place after nature experience (when guests dine and sleep in the village) it is treated here subsequent the Nature part.

7.3.1 "Welcome to the jungle"

On my first trek in Nam Ha, after departure from a village, having crossed the Nam Tha by boat and walked through agricultural land (paddy and swidden fields) for about an hour, we finally arrived at the foot of a hill where the forest of Nam Ha NPA starts. Suddenly, the guide raised attention and shouted "Welcome to the jungle!" accompanied by a Tarzan cry. This kind of announcement was not only entertaining and raised morale; it also announced the start of "primary forest" experience as it was advertised by referencing common elements of Western popular culture, such as, Guns'n'Roses songs and Hollywood movies (see also box 4). The spot chosen for this initiation of the Nature phase of the trek was a tall bamboo forest, which came across as an authentically Asian landscape one was about to explore. Interestingly, bamboo is both a pervasive marker of untouchedness (see below) as well as an indicator of past cultivation as one typical successor plant in swidden fallows (e.g. Johnson et al. 2012, 9; PAD Review no year, 44). The fact that the spot in question was cultivated about twenty years ago (according to an informant) is not necessarily known to the guides, so that they affirm and convey to their customers the illusion of "primary forest" which it, in fact, is not. In this way, the experience of natural primordiality is enacted where it does not actually exist, and by those who should know better while actually sharing in such abstract and idealizing notions. A frame is thus set for meeting customers' expectations by influencing their experience in a way that slips over the actuality of that place. Further Nature experience is based on this framing of the forest as pristine Nature.

If the Nature part fails to convince as pristine, that is, when extraction, cultivation or accessibility become too obvious, tourists will express their disapproval and may even request reimbursement, as this crucial point of the demand was not met. In Luang Namtha, this can be the case when tourists book cheap tours with small and rather new operators whose routes often lead over great length through rubber plantations.[203] Garbage is thus regularly an issue which makes the cultural

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[202] Even if NNNS an advisor claims that a clear line cannot be drawn (since although the Night Safari is premised on wildlife watching the whole terrain is the result of cultivation) the same advisor admits that old swidden fallows opposite the tourist camp in the core-zone are not pointed out and "advertised" to guests.

[203] As explained, each operator in Nam Ha is assigned its exclusive trail. The best ones were obviously occupied by those agencies that came first.

difference of the guides from the rest of the group tangible. More than once, guides would approach me asking why Westerners care so much about waste, complaining about how annoying it is to constantly explain the situation of villagers (e.g. absence of public garbage collection); or about the extra effort of picking up and bringing with us any piece of plastic that we find, etc. Interestingly, while guides may introduce Nature the way just described, quite a few admitted (to me as a researcher) their inability to relate to Westerners' fondness of the forest. Nature appreciation is one of those habitual features that are, as mentioned, still to be acquired by those working as guides.

7.3.2 Taking in scenery

Landscape and scenery are crucial to Nature as aesthetic experience (Ritter 1963; Cronon 1996). As a mode of cognition, landscape almost completely overlaps with photography as experiential tool. One of the central practices of any touristic endeavor is taking pictures. For nature tourism, specifically, natural scenery is one of the things that are not just "photographable" but "musts" to photograph (Bourdieu et al. 1990, 37). A trek without scenic views certainly falls short of meeting a central part of the demand (although it does not necessarily make it a bad trip automatically). When a forested landscape opens up, the majority of participants likely feels prompted to take a picture of it.[204] This is all the more true when there is only one spot along a trek which offers a good view. For example, on the Nam Ha trek there is but one possibility for landscape photography, while the rest of the trek leads through dense forest. Depending on the direction of the respective tour, i.e. with the free spot either in the beginning or at the end of the trek, the wide view is generally much appreciated and results in photos such as in picture 1.

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[204] As a tourist on a trek close to Luang Phabang commented: "I just have to" (SI, m, 27).

Picture 1: A view from the swidden

Such a view is an essential part of experiencing wilderness and proofs that it is wilderness which is experienced; regarding the locality depicted here, a Nam Ha tourist stated:

It was hundred percent nature, it was nature reserve, as far as you could see were hills, mountains covered with forest […]. Today was the first time when we had a view […] where we could really watch out into the distance – that was quite far. There you imagined: "wow, we are here in the midst of wilderness." That was really cool. (DE, m, 26)[205]

Now, it is notable that in this particular case, tourists' wilderness demand is met by a village which has broken NPA regulations in illegally clearing a swidden field that now offers a scenic view of alleged wilderness.[206] Adapting an insight of Anna Tsing, we might thus say that, "ironically, the forest as a site of truth and beauty seems clearer" from the swidden field "than anywhere else" (Tsing 2003, 5100). Slash and burn, a practice that ecotourism is supposed to discourage, thus actually

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[205] "Es war halt hundertprozentig Natur, es war Naturschutzgebiet, soweit das Auge reichte war nur waldbedeckte Hügel, waldbedeckte Berge […]. […] wir hatten heute zum ersten Mal 'ne Aussicht […] wo wir wirklich in die Ferne gucken konnten, da war's schon – also Du hast halt die verschiedenen Konturen der Berge gesehen – das war schon weit. Da hast Du Dir vorgestellt, 'wow, wir sind hier mitten in der Wildnis'. Das war schon cool."

[206] An informant explained that the respective village felt forced to clear this plot because of NPA restrictions on slash-and-burn cultivation which lead to land scarcity and declining yields resulting from shorter fallow cycles inside the NPA. It thus seems that in this case, NPA regulations quite necessarily led to their subversion. The village in question is part of the ecotourism project from its very beginning.

elevates the value of ecotouristic experience, providing a highlight of the whole trek.

Indulgence in pristineness does not exclude the guide informing tourists about the illegal clearing and park regulations. Such information, however, stands quite unrelated to the gaze itself, as if these were two different things: the particular origin of that scenic landscape as interesting information, and the generalized and fetishized meaning of landscapes as sites of "truth and beauty". The specific example discussed here, the view of pristineness from the swidden field, is also an affair of gradation and visual balance: had the swidden been very recent, displaying barren hills and charred stumps, the participants would probably have been shocked.[207] But a year later, vegetation had recovered sufficiently to provide a green-yet-wide view that perfectly met the demand.

This example demonstrates that ecotouristic consumption of "untouchedness" is not conservationist by nature but also allows for, or even requires, the opposite of conservation. In other words: *it is experiential detachedness of tourists from places coupled with self-referential activities, which allows for the consumption of pristineness in "messy" contexts.* From the perspective of Nature experience, landscape is perceived as part and index (a "marker") of pristineness – whereas it is generally made possible by some sort of cultivation, which, in turn, is absent in the experience and added as information and "education". Detachedness and self-relatedness, as exemplified here, are important yet tricky and awkward facilitators of clients' satisfaction (7.4).

7.3.3 Wildlife spotting

The NNNS not only represents a form of Nature experience that is well designed to function within a "wildlife-based" approach (see 6.2.5), but it is also unique in Laos and perhaps worldwide.[208] The actual safari is preceded by a bonfire, dinner,

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[207] Aesthetic contrariness of the landscape gaze and the practice of swidden cultivation is omnipresent among travelers in the North of Laos. Witnessing the Hmong method of clearing and burning whole hills in Houaphan province leaves a deep impression of regret and incomprehension amidst such "obvious" environmental damage. In the 2007 edition of Lonely Planet, the affinity of the landscape gaze to authoritarianism is expressed: "During the late dry season [...] the air over Luang Prabang can become very smoky due to slash-and-burn agriculture in the hills and mountains around the city. [...] Landscape photography is hopeless. [...] One hopes the authorities will get a handle on the situation before all the surrounding forests are gone, and extensive erosion and flooding result" (ibid, 139). Interestingly, the milieu consisting of Lonely Planet authors and readers, usually ready to denounce centralized, authoritarian power, calls for the authorities as soon as their passion of landscape photography becomes jeopardized. The respective section is not included in the 2014 edition.

[208] The Night Safari presents one of the rare occasions where there is a chance to observe wildlife larger than birds or reptiles in Laos. This is partly because of the friction of terrain in the Lao uplands – as opposed, for example, to the wide African savannahs, where it is easy to spot lions or elephants from a distance, spotting wildlife is next to impossible in mountainous jungle. A related aspect is that in NEPL NPA, the safari was established to counteract a decimation of wildlife, as opposed to commercially-run safari parks in Africa that are often artificially populated

tea, chit-chat with the village boatmen who relate Khmu folktales and legends involving wildlife – all taking place on a sand bank of Nern River inside the core-zone. About nightfall, behavior during the safari is explained, guests are instructed about the animals they can expect to see, torches are handed out, and the long, narrow boats are entered. The guides float the boats down through the rapids to the campsite in almost complete darkness, only their headlights scan the riverbanks.[209] Their activity involves a level of skill and local knowledge that is impossible for outsiders to replicate, which makes village people essential to the whole enterprise. They govern the boat through nightly rapids, at the same time watching out for animals, stopping, slowly paddling backwards, desperately trying to make out animals to show to the visitors (due to the function of animal sightings in the revenue system; 7.3.4).[210] The night safari depends on the experience of locals as hunters and fishermen, which is tapped for this special product.

In a more twisted way, however, the safari may also present an occasion for "hunters-turned-guides" to update their knowledge about the presence of wildlife, valuable when returning to hunting.[211] For tourists, spotting wildlife can be perceived as an experience of getting in touch with living Nature.[212] It is not so much about aesthetic enjoyment, as when taking in scenery, but rather active engagement in an encounter with the wild nonhuman.

Tourists occasionally show interest not only in spotting wildlife but also in watching guides hunt smaller animals. A customer recalls the spontaneously arranged catching of frogs and crabs at NHEP:

[…] it was very interesting to watch how they dealt with this […] they readily see them [crabs] – we haven't seen one – and then they showed us how to block their claws, so they tear out their feet and put them into their claws. Frogs also get their legs broken [laughs] and are then put in a plastic bag. Not so nice, but that's just how it is, I think. (AT, m 34)[213]

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with wildlife for tourist consumption. In NEPL, tourism serves conservation while in many African reserves "preservation" serves tourism.

[209] The lighter the night, the slighter are the chances of spotting animals.

[210] Boatmen are also quite likely, however, to sacrifice potential income for comfort, trying to float the boat down quite quickly, not leaving adequate time for wildlife spotting. Additional revenue depends on whether wildlife was seen by tourists – but this is at times also tricky to elicit (see 7.3.4).

[211] Safari boatmen have been caught poaching by NPA management.

[212] The experience can, unexpectedly and easily, turn into one of dying Nature, for example, when a fish jumps into the boat and slowly expires between the feet of a customer, as has happened to the author.

[213] "[…] es war interessant wie sie damit umgingen […] sie sehn die sofort im Fluß – wir haben keine einzige gesehen – und die haben uns dann die Technik gezeigt, wie man die Scheren blockieren kann bei den Krabben, also die reißen den Fuß ab und stecken's bei der Schere rein, und den Fröschen [werden] auch zuerst die Füße, die Beine gebrochen [lacht] und dann in nen Plastiksack gesteckt. Weniger schön, aber das ist einfach so, find ich."

This indicates that the boundaries between ecotourism and hunting blur not only on part of the hosts, but at times also on part of the guests. This pertains only to small wildlife, however, not to hunting larger animals such as the tiger.

7.3.4 Watching out

An interesting aspect of Nature experience is its intersection with NPA management. While the distributional and host-guest structures (see Chapter 6) are unrelated in the sense of what you do as a tourist is not conservation work but trekking, for example, both structures intersect in Nature experience. The advantage of the presence of tourists in order to deter or detect poachers or monitor the area was noted already by the NHEP. At NNNS, wildlife spotting and the attached revenue scheme are concurrently employed as quite effective ways of monitoring wildlife along Nern River. On the morning after the safari, tourists, boatmen and the guide will recapitulate the amount of sightings. A part of the local revenue is conditional on this account (6.2.5). Almost naturally, boatmen are eager to push the score, while they are also the ones best able to spot wildlife at night. Tourists, in contrast, are often not sure about what they saw or if they saw anything at all. Boatmen may insist on having made an otter visible to the guests, while the latter might not be so sure. The chance to spot wildlife also differs depending on which boat floats down first, but even within one boat not everyone may have seen a particular animal. Because tourists are mostly well-meaning and prone to support local communities, in such situations they might tend to give in, especially since they had already paid their share. Such revenue accounting-cum-monitoring is thus hardly objective but to a considerable degree product of negotiating socio-cultural and economic differentials.

7.3.5 Food and accommodation

In NEPL as in Nam Ha, lunch or dinner in the forest is often celebrated. A favorite experience of Nam Ha tourists is lunch on the trail served on banana leaves that are cut down on the spot. In NEPL, the same method is used for dinner on the river bank. Such presentation of Lao food in and on Nature is always met with surprise and appreciation as it provides the setting for a communal, joyous meal and an occasion to truly consume "authenticity" by eating sticky rice, vegetable or fish with your hands (i.e. the local way) surrounded by an environment experienced as pristine. A similar, multisensory, comprehensive and subtle way of experiencing Nature is sleeping in a jungle camp (in tents like in Nam Ha, or open huts like in NEPL): "as you're settling […] in that jungle camp […] from all the day-birds and animals and when it's dark it's completely different noises, but it's the same jungle. So it's quite nice to feel that transition" (ZA, m, 38). This quote leads us to the major inference regarding the quality of Nature experience vis-à-vis Culture.

7.3.6 Switching off

As argued in this study, the Nature/Culture (or Society) divide is a false-and-real distinction (see 1.4.3) which is realized in ecotourism in forest and village experiences as different experiential forms: The forest serves the purpose of "switching off, experience nature, and also enjoy more fresh air" (DE, m 26).[214] Forgetting about the world; just being physically exposed to and challenged by a "natural", i.e. supposedly nonsocial environment; sensing relatively pristine forest and engaging with it – those are the typical components of Nature experience. Its overall theme is best grasped in the following statement: "Peaceful […] extremely relaxing […] when we hiked into our jungle camp it was just like 'ahhh'. There was no one else with us, bamboo all around, it was very relaxing" (US, f, 32). Being challenged by the terrain is another typical theme, at least in more "classic" trekking tours (as opposed to less challenging ones such as the Night Safari):

I loved that the ways weren't that easy […] the environment was really beautiful […] it looked like a lot of old growth […] our drive up here was like clear-cut rubber trees and then all of a sudden we were like "ahhh", you know. Rice paddy here and there, but for the people that we had just met, and then the rest of it was just overgrown crazy jungle. (US, f, 32)

[…] the trails were well marked and made but you could tell from the environment that you were in, that it was really hard to make a trail in that area, to build up those steps, when it rains that washes all that away, and right now a lot of leafs are falling, so that's very thick. […] it was incredibly challenging for that but nice because you really felt […] "we're in this forest, and it is the environment that it is", it is really hilly and it is slick and there is bugs everywhere […]. (US, f, 31)

These passages express the convergence of three aspects of switching off in Nature: aesthetic, detached perception ("beautiful"); idealization of the environment as "just jungle, nature, pure nature" (CA, m, 59); and the value of physical exertion and challenge as a means to engage with that "overgrown crazy jungle". A common theme in the interviews was the impressive presence of bamboo which functioned as "switch":

I've never seen bamboo like that. I've seen big bamboo, but to be surrounded by […] almost nothing but it […] it was just such an amazing environment that I haven't encountered before. And, I felt like we were really far away from everything in the nature. (US, f, 32)

[The forest was] very green, a lot of […] very big bamboo plants. It was very beautiful because […] it was the first time that I saw the surrounding with such big, big bamboo […] Yeah, I liked the surrounding, it was green fresh air. (NL, f, 21).

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[214] "[…] abschalten, Natur erleben oder irgendwie auch mehr frische Luft genießen."

[The forest] was very pristine. You could feel that no human hand exerted influence, except for the trails. Bamboo trees crashed together on the left and the right and all that […]. (DE, m, 28)[215]

In general, bamboo was thus recognized as marker of untouchedness while, in terms of ecology, it indicates recent agricultural activity (7.3.1). This feeling is crucially influenced by the factors of novelty, seclusion and disorder – in contrast to what one knows from home, which in turn appears as inauthentic:

[In] a lot of our national parks you're still kinda like looking down on the roads because they built the infrastructure to bring the people that can't hike up that hill to the viewpoint […] and we have all these kinds of cheats and ways out. And being in a place where you didn't have that, there was no way to take the golf cart to the (laughs) whatever, you know. I just loved that. (US, f, 32)

The bamboo example is related to the "view from the swidden" referred to above in that both instances together exemplify how a certain way of cultivating the land – here: different stages in the transformation of a swidden field into forest, influenced by NPA dynamics – gives rise to different touristic experiences of wilderness: scenery first, and later "overgrown crazy jungle." Moreover, Nature experience might be shielded from the cultivation going on around customers, be it through prohibitions to cut wood or clear upland fields close to trails or rivers, or by avoiding larger roads or other signs of civilization during the trek (Gujadhur et al. 2008, 16 for Nam Ha; Fletcher 2014, 113f). In any case, it is predicated on and constituted by political-ecological prerogatives.

Plant interpretation or an overnight stay in the jungle may add to this core of Nature experience. The way food is prepared in a jungle camp, the nocturnal noises of the jungle, or wildlife-spotting at night (even without remarkable sightings), the total absence of light or noise pollution, etc. make the experience of Nature complete. Such experience is premised on detachedness and on the self-related nature of the activities undertaken. By perceiving "nature" as it is offered by Nature conservation and NPA management, such practices do not ask for the history of a specific environment, instead using it as an occasion to "switch off". It is thus evident that the Nature/Culture gap simulated by ecotourism is a *fiction made real*: experience of pristine Nature and untouched forest is predicated on all kinds of "culture," from cultivation to political regulation, while these are treated as additional information, if at all, satisfying a separate demand, education. Thus, purist fictions of Nature and Culture *exist* as more or less distinct spheres in the experience of tourists: during Nature experience, aspects of culture tend to be downplayed or ignored, except for "local knowledge" that relates to and expresses proximity to Nature (as in folktales, boating, plant interpretation). Local

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[215] "[Der Wald war] sehr ursprünglich. Also man hat ja gemerkt, dass da keine menschliche Hand Einfluss genommen [hat], außer die Pfade, also links und rechts da krachen die Bambusbäume zusammen und so."

knowledge is subordinated to the experience of the nonhuman: pristine forest, a nocturnal river, animals.[216] In this way, the institutionalized, legal distinction between conservation forest and other kinds of land uses is affirmed through active individual experience. Concrete practice fulfills the demand of dropping out and "switching off" and so reproduces abstract idealizations of Nature as purely nonhuman and as opposed to culture and society, reaffirming ecocapitalist contradictions.

7.4 The Culture part

When the line is crossed between the area designated as NPA and village land, the group exits the Nature part and enters the sphere of cultural experience. The most obvious sign of this transition is the sudden switch from dark forest to light cultivation land. Sometimes village land is marked by a fence that keeps livestock inside. As with the illegal swidden field referred to above, entering village land means a relief of sorts:

The best part was … the end of the second day […] leaving the deep jungle. Because the first day is only jungle. So it's great but […] at lunch on the second day you're still in the jungle – so "okay jungle, I saw jungle, okay next thing now" (laughs). And so in the beginning of the afternoon […] we just arrived in rice fields, and less jungle and more river and, so it's better landscape and begin photography, so it was a nice thing taking pictures. (FR, m, 23)

This tourist assesses this transition as the "best part". Although forest experience is "great", it can become too much, especially given the importance of photography as a mode of "watching" and experience. The realm of the cultivated fits this demand better than dense forest – and it makes for an experience fundamentally different from the Nature part.

7.4.1 Introducing the village

In NHEP, thin cables originating from electricity generators in Ha River lead the way into villages. Before entering, the guide gives some very general information on the respective ethnic group and its customs along with advice on how to behave appropriately. Such information is often quite stereotypical (along the lines of: "The Khmu is the oldest minority in Laos. They believe in spirits.").[217] After

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[216] Where wildlife spotting is not on the agenda, as in Nam Ha, seeing wild animals is nevertheless hoped for, and disappointment is often expressed about rare sightings of birds or other smaller animals.

[217] A Tiger Trail guide leading me around Luang Prabang "explained" ethnicity in Laos in the most stereotypical way (probably an authentic expression of lowland Lao attitudes towards ethnic minorities) with reference to the semi-official tripartition of Lao Loum, Lao Theung and Lao Suung, and he made a direct link between animism and economic and cultural backwardness.

having entered a Lanten village at the Nam Ha valley trek, our guide, Lanten him-self, explained the history and specifics of the Lanten "tribe" (their origin in Chi-na, their script and strong spirit belief). He told tourists to greet villagers with *sabaaidii*, even though this is not their own language, which might embarrass them.[218] What he did not mention to customers besides me was that there were two Hmong houses in the village, that a few of the villagers are Christian and that opium addiction is a huge problem there among adults.[219] Clearly, the guide did not want to confuse his customers or spoil their experience. However, when I realized (during village research) the seriousness of opium addiction it became clear to me that what I had previously (during the tour) understood as a "racial" feature of a people originating from China, such as pronounced cheekbones and a lean appearance, was very much the result of opium consumption. Such tran-scendence of everyday, half-conscious racism on the part of the visitor is thwarted by simplified representations of local culture. For instance, the ways in which villages are introduced predicate cultural experience on reified assumptions of ethnicity in Laos, such as that Khmu and *lao suung* are animists while *lao loum* are Buddhist, or that villages are ethnically or socially homogenous. The presence of groups that could confuse this picture (such as Christians, Hmong, or recently arrived Vietnamese) is ignored in village presentations (also Chapter 8).

However, precise information on the respective ethnic groups is also not the point: as argued already, guests derive from the sphere of the general and abstract and they perceive the specific locality as a case of the general. As a female traveler at the café of Forest Retreat in Luang Namtha put it: "I really wanna do the Hmong next, did the Akha last time" (US, f, ca. 25). To the regular tourist, it does not matter much whether she "does" a Khmu, Hmong, or Akha village. Under-standing their respective differences and peculiarities is less important, subjectively as well as structurally, than their being "ethnic" or "local", i.e. non-Western and non-lowland Lao. A particular village signifies an example of abstract "ethnic cul-ture" and serves as a screen for visitors' projections.

7.4.2 First encounter

None of the tours I witnessed included an official welcoming ceremony by village representatives. While greetings are exchanged with the occasional villager met on the way, tourists often feel awkward about just walking into a village, being looked at and greeted but not really welcomed by locals. This can also be interpreted in a positive way, however:

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[218] As mentioned by this guide in an interview.

[219] This guide, who apparently knew this village quite well, explained to me that almost all adults (especially males) are heavily addicted to opium, causing financial trouble because their own opium fields were destroyed so that they need to buy opium from other villages and ethnic groups (such as the Hmong). Meanwhile, many children are burdened with the daily chores and do not find the time to attend school (this was verified by the village's school teacher).

[…] this [tour] felt more naturally actually because we didn't have all the villagers lined up being like "Welcome to our town!" We walked in and […] it felt way more [natural], we knew they were looking at us as, you know, all of the tours that are going to stay and whatever but not having this big welcome ceremony. Because we just kinda like slid in there and hung out and they paid attention to us but not in the sense like "we are here to entertain you in any way". And so that felt really good. (US, f, 32)

This assessment fits with the orientation of the guest towards "natural," authentic encounters where hosts are not putting up a show. Even when not staying in a separate village lodge but in a homestay (a private house), an introduction to the host family is usually only rudimentary at most. While such a welcome may feel good to one person and awkward to another, it is clear that such casualness in the cultivation of host-guest relations is unlikely to be conducive for successful further interaction. Although the possible range of interactions is quite restricted, the disparities in tourist perceptions are still important to take into account because it depends very much on their respective behavior which kinds of interactions will take place and thus which concrete experiences the respective groups are left with. Awkwardness is a moment of almost every village experience, however, as is demonstrated presently.

7.4.3 Instead of a welcome: handicraft selling

The display of handicraft to guests can replace the welcome ceremony, as has happened in Nam Ha. Generally, such situations are not well perceived by guests and can result in uncomfortable situations. In one particular case, the tour has just arrived at a village where tourists rest before continuing for about ten more minutes to their actual host village. Clearly, this little rest was to serve the purpose of revenue extraction, introduced and sanctioned by the project. At least this instance revealed a quite clumsy way of dealing with a delicate affair: the tourist is a conscious paying customer, aware of being part of a financial transaction; but she does not want to be confronted with economic interest too explicitly while seeking "genuine" (non-commercialized) encounters. In the particular situation, everyone was silent and clearly endured this kind of first encounter rather than enjoying it, and no one bought anything except for beer. It is often difficult for guests in such situations to even develop a genuine interest in the products on offer. Rather, one will quickly buy "at least something" because one should.[220] The sale of

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[220] On a trek close to Luang Phabang, our tour had lunch in a Hmong settlement struck with poverty and sickness. The women and their children, many of them coughing and sneezing, arranged their handicraft around us while we were eating. Meanwhile our group discussed how to go about the situation: we divided ourselves up in order to distribute our money as equally as possible, also taking into account which items were most attractive. It was a rather depressing and stressful, quite "inauthentic" situation.

handicraft during village stays presents reflexive and responsible visitors with a dilemma between conservation and development:

[…] I must confess we weren't sure how to […] support them without spoiling it so – it's a bit difficult because you don't wanna buy things that you don't want anyway. We had these […] tactics in Vietnam […] the whole time "buy buy buy." And you don't want that to happen here, so if there is no demand for it then you don't want to encourage them coming back, and buy stuff from them just because you […] feel guilty. Then you can rather give support to, and find out what really matters, whether this it's just school or how can you contribute? (ZA, f, 35)

Handicraft production is central to local participation in rural development via tourism, projected to generate revenue and to preserve local artisanal knowledge. It is often perceived with mixed feelings by tourists, however, mainly because the commercial character of selling situations unveils the economic and "profane" nature of the whole ecotouristic set-up. The guide informing guests not to feel obliged to purchase might relieve such situations to a degree, but also confirms the commercial nature of the encounter.

Rather than just a source of financial revenue, the customer wants to contribute to locally adapted change that "really matters", and which does not "spoil" the place with commercialism. Handicraft producers and sellers are normally private households (i.e. their women) who ten to stand in competition with one another. Knowing that the choice for a product benefits one to the detriment of other villagers increases pressure on guests who want to support the whole community. While some simply do not buy anything, others feel obliged to help. This way of offering handicraft – encouraging people to buy things they are not interested in – is perceived by some individuals in much the same way as begging. Therefore, projects such as NHEP or NEPL include a portion of the handicraft sale in the fixed tour price, so that guests are "presented" with a "give-away" at the end of the trip.

7.4.4 Village walks

A walk through the village is a common element of ecotours. The Night Safari starts at the village of Son Khua, from where visitors are carried upriver by boat. Before that, a short village walk is scheduled led by district and village guides as well as occasional bystanders. The first thing to see is the ceremonial village post (*lak baan*) of Son Khua, located at the sacrificial site of the annual "feeding of the village spirit" (*liiang phii baan*) which both ethnic groups in the village, Khmu[221] and Lao[222], respect. Guides and villagers maintain that the custom of *lak baan* is part of Khmu culture because it is an "animist" practice while Lao are "Buddhist".

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[221] Some identifying themselves as *tai phorng*. Schlemmer (2002, 12) subsumes "lao phong" under *lao suung*, GoL (2005, 166ff) subsume "phong" under Mon-Khmer (i.e. *lao theung*).
[222] Identifying themselves as "lao loum."

This seems like an interesting confusion of ethnic essentialism that reproduces contradictory stereotypes: the custom of erecting *lak* is usually seen as an animist element in Tai culture; it is also a Thai-Lao term. Similarly, the "animist" *lak* of Son Khua is engraved with a quasi-Buddhist imagery. But since the Lao are defined as distinctly Buddhist, it can only be an original Khmu custom. The information that visitors are provided with thus remains quite stereotypical.

Village walks furthermore include visiting sites of village development, such as schools, water systems, maternity houses, and an introduction to village production methods, such as tools produced by village blacksmiths, production of silk and weaving, preparation of rice, etc. Such village walks do not necessarily involve village guides but are led by the provincial and district guides, and generally tourists are allowed to explore villages by themselves. Village walks usually perpetuate or even intensify the awkwardness of village experience. When asked how he felt in the village, a Nam Ha tourist answered:

Yes, of course a little like a foreign object. A little bit like a time traveler. Not disturbing because they didn't let themselves being disturbed but, of course, like … like "in a zoo" would be wrong: you were there, and you didn't just watch from the outside or so, you were kind of integrated. But it was also clear to all involved: you're dressed differently, you look differently, you don't speak their language – to all who were involved it was clear that you don't belong here. So it's not that I could say that we were totally integrated. (DE, m, 28)[223]

This strange ambivalence of being and not being integrated, which intensifies with a walk through the village and looking into the "locals' kitchens", is a defining moment of the whole cultural experience. It plays out as shyness and insecurity of how to behave – on both sides.

7.4.5 Conversations

Conversations between hosts and guests betray this contorted relation of detached proximity that exists between them. The tour guide is essential here as the only link through which both parties can talk. If both are left alone with each other, e.g. when the guide has to take care of food preparation, the awkwardness is unpleasantly tangible for everyone present. On such an occasion, a host at Vongsikaeo village (Chapter 8) concisely put it: "Now we sit together and don't know how to talk." When coming together, talking is a natural thing; and it is strange to be un-

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[223] "Ja, natürlich schon ein bisschen wie ein Fremdkörper. Ja, so ein bisschen wie ein Zeitreisender. Nicht störend, weil die haben sich nicht stören lassen, aber natürlich schon so … äh, „wie im Zoo" ist falsch. Du warst dabei, Du hast nicht nur von außen zugekuckt oder so, Du warst schon integriert. Aber es war auch allen Beteiligten klar, Du hast andere Kleidung an, Du siehst anders aus, Du sprichst ihre Sprache nicht – jedem der Beteiligten war klar, dass Du da nicht dazugehörst, also es ist jetzt nicht so dass ich sagen könnte wir waren total integriert oder so."

able to have a conversation, in terms of both language and topics, indicating an unnatural and arbitrary situation.

If conversations take place at all (through the guide) they remain very general, schematic and taciturn. Regularly, the first topics brought up by the hosts are the guest's countries of origin, their age, marriage status and number of children. The questions are answered and posed back to the hosts, and astonished comparisons between both parties ensue, for instance differences in the age-offspring ratio or the meanings of marriage here and there (as happened on all observed tours). Hosts may further ask questions about the existence of certain things in the Western life-world, such as "Do you have forests, cows, etc. in Germany?" Conversations are mostly restricted to this. The obvious and institutionalized unfamiliarity of each party with the life of the other predetermines rather shallow exchanges of thought. Given the restrictions on public political debate in Laos in general, the potential scope of meaningful exchange of thoughts is further limited.

Another, rather non-superficial issue often brought up by hosts in direct interactions is their bad health condition, often coupled with requests for medicine from guests. This topic again bluntly disenchants the "direct" yet variedly mediated host-guest relation as one of separation between well-off *falang* and Lao peasants. Such disenchantment may open a window into local everydayness, though not necessarily a pleasant one (see box 5). Often, guests would be in the position to ease physical pain and discomfort of villagers who are cut-off from efficient health care (infrastructurally and financially). But guests are also aware of sustainability issues, such as begging, or are insecure whether common medicine for Westerners is unproblematic for those unaccustomed it. Although there are exceptions, guests tend to not hand out medicine to villagers.

Box 5: Evil spirits in Baan Nyang

During our stay at Nyang village on the Katang Trail (Chapter 8), our group had the following experience: in the evening, sitting in front of our guesthouse, our host spoke about his 11-year-old daughter just next door, who had a serious health issue with her lungs. Although he did not ask for medicine, he certainly hoped that we would know how to help. Our host had taken his daughter to the district hospital but doctors could not improve her situation. As hospitals are very expensive, the family took her home again and the spirit doctor (*mor phii*) was taking care of her.

At night, we heard disturbing screams from the house next door. The following day, our guide told me (and not the others) that he was really afraid when he heard the girl screaming. According to him, the girl had a "weak soul" (*khwan orn*) and was a *phii borp*, an infamous evil spirit (e.g. Rajathon 1954). The screams were due to the spirit doctor exorcizing the spirit, and the guide was scared that the spirit would slip into him while he was preparing food in the host's house. While the girl felt better the next day, another villager had seriously fallen ill.

The brief anecdote related in box 5 illustrates how village experience can be "tainted" by the problem of health inequality and local ways of dealing with it. Mostly, requests for medicine will be declined because guests are afraid of making a social, cultural, or medical mistake, expecting clarification of appropriate behavior from the project, which is rarely given.

7.4.6 Taking pictures

As discussed already, taking pictures is a central mode of touristic experience, especially in the village. This mode of "interaction" is premised on detachedness between subject and object in the act, so that in photography the nature of the ambivalent host-guest interaction is physically enacted (see picture 2a):

Picture 2a: Subjects and objects of village experience

The detachment implied in taking pictures of villagers and the latent violence of the act is expressed here: the tourist, subject of the act, targets her object from a distance, positioning herself in the way most conducive for the kind of picture she wants to take of the host. The host has a passive role, serving the guest's cultural experience. Tourists are mostly aware and wary of this awkward but compulsory way of (non-)interacting: "[…] I asked to take pictures. It's kind of weird, each time you're doing like this, but I really wanted to do so […]" (FR, m, 23). The perceived awkwardness is overcome by either obtaining consent from people or by trying to be unobtrusive in photographing:

[…] normally I don't take pictures of people ever, and I've been travelling Southeast Asia for a long time. But I couldn't help myself with these villagers, they were so beautiful. And they were just so wonderful, so I'd always ask and a couple of them would say "no" and that's fine […]

yeah, we took pictures but still trying to not be intrusive on anyone who was not wanting it […] very respectful, not in their faces. (US, f, 32)

Almost needless to say, pictures by tourists in an ethnic minority village are taken on the basis of rather rigid understandings of what is photographable or a "must" to capture (see Bourdieu et al. 1990). The patterns of picturing the ethnic other are prescribed by documentaries, tourist advertisement, professional photography, and indigenous peoples campaigns. Such globalized imageries and "spectacularizations" of the local are a clear standard for the photographic action of the guests. The picture taken by the tourist in the picture above clearly illustrates this (picture 2b).

Picture 2b: The token

This picture is, basically, a reproduction of the global media image of local ethnics, where ethnicity is predominantly represented by women in colorful dresses who, in the ideal case, are smoking a pipe or rolled tobacco leaves. In combination with the naked child, this picture evokes and reproduces the common preconceptions about ethnicity as natural and exotic (yet poor). Photography is an urban leisure practice that not only solemnizes and celebrates the contact between host and guest (Bourdieu et al 1990, 19ff), making it impossible at the same time. It also "gentrifies" the Lao countryside by drawing it into the orbit of the global circulation of images of the rural ethnic other that are mainly consumed by middle and upper-middle class leisure seekers of postindustrial regions of the globe (ibid, 50).

7.4.7 Playing with kids

Children are major players (in a double sense) in alleviating the awkwardness of village experience: they are usually the (only) ones who playfully cross the line between hosts and guests. Interestingly, it is often exactly the awkward act of taking pictures which functions as a first step toward more comprehensive interaction: most village kids love to have their picture taken and look at it on the camera display, which gives rise to further interaction based on their "innocence" and spontaneity:

[…] when they were cooking we had a beer […] before eating, and the kids of the family, so two young boys and one girl, they were with us and it was really funny, really innocent and spontaneous. It was a great moment and the kids were really … dynamic, and we could exchange even just with the hands and face […]. (FR, m, 23)

Usually, kids are more eager to engage with visitors than their parents are, while guests are generally also insecure. Whereas adults are more aware of and hampered by the structural implications of their encounter, children act as "ice breakers" who make guests feel more welcome:

We didn't want to be rude but we wanted to be there, and then […] – I don't remember how it began, but it was one of the kids came up to Liz and was like showing off his toy as like any kid would do […]. Then somehow it turned into drawing pictures in the sand, and then it turned into all these other kids going like "what's he doing over there with that girl?!," and then like one would peek over and see that we were drawing. And then it turned into writing, and then it turned into all these kids around us […]. It was very fun and natural of any kids anywhere in this kind of way: [first] "should we be here, what should we do, who are they, what are they doing here?", and then slowly creeping into this like "oh yeah, this is cool, we can just hang out and have a good time". (US, f, 31)

This role of children to "play over" socio-cultural frictions ("as any kid would do") is observable in many tours that involve an overnight village stay. Boys may arrive with their footballs and engage both their parents and visitors. If tour members are reluctant to participate, the kids delightfully show off their soccer abilities playing with their friends. They may also collect wood for the lodge's bonfire and just sit with visitors around it, watching them and giggling with each other. Their curiosity and rather impartial "innocence"[224] in their behavior towards guests often constitutes one of the most light-hearted aspects of visitor's village experience.

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[224] These are the same kids who care for their addicted parents by supplying their households with necessary food, firewood, even opium.

7.4.8 Taking a bath

"I'll never forget the shower I [took] with 29 spectators: it was a show for them but not very comfortable for me."[225] If guests are turned into objects of the gaze of villagers (especially of kids who are keen to watch a *falang* wash herself or himself) during a shower, visitors are likely to disapprove. Given the shyness of guests when walking through a village, walking through it alone to the washing place is generally not the most pleasant experience as visitors are naturally insecure about locally expected bathing behavior and how to live up to these expectations. In fact, the procedure of taking a bath or shower publicly in a discreet way, as is done throughout Laos, is quite alien to Western habits. The sarong problem, for example, is almost classic: "In the orientation it would be better to explain why having a sarong is such a good idea because we found it very awkward without one [when taking a bath] and had the impression short + t-shirt would work just as well but didn't." Even in professional arrangements such as Green Discovery tours, communicating the importance of a sarong for women when taking a bath in public is at times simply forgotten, as it is too normal for Lao people. The ambiguous cultural experience of such taken-for-grantedness is expressed in the following statement:

[…] we were like bathing in the river […] and […] I was not sure if the people will like that because we were in bikini and something like that. But they didn't say anything about it and not everyone could see it but still it was like "I am not sure if that is okay with the villagers." But maybe they are used to tourists, but then still, so … (NL, f, 21)

When washing away the sweat, dust and dirt of the day, guests' habits of comfort and comfort of habits intersect with insecure and rather uninformed expected expectations regarding local rules of public undressing. The general awkwardness of village experience, which is how epistemic-institutional and social structures are "made flesh" (i.e. are actualized and reproduced), is intriguingly exemplified by the issue of bathing.

7.4.9 Dinner and "hanging out"

In the forest as well as in the village, meals are much appreciated by visitors if enough attention is paid to preparation and arrangement. Given the fact that electricity is usually scarce in remote villages, dinners are often taken by candlelight. Generally cooked by the guide with the help of some villagers (usually women or girls) and prepared with produce bought in the village and/or at the market, together with herbs and vegetables gathered during the trek, food served in a village ambience (a bamboo lodge or a stilt house) is regularly mentioned as a highlight.

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[225] For quotes from the Katang trek feedback forms, information on nationality, gender and age are missing.

Dinner involves a few shots of *lao laao,* served by the homestay's host or, according to respective tradition, by an unmarried village girl. Consuming a meal in this way is to consume "the local". Quite regularly, however, another feature of local understandings of hospitality transpires that involves a central disappointment for tourists: the refusal on the part of the hosts to dine with them. While men might join the tourist table when invited (but seem to prefer not to), women or kids almost never eat together with guests.

Even if the food is not to the taste of the customer (e.g. if containing meat, MSG or too much salt, or if only noodle soup and fish is served for breakfast), or if some other aspect of dining in the village goes against her expectations or values, she tends to refrain from openly complaining to hosts or the guide. Instead, she will uncomplainingly supplement a meal with snacks brought along and only voice criticism in the final feedback. The following examples from the Katang trek feedback forms reflect the meaning of food within the "jinxed" relation of clients to the locality:

- I feel a bit ashamed to have so much food and the locals look at me while I eat […]
- Should the owner of the Homestay [not] eat with us instead of watching us eating? The food should be local and not bought and brought from outside. The food should be prepared by locals.
- It would be <u>much</u> better if we ate <u>with</u> the local people – it makes it very nervous, eating while other people just sit and watch, when they will eat the same food after you – everyone should eat <u>together</u>, and eat <u>local</u> food, no matter how simple.
- […] Food was good but there was <u>too much</u>! We felt awkward/uncomfortable having so much food when families have so little. (Also we didn't need that much!)
- No MSG or meat for vegetarians please! (Knorr has both)
- […] Some other people on the trek were unnecessarily critical of the guide's food and English skills.
- It is understandable bread was prepared because some white people don't eat Asian food. We are Japanese and OK with local food in many cases. (emphasis original)

As food is a fundamental cultural complex constituted by all kinds of socialized needs, embodied habits and ideal values, it becomes a natural foil on which tourists assert themselves, mainly as critical, egalitarian ("everyone should eat together, and eat local food, no matter how simple"), discerning, and sometimes nationally identifying individuals. General ideals of authenticity and sustainability are thus expressed via food. While provided as constructive feedback, such comments also exclude aspects of reality: if food is more expensive in the village than on the market, or if rice is short, tour operators may have no choice but to bring it from outside. Also, buying food in the village is not necessarily better in terms of quality. Moreover, wanting to have everyone eat local food is clearly a lofty ideal: even most meat-eaters might have substantial problems with common local specialties, such as innards, rodents, spiders, insects, dog meat, *paa dtaek* (rotten fish) or *phiia* (intestinal contents of cows). Similarly, the ideal dining community would be jeop-

ardized in practice by all kinds of differential table manners that inevitably appear unappetizing to the other group.[226] As long as one can be sure that some safe distance is necessarily created to local realities by ecotourism structures (through cooking trainings and safeguards), however, it is easy for customers to make idealistic claims, mainly as means to self-actualization.

Usually, after dinner there is time to relax and hang out. In Nam Ha, the guide or some villagers (e.g. kids) collect wood and start a fire in front of the lodge while customers are still eating inside. Quietly set apart from the village at the banks of Nam Ha, this is the ideal place for group members to hang out and chat, drink, listen to the noises of the jungle and look at an astonishing sea of stars. Conversation topics widely vary depending on respective habitual baggage and preoccupations.[227] Such settings are occasions to foster mutual recognition as *habitus* peers rather than creating internal difference through serious discussion, so that outright debates and arguments are an exception. Everyone is interested in finishing the day in a relaxed and peaceful way. Gradually, the different members will excuse themselves and go to bed while a core of discussants may talk until the early hours about the human condition – except if there is a party going on.

7.4.10 Parties and celebrations

Occasionally, guests are invited to village festivities, such as communal feasts to celebrate the construction of a house. House construction is generally a social affair to which people from the area are officially invited to help. Their participation is repaid through provision of food and drinks, and, at certain stages (such as the completion and erection of the framing), through communal celebrations. If tourists become involved, they likely have a rather relaxed time as well, communing with their hosts and gaining glimpses into actually lived local culture:

[…] when we were invited to this party at first we were noticing: there is only men here and little children playing, and now we're sitting here and they're passing us laolao, I liked it if women were here also. And then women did join, and then we felt more comfortable [and] really a part of it, knowing that we are not this spectacle that they're inviting but – well maybe we are but at least people of our same kind of position in society is also there, meaning like another woman […] when we got to the party they showed us some Lao dance moves, and they had this funky ginger root thing and they were teaching us how you peel and eat it. That was their way […] of showing their ways to us, and that was really nice. […] a lot of them were asking us like "take a picture of us." At the party it was very much like "yeahyeah, picture this, picture this" […]

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[226] Be it, for the guests, the drinking of rice-whiskey before the meal instead of after, eating with hands, sharing rice with the hands of hard working peasants, habits of eating noisily etc.

[227] Discussions might generally revolve around recalling certain experiences of the tour so far; personal stories, most commonly about travel experiences more generally; political and philosophical considerations, e.g. about purposes of travel, views on the countries visited or reflections of one's own position as a tourist.

the party was like crazy and the kids were nuts, but even with all the laolao and whatever they were still so just nice and respectful and inclusive and they wanted pictures and [...] continued to make us eat and eat and eat. (US, f, 27)

I will elaborate on the peculiar kind of *communitas* enacted through such village-based fêtes when focusing on the intersection of religion and political ecology in Dong Sakee sacred forest (8.4.2). A tour there involves a *baasii* ceremony that creates a relationship between host and guest that is not entirely determined, although partly impeded, by mutually perceived strangeness. Guests as well as hosts meet on a more equal ground: the cultural universality of "participant intoxication" (Fiskesjö 2010).

     Such glimpses into real community life, however, also raise concerns about certain aspects of local celebrating. While women and kids were included in the above-referenced house-warming party, the Katang *baasii* puts women and children into the background or employs them as caterers of *lao laao*. Such exclusion is prone to meet (some) visitors' disapproval, as are the quantities of alcohol consumed (by village men) or nine-year-old kids chain-smoking. So even where more "authentic" relations are formed between both structural poles, the cultural experience does not remain unclouded by concern. In fact, the uneasiness often felt in different forms of interaction derives from the guests' reflexivity and sensitivity that must be seen as a central asset of their milieu's cultural capital, so that this constant – open or smoldering – discomfort with village experience fulfills a central function in guests' self-actualization as members of their social group. A brief anecdote illustrates how the party factor in host-guest relations may provide for the "worst experience" of a customer:

[...] in the night we were at our fire camp and we saw a fire camp higher in the village, and I just asked [...] the guide: "Could we join them? Is it possible?" And he said yes. So we climbed up, he asked and we didn't really understand but we supposed [the answer] was no [...] because we didn't join and instead he went to a house. That was the house of a family who was [assigned] to take us in charge like for the food, the cooking. [...] And so he went to this house, it was all dark, so they were sleeping, so he just woke them up and he called us "come in, come in." And so the parents [had] woken up and with a laolao bottle and we had a laolao tour (laughs). But [...] it was weird, like we deduced that [our guide] wanted that we were pleased [...] and that was in the contract that this family has to please us [...] so it was really weird and so we just [stood up saying:] "now we want to sleep" and we quit. We left quite quickly. (FR, m, 23)

The failure of communal drinking to create a genuine host-guest relation can be attributed in this case to a surfacing of the locality's reality in ecotourism's ambiguous functioning. Had the first group of villagers invited the tourists into their round, it likely might have become one of the best experiences. But their refusal, for whatever actual reason, set in motion a fatal, totally "inauthentic" dynamic

where the guide almost enforced partying, more or less explicitly on basis of the contractual agreements between stakeholders (6.2.5), which ultimately dissatisfied all included actors.

7.4.11 Sleep

Finding sleep in a Lao village is often not easy for tourists. Apart from being unaccustomed to the bedding, the peculiar campsite ambience of Lao villages (e.g. the paper-thin walls of stilt houses and their assemblage) is more clearly recognizable at nighttime. While trying to fall asleep, one becomes aware of the many voices and noises in the village, of the presence of rats under the roof, and of the non-attributable sounds of a foreign place. If there is party going on (without tourists invited) or if some villager happens to be in the mood for loud Thai pop music, or is snoring, it is hard to find sleep at all. As the toilet is located outside, the unaccustomed customer has to deal with the prospect of uncomfortable nightly excursions that run the risk of waking sleeping dogs or meeting a cow in the dark. Those are all aspects which can cause light sleep on an overnight village stay. It is chiefly at night that "authenticity" becomes auditory. As one Katang Trail tourist put it:

[…] Suggestion (don't know if it works): for that night when tourists are there, no TV[,] and loud music should be avoided. As tourist I pay a high price for the tour to support people. So it would be nice as reward to have at least the feeling of ancient village.

An "ancient" village is one without noise pollution, especially at night when good sleep is at stake. The quote provides a direct link between untouchedness ("ancient") and the touristic service agreement. It refers to the expected soundscape of an authentic, "archaic" village consisting of, at most, low-volume noises that are not produced by modern technology, allowing for sleep surrounded by natural culture. The absurdity of such an authenticity logic is easily and unavoidably revealed the next morning: when the visitor is woken up by the age-old, incredibly early sounds of the cockcrow or of peasants heading to their fields. In the case of the Katang Trail, traditional rice pounding will do the job: the rice pounders and the women using them are a photo attraction during the day, but if constant pounding starts at four-thirty in the morning directly under the homestay, it is very much to the displeasure of most customers. There are worse troubles with overnight stays, however.[228]

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[228] Two female customers of a Luang Namtha-based tour company, for example, complained to the manager about harassment when going to bed in their homestay. Two men had stepped into the house and invited them to drink beer but the girls declined and stayed in their bed reading. Then these men allegedly tried to climb into the ladies' beds. When they screamed, no one came to help them, even though the family they were staying with was present. One girl's shoe was stolen. They were not really in danger, they admitted, but nevertheless felt left alone in a threaten-

After waking up and having breakfast, the tour continues with a friendly and formal, but rarely cordial farewell in the village. The job of the villagers to accommodate the guests and provide them with more or less satisfying experiences of authentic village life is completed for now. The guests will disappear into Nature again, most likely not to return to this particular village. After another Nature experience, tourists return to the start of the tour and the group dissolves eventually.[229]

7.4.12 Switching on

When NPA land is left behind and village land begins, a switch takes place from Nature to Culture experience, which entails differential sets of activities. While the natural environment allows for quite perfect self-assertion (it does not "talk back"), the detachedness-in-intimacy that characterizes village experience hampers easy self-affirmation. The village context is more obviously "social", although closer to Nature than is the visitor herself. From this tension arises the potential of the village to function as trigger of critical self-reflection:

My strongest experience was in the villages because there the penny has dropped somehow. You observe a lot or you've made many personal observations at home or even inside of yourself: what drives you, what pleases and bothers you; or dynamics in your family. Then you are there, time-travel, a hundred-fifty or so years back, five hundred, thousand years, it doesn't matter at all, and you see how such a primordial human community lives together, and that is a little eye-opening. (DE, m 28)[230]

We will presently be picking up on the trope of time-travel referred to here as an expression of guests' reflected village relations (7.5). The village's peculiar poten-

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ing situation and demanded their money back, which they got – along with a whole set of apologies, excuses, caring questions and possible explanations. The company's co-owner rationalized the incident by insisting that the village had been opened up for tourism only six months previously and villagers had never seen a movie or been to the city before. That is why, he implied, one should also try to understand possible overreactions ("freak out") when they see (such cute) Western girls in the village. In this way, he maintained an illusion of untouchedness and sought to appeal to the empathy as well as the vanity of these tourists.

[229] There are exceptions, of course, but generally, as is the case with most travel acquaintances, one promises to stay in touch, followed by short-lived attempts via e-mail or Facebook that eventually peter out. However, deeper and sometimes romantic relationships can emerge, such as between a guide and a customer in Luang Namtha.

[230] "[…] meine stärkste *experience* war […] in den Dörfern […] weil da ist so'n bisschen wie so'n Groschen gefallen. Man beobachtet doch viel, oder hat viele menschliche Beobachtungen zu Hause gemacht, […] oder auch in einem selber, was einen antreibt, was einem Freude macht, stört und so, oder [D]ynamiken in der eigenen Familie. Da bist Du da, Zeitreise, hundertfünfzig oder so Jahre zurück, fünfhundert Jahre, tausend Jahre, das ist völlig egal und siehst wie so eine ursprüngliche menschliche Gemeinschaft zusammenlebt, und das ist so ein bisschen augenöffnend."

tial to trigger self-reflection lies in the fact that, on the one hand, the village's particular "materiality" provides for certain impressions while, on the other hand, and concurrently, tourism turns this particularity into a projection screen for guests, so that the locality is subordinated to the purpose of guests' self-assertion. This purpose is already part of the motivation to travel:

Yes, gaining distance from home was definitely a driving force from the outset – see what do you appreciate at home and what bothers you, maybe also what you would like to change. Such kinds of travels are always good for this, to have enough distance to be an observer of home, like in the village, and say: "which dynamics are actually going on there and what do I actually like about my life." (ibid)[231]

The kinds of thoughts provoked by experiencing the village as participant observer are, for example:

It gave me hope that there are still people out there living with nature and still have that incredible sense of community. I love seeing that sense of community because we really lost that I would say in a lot of parts of the world. (US, f, 27)

[…] you see that they are living all really simply, and the first thing I thought is: they look like happy (laughs). It should be good to live here. No big worries, I guess, at least what I see. Yeah kids are really having fun. It's nice, it's a nice place. (FR, m, 23).

[It is] just like two or three hundred years ago [in Europe]. So, an extremely beautiful village community; very, very simple. (DE, m, 26)[232]

These statements relate perceived simplicity with happiness and aesthetics ("extremely beautiful village community, very very simple"). As just referenced, village experience is often perceived, implicitly or explicitly, as time-travel:

It was a bit like time-travel some hundred years back, also in our history. That's why it was nice to see because you saw where we all come from; how we have lived together for hundreds or even thousands of years until stuff like urbanization, industrialization and so on basically started a hundred-fifty years ago to change everything. So that today we find cities that have actually noth-

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[231] "Ja, also das war sicher von vornherein 'ne Triebfeder, ein bisschen Abstand zu zu Hause bekommen und – gucken was schätzt man so zu Hause, was stört einen zu Hause, was will man vielleicht auch verändern? Und dafür ist so ne Reise immer gut […] dass man so viel Abstand hat, dass man beginnt zu Hause so ein bisschen […] wie der Beobachter im Dorf, und zu Hause zu beobachten und zu sagen 'was läuft da eigentlich so an Dynamiken und was gefällt mir da eigentlich so an meinem Leben?'"

[232] "[…] so wie wir vor zweihundert, dreihundert Jahren [bei uns]. Also, extrem schöne Dorfgemeinschaft, sehr sehr einfach."

ing to do with those original – how people grew up. Yeah it was really a little time-travel, that captures it quite nicely. (DE, m, 28)[233]

This statement not only recapitulates the "metabolic rift" (Foster 1999) but also brings the abstractness of village experience to the point: because he recognizes "only few elements of modernity" (ibid)[234], it does not matter at all how old the village actually is and what village life really looked like five-hundred years ago in Laos. It seems possible to argue that the impression of travelling in time during village experience is an effect of the epistemic-institutional ecotouristic universe (Chapter 3): it is the ambivalent position of the ethnic village between pure Nature and Civilization which triggers guests' self-reflections. On the one hand, villages are clearly in the realm of the cultivated, on the other they are closer to Nature and therefore further back in time. More analytically speaking, time travel is effected by the institutional double standard with which ethnic villages are measured in the ecotouristic universe: within the Nature vs. Society (or: Culture) distinction, villages are on the side of society; within the tradition vs. modernity distinction, they are on the side of tradition. This contradictory intersection of two homologous oppositions was argued to be essential for sustainable development more generally; its enactment in touristic experience reaffirms this double standard.

Just as village children are central to breaking the ice (above), they are important triggers of guests' self-reflection:

Yeah, that was really impressive, to see how they live. Really simple, but they all seem to be happy. And when I look at the kids that I treat [as remedial teacher], the things they don't know and how neglected they are; and here I see four-year old kids preparing something for the kitchen with machetes – that was very impressive, with such naturalness. (AT, m, 34)[235]

And the children, you think, oh what an experience growing up like this. I felt, this is the way we grew up, because there were all kids going down to the water, and one of the girls caught a frog and showed me. That was exactly what I did as a child, I think, how nice to have this […] (ZA, f, 35).

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[233] "[Es war] so ein bisschen ne Zeitreise zurück, einige hundert Jahre zurück […] auch in unserer Geschichte. Dadurch war's natürlich schön zu sehen, weil Du so ein bissel gesehen hast, wo kommen wir eigentlich alle her? Wie haben wir einige Jahre, oder *tausende* Jahre zusammengelebt bis jetzt so Verstädterung, Industrialisierung und so weiter vor hundertfünfzig Jahren im Grunde angefangen haben das alles zu verändern, und wir heute Städte vorfinden die mit den ursprünglichen, wie die Menschen aufgewachsen sind eigentlich nix mehr zu tun haben? […] ja, es [war] wirklich so ein kleine Zeitreise. Das trifft's ganz gut."

[234] "[…] irgendwie wenig Elemente der Moderne […]."

[235] "Ja, also wie die leben, das war schon recht beeindruckend. Sehr einfach aber sie scheinen alle glücklich zu sein, und wenn ich mir meine Therapiekinder anschaue was die alles nicht können, wie die vernachlässigt werden, und hier sehe ich […] vierjährige Kinder die mit den Macheten für die Küche was zubereiten, also das war schon recht beeindruckend, mit der Selbstverständlichkeit."

And they all, all the kids just seemed well cared for, extremely happy, and animals galore! (US, f, 32)

When you see the grandfather how he carries the child in this pouch – yes, there the grandparents fulfill exactly the function they used to have back home, that is, to watch after the offsprings. Insofar, I learned something: that family is an important value, and that children play, and to become young again as a grown-up when you have children yourself. (DE, m, 26)[236]

This last statement goes on explicitly highlighting ecotourism's potential as a strategy to self-contemplation of the Western, white middle classes:

You see in a simple way how people can be happy. In the West, this is going down the drain a little, I think, because of these – many distractions like I-phone, laptop, computer games, money making. And now many people recall this, maybe because of ecotourism, [and ask:] "Okay, what's actually important to me? It is nature, fresh air, friendly people". (ibid)[237]

In this view, ecotourism is also an agent of individual critique of one's life in the West, providing for encounters that prompt reflections on "what actually matters." This indicates that ecotourism is perceived as a means for attaining a more critical stance towards one's own life, and it must therefore be taken seriously as such. This indicates that "actors" are no mere executors of some structural programming but are also reflexive and partly nonidentical with objective structures (1.4). Ironically, however, a consequence of experiences reflected in this way is the ultimate affirmation of everyday social rules.

7.5 Self-reintegration

Self-reflection is a crucial element of ecotourism practice. It appears, however, that critique feeds into re-affirmation in an almost ritualistic way. Tourism in general and Nature tourism in particular have been described as rituals and analyzed according to theories of ritual structure and anti-structure (e.g. by Graburn 1983; 2001; see Turner 1969). Although this was not the purpose of the my examination, one theme shared with ritual studies is the ultimate reintegration of the actor into the structures of everydayness after a liminal and critical detour into (in fact

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[236] "Wenn man den Großvater sieht wie er das Kind in diesem Stoffbeutel rumträgt, ja, da haben die Großeltern genau die Funktion, die sie bei uns früher hatten, nämlich auf den Nachwuchs aufzupassen. […] Also insofern [habe ich etwas] gelernt, dass Familie wichtige Werte sind und dass Kinder spielen und das Sich-selbst-jünger-werden als Erwachsener wenn man selber Kinder hat […]."

[237] "Ja, Du siehst auf 'ne sehr einfach Art und Weise, wie die Leute eigentlich glücklich sein können. Ich glaube das geht im Westen so ein bisschen flöten durch diese – vielen Ablenkungen wie IPhone, Laptop, Computerspiele, Geld machen. Und viele besinnen sich, vielleicht auch durch den Ökotourismus, darauf zurück, „okay was ist mir eigentlich wichtig? Es ist Natur, frische Luft, freundliche Leute."

well structured) "anti-structure" of exotic jungle and ethnic villages. Ritual re-integration in ecotourism as "pseudocatharsis" is also a consequence of Fletcher's recent study of the cultural dimensions of ecotourism (Fletcher 2014, 184ff). In this vein, also ecotourism in Laos appears as a process of *uneasy* reintegration and affirmation of the realities one originally escaped. We find hints at this dynamic in tourist reflections on a good life and in their wishes and expectations regarding the visited locality.

7.5.1 Good Life

Guests' notion of a good life follows a common line:

I don't know, my life's pretty good so like, for me just family and friends and travel. (US, f, 32)

I'd say family and friends are everything, and basic necessities like food and shelter and water and stuff like that. And then just access to […] some adventure. Whether it's nature or people or different places […] or trying a new sport or instrument or something. […] Just ongoing learning, that's a good life. (US, 27, f)

[…] it's not money, you don't need money to do what you want. […]. When you see […] people here, especially in villages, they are just here and maybe they are bored a little bit but not so many problems. Just live and enjoy life. […] [Managing a local tour agency] is a kind of life which would be good. Just finding a business to do in a great place like here [Nong Khiao], and then your life it's simple, you just manage your treks, your guides and, yeah it's great place. This kind of thing. Maybe do it one year, two years and then find […] another thing to do. (FR, m, 23)

I want myself to be fine; healthy; have friends, that is, a social network; decent financial security, I don't have to be rich necessarily but I don't want to be concerned about this. Also having a family would be nice. (AT, m, 34)[238]

Actualized by their experiences on the trek, tourists' notions of a good life revolve around the image of basic ("just…") material and social necessities. Given the critical stance towards Western materialism reinforced by the experience of happy simplicity, guests' notions thus involve family and friends throughout. Money tends to be seen as a source of worry and is therefore either not at all part of a good life ("you don't need money to do what you want") or, more realistically, accepted as a basic necessity. Doing what you want, ongoing learning, and finding new things to do tend to be put into the basic necessities category as well but must be seen as post-material values resting on a certain phase of capitalist development (Fletcher 2014, 101ff; Inglehart 1977). When "post-materialism" becomes

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[238] "[M]ir soll's gut gehen, gesund sein, Freunde haben also soziales Netz haben, finanziell halbwegs abgesichert sein, muss jetzt nicht reich sein, aber halt, muss mir keine Sorgen darum machen. Familie wär auch noch schön ja."

explicitly addressed by tourists themselves, the notion of good life transcends the idea of simplicity:

[Good life is] more than just covering your basic needs. Because I am from Germany, I am in a position, I guess, to say that I want to be happy. I want to be able to like my job, not just do it to earn money, for example; or just have a nice place to live. The opportunity to go places, meet interesting people, stuff like that. It's a bit more than just covering your basic needs. […] I'm in a first-world position, where I crave more. Which is, I don't wanna say presumptuous – I just think that as societies evolve […] you're looking just more for like self-fulfillment. And everybody has a different notion of that. […] For me it's to be able to do the things that I want. (DE, f, 24)

The idea of good life may be based on a fixation on natural simplicity (family, shelter, material security), on conscious self-positioning ("do what I want"), or on a combination of both – ultimately, it tends to result in affirming urban everydayness: "Good life for me is to consciously live for the moment and be self-determined and also to pursue my hobbies, as well as to not deviate entirely from financial success" (DE, m, 26).[239]

Opportunity to travel, freedom to choose a job one can identify with and financial success are ways of imagining good life as principally attainable through existing social forms – which one wanted to get away from in the beginning:

Good life, I guess, is to live consciously, especially when you're on a journey like this where you see a lot of poverty, begging, also a lot of misery. Yes, and also to be more aware and grateful for what one possesses at home; and, through this, to create a good life by yourself. (DE, m, 26)[240]

The comprehensive functioning of ecotourism and travel as a (milieu-specific) ritual of re-accommodation is most clearly expressed in the following statement:

Travelling, this is important to me personally. Something like discovering the world, getting out of your own world, out of what's familiar. I find that this broadens your horizon, opens your perspective. And afterwards I appreciate much more my life back in Switzerland. And above all, I appreciate what stresses me out in Switzerland over time, that is, this extreme punctuality, this perfection everywhere, and also this extreme cleanliness. Those are actually things that put me

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[239] "Gutes Leben heißt für mich bewusst in den Tag hinein zu leben und selbstbestimmt zu leben und auch meinen Hobbies nachzugehen, als auch nicht *ganz* […] vom finanziellen Erfolg abzukommen […]."

[240] "Gutes Leben ist glaub ich bewusst leben, gerade wenn man auf so ner Reise ist wie hier, wo man sehr viel Armut sieht, Bettelei, sehr viel Elend auch. […] Ja und bewusster und dankbar sein für das, was man eigentlich zu Hause hat und dadurch sich ein gutes Leben selber zu erschaffen."

under stress over time, also this whole work pressure and all – I learn to appreciate this again when I'm back from abroad. (CH, m, 29)[241]

Social realities become stressful over time both at home and on a trip. Leaving home involves *hysteresis,* habitual attachment to the structures sought to become detached from via travel (desires for cleanliness, punctuality, perfection). Travelling exposes one to a supposed other of everyday life and this experience leads to a more benign assessment of everydayness, even of the most obviously exploitative contexts ("work pressure"). Such reintegration must thus remain uneasy: what became stressful at home will become stressful again after some time, and the process must be repeated.

Moreover, material and post-material values combine in tourists' notions of a good life; the Swiss tourist just quoted differentiates wealth ("*Wohlstand*") and welfare ("*Wohlfahrt*") in a peculiar way:

I think that welfare is more difficult to achieve [than wealth]: happiness, satisfaction. This has to do with yourself, your attitude towards life and the world. You can only become happy through yourself, no one can give you that. It cannot be bought as well. Wealth is important so that you have enough to eat, clean water. I am not that materialistic, I don't need that much. (ibid)[242]

Locating the responsibility for everyone's happiness in the individual is a central feature of neoliberal ideology which identifies happiness with individual adaptation to the social pecking order. Being content with what one already has – that is, *amor fati* (to love one's fate) in Bourdieu's terms – is equated with happiness and a good life, as the quotes above show. Wealth is generally acknowledged as material sufficiency (to have everything you need, and you don't need much). This view mirrors and goes along with the current hegemonic sustainability discourse. As guests were presented with an apparently real-existing example of a "self-sufficient" economy, they become (re-)converted to the ecocapitalist universe. In thus far, guest's reflections are constituted by the conservation-development dilemma as well as by the uneasiness which accompanies re-acknowledgement of

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[241] "Also das ist mir persönlich wichtig, reisen. Etwas die Welt entdecken, […] raus aus der eigenen Welt […] raus aus dem Bekannten. Ich finde das öffnet den Horizont, das öffnet die Perspektive. Und ich schätze nachher vielmehr wieder mein Leben in der Schweiz. Und ich schätze vor allem auch das, was mich eigentlich stresst in der Schweiz, also die extreme Pünktlichkeit, die Perfektion überall […] auch die extreme Sauberkeit. Das sind eigentlich so Sachen, die mich in der Schweiz mit der Zeit stressen, auch der ganze Arbeitsdruck und so, den lern ich nachher wieder viel mehr zu schätzen, wenn ich aus dem Ausland zurück bin."

[242] "Ich denke Wohlfahrt ist das schwierigere zu erreichen: Glückseligkeit, Zufriedenheit. Das hat mit einem selber zu tun, mit der eigenen Einstellung zum Leben und zur Welt. Also man kann nur selber glücklich werden, das kann einem niemand geben. Das kann man auch nicht kaufen. […] der Wohlstand ist einfach wichtig, dass man genug hat, genug zu essen, sauberes Wasser. […] Ich bin jetzt nicht so materialistisch dass ich, ich brauch jetzt nicht so viel."

the factual constraints. This is more clearly expressed in their wishes and expectations regarding the future of the localities visited.

7.5.2 Wishes vs. expectations

Asked about their wishes and expectations regarding the area's future, guests displayed a notion of development much in line with hegemonic sustainability reasoning. This is evident in this triple statement of wishes for the visited village:

A: *I would like to see, if it changes that's fine, but a change that they want. Not a forced change. A change that they stand up for and that they're at peace with. Whatever it is.* (US, f, 27)

B: *And that they're benefitting […] I don't think that I want for them a whole lot of outside industry that's not supporting their culture or their people.* (US, f, 32)

C: *No illusions, no economic illusions.* (US, f, 31)

B: *Yeah, I'd really like to go back to that village and probably see life not, not … extremely different from how it is, but maybe the changes that they have allowed to occur again make them just healthier, stronger and, yeah at peace with their community. However they want it to happen, I want that they are the ones making it.* (US, f, 32)

Such statements express ideals of local self-determination in development, the cultivation of diversity ("[…] it seems like rubber is like a monoculture, you know, destroying diversification of your sustainable lifestyle"; US, f, 27) and a careful, protective relation with the environment:

I don't wanna see that forest be overrun […]. But I do want them to grow […] I would love to see economy grow here, and I would want to see the people be beneficiaries of that. (US, f, 32)

These statements proclaim long-term economic thinking and are skeptical about economic "illusions" such as large-scale monocultures or grand "outside" development schemes. From the perspective of self-determination, forced development is part of an economic illusion. However, this ideal is also at odds with what is to be reasonably expected for the locality's future development:

It should stay as it is as far as possible although I do understand, of course, the village's wish to have electricity the whole time. But it would be nice if it stayed like this, but then again it would be like an open-air museum, and I wouldn't want to ask this of them. So, you cannot stop this development, I'd say, but keeping traditions in some form would be nice. (AT, m, 34)[243]

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[243] "Ja das soll schon noch so bleiben wie es möglich ist, wobei ich natürlich den Wunsch der Dorfbewohner schon versteh, dass sie täglich die ganze Zeit Elektrizität haben [wollen] […]. Aber, ja, schön wär's wenn's so bleiben täte, aber dann wär's schon so eine Art Freilichtmuseum und

I hope it will be the same, ah, but that's not possible, I think. I think it will be more developed.
(NL, f, 21)

*I hope [that in the future the village will be] not unlike today. I don't think that this is realistic
but…* (DE, m, 28) [244]

This gap between wishes and expectations lies in the evidence of a development
gap, in the views of guests, between Laos and their home countries. Similar to the
trope of time-travel referred to above, Lao development is literally seen from fur-
ther up on the capitalist development ladder, which, in this case, legitimizes reality:

*I would say once they filled their pockets with the corruption fees, if you will, they'll eventually
move on to helping the people. […] I think they'll eventually move to where they see it's beneficial
to help the people rather than fill their pockets. But first they have to go through that phase. Like
all other countries have in the past.* (US, f, 27)

*They do exactly what we did in Europe over the last fifty years. And I think you cannot expect them
[to avoid this], they have to take evolutionary steps by themselves just like us.* (CH, m, 29)[245]

The visitors' more developed position has already gone through the unsustainable
stage of social development and arrived phylogenetically, as it were, at the idea of
a more sustainable society. The developmental gap as reflected in the difference
between what guests would like to see and what they expect is often addressed but
never actually resolved. It remains a contradiction:

*[…] you learn from – let me just call them the simple people, who are limited to the essentials,
their village community, family, survival: they are around the clock busy with their daily to-do's,
and it seems to be a very fulfilling life. And I also don't think that one should force development
in these villages, unless regarding – and maybe this is how it starts – clean water and education,
because from this arises more. Smarter people make more money and do more trade. Maybe the
vicious circle start like this, which has drawn us into the rat race. But normally you say "okay
healthcare and clean water are targets worth aspiring to, and good education, proficiency in Eng-
lish and so on." So that people get a chance in the city, maybe find a job.* (DE, m, 26)[246]

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das würde ich ihnen doch nicht zumuten. Also aufhalten kann man die Entwicklung nicht, würd
ich sagen. Aber Traditionen erhalten in irgendeiner Form wär schön."

[244] "Hoffentlich ähnlich wie heute. Äm, halt ich zwar nicht für realistisch aber […]"

[245] "[…] sie machen genau das gleiche wie wir in Europa die letzten 50 Jahre. Ich denke, man kann
das auch nicht erwarten, sie müssen selber evolutionäre Schritte machen wie wir auch."

[246] "[…] insofern lernt man von den einfachen Völkern, sag ich jetzt mal, die auf das Wesentliche
beschränkt sind, auf ihre Dorfgemeinschaft, auf ihre Familie, auf das Überleben [...] Man ist
around the clock beschäftigt mit den tagtäglichen *to-do's* und es scheint aber ein sehr erfüllendes
Leben zu sein und ich glaube auch nicht, dass man Fortschritt in diesen Dörfern forcieren
müsste. Es sei denn in Bezug auf – vielleicht fängt's ja so an ja – klares Wasser und Bildung, weil
dann entsteht mehr. Smartere Leute machen mehr Geschäft und mehr Handel. Vielleicht fängt

The ambivalent notion of development as expressed in this view leaves unresolved the tension between "the goals worth aspiring to" and the "vicious circle" set in motion by the same thing, development. Where exactly is the point at which legitimate social change begins "spoiling" a community? Unsurprisingly, this contradictoriness is also present in the attitude of tourists towards their own practice, tourism. On the one hand, some are very positive about ecotourism (also already above) as an option of sustainable development:

[…] it was really cool […] how we were really containing our tour environmentally and sustainable in other aspects. Like economically, each day we had a person in the village that started trek with us […] paid to be with us […] on a rotating basis the family members of all the village help cook the meal […] paid for that. […] it was just really cool to see how the trek was so resourceful with the area that we are in, about the people and the land, but not in a damaging way. […] we had very little waste […] really inspiring that we can do so much with what's just in our immediate surroundings and go for like, you know the exotic far-off thing. (US, f, 27)

[…] I do presume that tourism will be expanded; the country wants to advance and ecotourism surely is a cool development sector for the country. (DE, m, 26)[247]

On the other hand, tourism and ecotourism are seen, partly by the same people, as a potential threat that will "spoil" the place:

The downside is that more and more people come, and when more and more people come authenticity will be lost a little, exactly that which makes it special. (DE, m, 28)[248]

I think there will be more tourists, so the ethnic villages will be visited [more often] because there are too many tourists. So I think that will change. But I really hope they can manage to let it be like it's now. (NL, f, 21)

I think our first worry is how long it will take to spoil them and people [guests] actually giving stuff for free and it is not the tourism alternative [anymore]. (ZA, f, 35)

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dann der *vicious circle* an, der uns so in das *rat race* getrieben hat […] aber man sagt ja schon so okay, *healthcare* und *clean water* sind so erstrebenswerte Ziele, und gute Ausbildung, Englischkenntnisse und so weiter. Dass die Leute 'ne Chance haben, in der *city* vielleicht nen Job zu finden."

[247] "Insofern gehe ich schon davon aus, dass der Tourismus ausgebaut werden wird, das Land will vorankommen, und der […] Ökotourismus ist für das Land sicher ein cooler Wachstumsbereich."

[248] "[…] die Kehrseite ist, dass mehr und mehr Leute kommen und wenn mehr und mehr Leute kommen geht das Ursprüngliche natürlich ein bisschen verloren, was es gerade so besonders macht."

Regular ecotourists' views are thus much defined by the idea of self-limitation of local development (3.3.2) that should be adapted to the perceived stage of development the locals are seen in:

So I think you can't tell someone "you are not allowed to improve your life." But at the same time you should do it at a speed which doesn't destroy the culture. […] So that's the bit that worries you, if it grows too quickly […]. […] you don't wanna sound like a pessimist, that […] there is no doubt about it, it will be changed. Completely destroyed. (ZA, f, 35)

The matter of conservation vs. development is not treated as a logical contradiction but, again, as a matter of gradation, where a precarious "balance" must be struck between conservation and development, between purity and being "spoiled":

So it's that balance, I think. […] how to develop […] I don't know but I think conservation should be on the top […] because people will be willing to pay for that if they have that experience. (ibid)

Ecotourism is therefore not perceived as the worst of all developmental means as it capitalizes on conservation. The conservation-development problem is finally settled on the grounds of the factual constraints, and is thus approached pragmatically. First, by simply following the zonal logic of current land-use schemes:

To me it's not necessarily a contradiction if [in one area] they protect the forest and this is their creed, but they have to have a certain area set aside for industry. Every country has. It is not a contradiction, it's a way of life. So for me […], I can easily separate: this is – even though maybe imposed by China whoever – this is their industry here, that's fine, and here is the protected area. (US, f, 27)

Interestingly, the same zonal compatibility view is expressed in most of the interviews conducted with villagers. A second trope is that development cannot be halted, it is something of a natural force:

I have to be a pessimist, I think it will bring along a lot of change for the worse […] it's inevitable with higher education […]. (ZA, f, 35)

[…] culture changes because it has to, because it won't survive, like anyone else […]. (CA, m, 59)

A related trope of this ambivalent reflexive attitude towards the locality's future is competition as factual constraint, which further naturalizes capitalist sociality:

Yeah it's the human condition, it's gotta be competitive. And I think this is difficult in a small village. (ZA, m, 38)

I don't know necessarily what a different model is […] but I think in general you have to compete to be, like, we're all part of global economy right now, so you have to compete to be part of that. But it's a shame that the global economy thinks more short-term than long-term […]. (US, f, 27)

They [the villagers] seem to have fighting chance though. (ibid)

Such affirmative reference to the factual constraints of capitalist sociality is clearly struck by uneasiness ("it's a shame", "a fighting chance") of being relegated to the power of social reality, without an idea about a "different model." There are exceptions from the regular view, such as: "[…] to me the perfect world is where technology is advanced enough that nobody had to work and no pollution, that to me is the perfect world" (CA, m, 59). But these exceptions are few and far between, and within the frame of ecotourism, such utopian views are like the others relegated to what seems like a veritable "weapon of the weak": "In ten years we just go somewhere else" (DE, m, 28).[249] Because the experiential uneasiness, which was at least in part a motivation to leave home and, also, to do an ecotour, and which was actualized throughout practice, cannot be resolved or satisfied within the given conditions; and so the ecotourism frontier cannot but move on geographically in order to repeatedly actualize a complex and comprehensive, active individual self-reintegration. Ultimately, within the ecotourism framework, uneasy "identification with the aggressor" seems the only real option for finding at least some relief from the multiple frictions and attritions between the individual and society (also Fletcher 2014, 184ff). In the final analysis, of course, the ultimate structural constraint that is inescapable for most ecotourists, and within which self-reintegration has to take place, is that of the labor-leisure duality, which objectively forces holidaymakers to get back to their desks once vacation time is over. Recapitulating what has been said about tourism as culture-industrial form of integrating nonidentity (2.1.3) we might thus say that ecotouristic escape "is destined […] to lead back to its starting point" (Horkheimer/Adorno 2002, 113): the everyday constraints of urban capitalism.

7.6 Discussion

Summing up this chapter on the practice of the host-guest structure, I return to the question posed in the beginning: How does a messy reality become a promised land of authenticity and untouchedness? Or: How do troubled and dynamic places, such as those under consideration here, come to pass as localities where ecotourists' demand for a timeless, untouched "other" can be met? Answering this question is necessary in order to understand how the structures implemented (Chapter 6) are practically enlivened and gain effectiveness: by making customers

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[249] "In zehn Jahren gehen wir halt woanders hin (lacht)."

pay and by (more or less) satisfying their demands conservation and development are integrated via continuous revenue flow from the tourists' pockets. In this way, the comprehensively constituted landscape of tourism (Chapter 4) becomes on for tourism. Part of the answer to these questions is the regulation of visitors' expectations, which is conducted in a variety of ways.

7.6.1 Regulating expectations

A rather banal and therefore crucial aspect of creating authentic experience is the fact that customers necessarily bring vague, abstract and thus malleable expectations, if any, about a certain product. However, the very decision to do an ecotour in order to satisfy a felt need of "getting away" (instead of other forms of travelling, or even dropping out) already narrows down the types of expectable experiences. With this decision, two things are effected: first, the actualization of the conservation-development nexus in the distributional structure; and second, the acknowledgement of a relation to Lao villagers which is essentially one of service and servitude: hosts are expected to satisfy the expected expectations of their guests. This implies an *a priori* gap of power which is coterminous with the self-relatedness of guests' expectations, activities and experiences.

A crucial aspect of the regulation of guests' expectations is their self-regulation: their conscious, at least partially critical relation to their own anticipations, which boils down ideals to expectations that can be satisfied. In an informal conversation, a member of a tour around Luang Phabang said almost verbatim: "Of course, it would be great to be the only foreigner in a place and to really get in touch with local life. But if this is not possible, I am also happy to hang out with you guys and wait for next time" (SI, m, 27).

While guests are trying to get away from the *status quo* they pragmatically relate to their own ideals of getting away. This pragmatic reflexivity gradates theoretical contradictions, or "either/or" relations, by turning them into a continuum of "more or less" and "as-well-as", where some kind of balance must be struck between, for example, "too little" and "too much" development. This way, false-and-real contradictions engrained in the ecotouristic universe (3.3.1) are reproduced through consciously practiced experience. The customer is likely to curb her expectations in order not to thwart her experience as paying customer. This practical gradation means a re-production, a re-realization of institutionalized false-and-real contradictions, which is revealed in the ambiguity and awkwardness that characterizes the ecotouristic experience.

7.6.2 Nature vs. Culture

This examination has treated nature and culture experiences separately, thereby deliberately following a false-and-real contradiction in order to systematize ecotourism practice and take seriously a dichotomization evident in practice itself. As

has been argued, although any practical aspect must be seen as a dialectic of both society and nature, practice itself pretends that both exist in separate realms which can and must be combined. On the question of what was more important, the Nature or the Culture part, a German tourist answered:

All in all, for the success of this trip and in order to gain a positive picture in retrospect, it was fifty-fifty, I'd say. Because, yeah, that's really different; that is, in the village I came away with different experiences than in nature but the one wouldn't have been as cool without the other. So I would say it's really about the combination. (DE, m, 28)[250]

This quote illustrates how impressions gathered in the villages and the forest, respectively, are distinct, while one should not exist without the other. The trekking partner of the tourist just quoted put is slightly differently: "the mixture did it."[251] In this optic, the association of Nature and Culture is a matter of combining two different things or mixing two different essences. It thereby practically acknowledges, reinforces and sanctifies a distinction which has been objectified via legal imposition (see 4.2.3). Embodied in official boundaries between different legal land-uses, the passage from NPA land to village land corresponds with a symbolic and experiential shift which is understood less as legal boundary but rather as self-evident and natural condition. Combination as such follows a zonal logic and is therefore a major mode of rendering conceptual-institutional contrariness practicable in ways that reproduce this contrariness.

7.6.3 Proximity vs. detachedness

One of the main tensions of ecotourism practice follows from the objective structural nature of the touristic activity itself: the tourists' principal detachedness from and foreignness to a particular place and their immersion in that place through a guided tour. In practice, this condition plays out as tension between proximity and detachedness. This situation is perfectly illustrated in the example of the village lodge in the Nam Ha valley trek, located on the village's boarder – a decision made by the local community (6.2.2). Tourists enjoy its location, since it corresponds to their general situation during village stays:

[…] in the village you have the place where strangers stay […] between the river and the village, so we are not really in the village but we were almost in. So it's a great place because we don't trouble them too much, I guess, but we are there. (FR, m, 23)

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[250] "Unterm Strich fürs Gelingen des Trips und dass man einen positiven Blick zurück kriegt, würd ich sagen fifty-fifty. Weil […] ja das ist einfach anders, also in dem *village* hab ich was anderes mitgenommen als in der Natur aber das eine wäre ohne das andere nicht so cool gewesen, also ich würd schon sagen die Kombination hat's ausgemacht."

[251] "Die Mischung hat's gemacht."

Given general power inequality between hosts and guest (3.3.3), it is notable that the case of the Nam Ha lodges are examples of how hosts' as well as guests' conveniences are met: established during a test-run, they mitigate the tension between foreignness and intimacy experienced between hosts and guests in what could be called a "win-win" fashion.

Another way of putting the detachedness of the guest towards the host locality is by pointing out the self-relatedness of her motivations, activities and reflections. The activities pursued during a tour are mainly self-related, as they are geared towards the satisfaction of customers' demands. This includes a deliberate self-identification as paying customer: "So (laughs), as someone coming from a capitalist society I was first of all focused on my benefit, and I just wanted to experience nature"[252] (DE, m, 26). This self-relatedness is prone to disregarding the reality of a place in favor of satisfying culture-industrially manufactured demands – such as that for scenery in order to realize oneself amidst wilderness, even where such a practical experience is fundamentally produced by practices opposed to the very notion of wilderness (7.3.2).

This inherent hedonistic drive in ecotourism must be understood as a powerful force in meeting demands for authenticity in inauthentic settings. It facilitates a satisfactory experience of the local as *relatively* and *apparently* pristine and authentic; as actually existing realms of timelessness threatened by time. The multiple internal tensions of concept structure and practice of ecotourism involve an experiential self-fulfilling prophecy created from the guests' previous socialization, their expectations, the reflexive management of the same, and the experience itself. It is the guests' relative awareness of some or all aspects of their contorted experiences which tends to finally result in a conscious, uneasy re-integration into the everyday rules and structures of guests' home societies. The successful, convincing mediation of expected authenticity and actual "inauthenticity" – facilitated in the pre-tour stages by bringing the locality closer to potential guests' expected expectations – is realized in the actual tour by approximating these expectations and experiences to the locality.

This chapter examined the workings of the host-guest structure chiefly from the perspective of guests' experience in order to understand how ecotourism and its epistemic-institutional universe gets realized through satisfaction of the client's demand. The "inauthentic" landscape of tourism is turned into an "authentic" landscape" for tourism via the combination of three experiential moments: first, fundamental detachedness of the visitor from the place visited; second, the self-relatedness of the specific activities pursued during a tour; and third, the reflexivity of the tourist who self-manages her expectations realistically with the aim of final satisfaction. A practical consequence of this combination is, for example, that the

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[252] "Also (lacht), als Mensch aus einer kapitalistischen Gesellschaft war ich erstmal auf meinen eigenen Nutzen fokussiert, wollte halt Natur erleben."

landscape of tourism becomes one for tourism by its *appearance* as *largely* untouched; that is to say that the complex social constitution of the landscape is largely slipped over by an "ecotourist bubble" (Carrier/MacLeod 2005) thus created. Another outcome is the awkwardness of village experience. Thus, the practice of a tour is fraught with awkwardness and ambiguity that mirrors and effects false-and-real contradictions which provide attractions as well as attritions to all actors involved. The practice of this "jinxed" host-guest structure is ridden by the conservation-development tension and realizes it.

This chapter argued that in this mode ecotourists experience political boundaries between Nature and Culture as naturally given and acknowledge, even solemnize these boundaries. Similarly, tourists share in the view that they truly experience a real existing exotic other of their everyday life which in turn acknowledges and leads back to everydayness. The aspect of the nonidentical seems crucial to explain the dynamic of self-reintegration but it is hard to elicit and to convey; one can only read between the lines. As argued, tourists' reintegration is uneasy, eventually an "identification with the aggressor" that is objectively enforced by the labor-leisure distinction which, despite the blurring of the line between both, nevertheless remains significant. The dynamic in which tourists first seek to get away from stressful conditions in order to end up appreciating them is struck with uneasiness in that after reintegration everyday life will become stressful again over time and the ritual is to be repeated – and in a different location. This "compulsive repetition" is hard to get at without a notion of nonidentity.

A last dimension here is social structure, inequality and mobility: as indicated, hosts and guests both tend to more or less reproduce their respective social positions via the doing of ecotourism. Guests pursue an activity valued by their respective middle-class milieus and gain recognition by accumulating cultural and social capital useful to reproduce their positions. Hosts may see some additional income from tourism but due to ecotourism's self-limitation they basically remain "close to Nature", that is, marginalized. As we have seen, however, the mediators between hosts and guests are moving socially upward. They intentionally acquire not only new important knowledge, such as, learning the English language etc., but also new "modern" *habitus* that will identify them with emerging middle-class milieus in Laos. This is also true more generally: while advisors rather maintain their positions through their involvement, certain members of the domestic conservation staff are upwardly mobile in a manner similar to guides.

I will examine some of the overall effects of ecotourism practice in the final discussion (Chapter 9). Before these effects can be fully appreciated, however, it is first necessary to take a closer look at the particularity of a touristic destination, i.e. the idiosyncratic symbolic-material local assemblage of intermingling frontier projects of which ecotourism is part. The next chapter thus situates ecotourism in a concrete locality and, by switching from the internal to the external contradictions of ecotourism, complicates "the local".

8 Localizing ecotourism

After the last two chapters have examined the internal dynamics of ecotourism practice, this chapter zooms out conceptually to scrutinize the complex ways in which a specific ecotourism destination is constituted by diverse frontier projects. This chapter's purpose is to provide material for one central argument of this examination: that the appropriation of the Lao uplands by capital is a twisted symbolic-material affair meandering between conservation and development, rather than being a straightforward conversion from "precapitalism" to "capitalism". I thus zoom in empirically on one particular locality and its complex symbolic-material constitution and thereby situate ecotourism practice as laid out above within an idiosyncratic local setup.[253]

In order to localize ecotourism and add complexity so as to counter theoretical reductionisms (such as a crude modernization logic), I have chosen the site of a spirit forest called Dong Sakee, which is respected by locals from the Katang ethnic group. Its examination shall demonstrate that exclusionary assumptions (tradition vs. modernity; sacred vs. profane) are heavily troubled by empirical reality, and also that such binary preconceptions have problematic ethical implications. Picking up on the relational frontier concept (4.2.1), I focus here on the character and interplay of various "projects" – understood as projections to be realized – constituting the local relational frontier. I thus complicate the "local" in two inter-

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[253] This chapter is a revised and expanded version of a DORISEA working paper (Kleinod 2014).

related ways: first, by situating ecotourism in a constellation of frontier projects, showing their entanglement and complexity; and second, by disturbing essentialist notions of the "local" through blurring the symbolic-material boundaries of these frontier projects. Throughout this examination, a critical stance is taken towards what I refer to as "indigenism" – understood as idealizing, ideological notions of the local. I argue that, in contrast to what many political economic studies of upland transition often seem to suggest[254], local customs and "traditions" are not simply overrun and disenchanted by capitalism; rather, "animist beliefs" may be productively entwined with capitalist transition which, in turn, establishes new fetishes. Capitalist transformation in the Lao uplands thus not simply disenchants the sacredness of what is threatened by frontier expansion, such as, an ethnic spirit forest. Rather, rationalities and irrationalities, both "native" and "foreign", constitute current "primitive accumulation". This argument is based on Horkheimer and Adorno's suggestion that "myth is already enlightenment and enlightenment reverts to mythology" (Horkheimer/Adorno 2002, 18; see 1.4).[255]

I mainly focus on the following dynamics constituting Dong Sakee: the indigenous project, involving the logging frontier (8.1); the evangelist project, impacting animist belief and local authority (8.2); the conservationist frontier, supporting and complementing local spirit belief (8.3); and the recreational project, i.e. the Katang Trail already referred to (8.4). A discussion will tie the strings together and focus on the interrelations of these projects as well as on the reproduction of the conservation-development tension as the overall subject of this study (8.5). Moreover, the discussion elaborates on the importance of "thinking across" well established institutional-epistemic boundaries – not only in order to facilitate academic understanding, but for hands-on, policy-related matters of doing justice. In the course of the argument, ecotourism appears as a precarious element of relational resource frontiers which, overall, subject the Lao uplands to the global expansion of capitalist nature organization. It does so through social formations which historically precede the advent of capitalism, such as subsistence economies and their symbolic reflections. Rather than simply "original" or "indigenous", such sociocultures (Rehbein 2007) are themselves frontier projects. It is crucial to capture this contorted constellation in order to fully appreciate ecotourism's reality.

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[254] For example, Michael Goldman notes that the World Bank "does not take into consideration the effect on a 'spirit territory' once everything on which the spirit and territory are based has been radically altered, i.e., forests submerged, rivers dammed, societies put on a development agenda. This exemplifies the ongoing reification process, where pieces of indigenous practices are decontextualized, objectified, and then judged in purely developmentalist terms of commensurability" (Goldman 2001, 508).

[255] It seems in these authors' spirit to suggest that in any historical phase of social development aspects of myth (or ideology) and enlightenment (or rationality) are entangled, so that "modernization" does not represent a clear-cut and unidirectional progress, but is always coupled with some kind of regression (see 1.4).

8.1 The indigenous project

To be sure, "indigenousness" can only be an arbitrary starting point for a place-based analysis and not a quasi-natural, original first ground; it is thus treated here as being of the same order as other dynamics. To posit the "indigenous" as onto-/logically primary would run the danger of sharing in an ideological "indigenism" that is part of the problem rather than of any solution.

8.1.1 Indigenism

I employ the term "indigenism" to refer to indigenousness as political-ideological project. This term is brought up against the recent rise of indigenity as symbolic capital within the sustainability paradigm. Indigenism forges alliances between local people perceived and representing themselves as "indigenous"; rural developers who affirm their indigenousness in participatory projects; and supra-local (national to international) politics tackling customary law, indigenous peoples and traditional knowledge. Defining people mainly via their longstanding direct connection to the immediate environment, and lending this connection moral value *per se*, indigenism elides the reality that local populations can, and often do, stand in a disharmonious, even destructive relation to their environments, such as, as active agents of capitalist "cheap nature" appropriation. In a similar vein, indigenism constructs an ideal morally integrated, homogenous rural community with low hierarchies and domination, slipping over the fact that village integrity is regularly at the expense of the individual, and executed by local elites who derive their authority not least from animist-spiritual fear.

This section argues that "traditional beliefs", such as those regarding a Katang spirit forest, are actively entwined with and thus partly constituted by rampant ecological plunder. I first outline the general setting of Dong Sakee sacred forest. In a second step, the logging frontier is highlighted as an intrinsic part of current local economies. I argue that animist taboos concerning the sacred forest do not rule out the possibility of its deforestation by animist Katang, without necessarily indicating a decline in spiritual fear as conservationists suggest (below). This dynamic is telling for the character of symbolic-material change-through-persistence and persistence-through-change in the Lao uplands.

8.1.2 Situating Dong Sakee

Dong Sakee and the villages that hold it "sacred" (*maheesak*; see Rajathon 1954, 157) are situated in Dong Phou Vieng NPA of Savannakhet Province. Locals are of the Katang ethnic group (Katuic branch of Mon-Khmer language group; see Sidwell 2005; Schliesinger 2003). Phiin district town on Road No. 9, a former colonial road now converted into ADB's East-West Corridor (see Pholsena 2013 for a historical account), lies about 20 kilometers to the north of the area. Dong Sakee forest itself is about 3.8 kilometers in length and 700 meters at its widest

point, thus covering around 180 ha. It is passed by an upgraded dirt road connecting the villages of Alao Dong (or Alao Kao) and Vongsikaeo. The Katang village of Alao Khoke (or Alao Mai) lies south of Alao Dong and is not considered an "owner" of Dong Sakee like the other villages; the majority of Alao Khoke inhabitants have converted to Christianity (below).

Taboos on Dong Sakee refer mainly to cutting trees and hunting the monkeys inhabiting the forest while gathering herbs and dead wood as well as hunting other animals (such as wild pig or deer) is not prohibited. Two species of monkeys are taboo inside Dong Sakee: *taalung*, not considered a monkey (*liing*) by locals and known to science as silvered leaf monkey (*Trachypithecus germaini/margarita*); and *khaa daeng,* considered a monkey and known as red-shanked douc or douc langur (*Pygathrix nemaeus*). As it happens, these animals are considered endangered as well as sacred. The forest and its monkeys as well as local culture are, furthermore, an ecotouristic attraction.

The villages

Over seven hundred people live in Vongsikaeo in more than 220 families sharing about one hundred houses. According to the deputy village chief, most important economic activities are paddy rice cultivation, gardening, and weaving. A master's thesis notes that in 2004 almost all households were engaged in shifting cultivation (88%) and far more than half in hill rice cultivation (60%) (Hansen/Jeppesen 2004). While dependence on forest products to supplement nutrition remains comparably high, in November 2012, villagers told me that now only three households engaged in shifting cultivation while all others only grow paddy rice. This suggests a transformation of local livelihoods, which is further evidenced by the aspect of logging (see below). Alao Dong is considerably smaller, hosting about 230 people in 45 families. Most important economic activities are paddy cultivation and cattle-raising. Both villages are situated more or less directly on the former Ho Chi Minh Trail,[256] and villagers recount having fled into nearby caves from the bombings and cultivating their rice fields at night during war times.[257]

Both villages are mainly subsistence-based, with diverse development projects completed or ongoing, from husbandry to water supply. An electric land line supplies Alao Dong with electricity to run threshing machines, refrigerators, etc., but passes by Vongsikaeo where electricity is produced through solar-charged car batteries. Customary manual rice pounding, a strenuous affair conducted by women from early in the morning, can thus still be observed in Vongsikaeo but not in Alao Dong.

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[256] The issue of unexploded ordnance (UXO) is therefore a grave problem in the area.

[257] See Pholsena (2013) on the war and post-war history of Phiin district and the political exploitation of remoteness and unexploded bombs for re-education camps by the communist government. Meuang Phiin was a Pathet Lao headquarters (ibid).

Dong Sakee plays a role in local history. An Alao Dong elder recounts that his ancestors used to live close to the Vietnamese border in the far north of Laos but had to flee after a Katang knife moving of its own accord killed a Vietnamese. They settled as far away as possible, close to Vientiane Capital, but moved again as a "bee war"[258] was raging there. While one of their men returned to Vientiane with a Buddha statue that they have come across, the others moved closer to the current area. They were "called" by Dong Sakee and resettled several times according to its will until ending up at the present location.[259]

Intense interaction with "the Vietnamese" is also an element of Vongsikaeo's founding myth: its name derives from the story that a man named Vong left Ban Nyang (another Katang village some 15 kilometers away) – because of conflict or in order to find land – and who had reputedly "slept with" (*sii*) a "Vietnamese" (*kaeo*). [260] Ban Nyang is also part of the "Katang Trail" (below) but not directly related to Dong Sakee although it is held sacred there, too. Alao Dong villagers claim that they were the original "owners" of Dong Sakee until people from Vongsikaeo arrived. The view that Alao Dong is more closely related to Dong Sakee is at times also held by people from Vongsikaeo, while the same people might claim another time that Vongsikaeo was first and the belief originated from here.

Dong Sakee beliefs

Probably the only published account of Katang beliefs regarding Dong Sakee is from a primatologist's report:[261]

It is believed that an old village formerly existed within Dong Sakee, but people from all other villages around 'Dong Sakee village' could never see the inhabitants of the latter. However, there existed a strong sense of trust and honesty between invisible villagers from Dong Sakee and other villagers from surrounding villages, the latter often hanging defaulted clothes in 'Dong Sakee village' and coming back a few days later to find the clothes repaired (by invisible villagers) or borrowing things from Dong Sakee villagers and having to return them a few days later (otherwise it would bring bad luck to the family if they did not return the borrowed things). One day the son of Dong Sakee's village chief died in a weaving room in 'Dong Sakee village'. This is where the name Dong Sakee comes from: Dong Sakee = Forest Room. It is nowadays believed that the monkeys inhabiting the Dong Sakee Forest are reincarnations of people from the former

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[258] Arhem (2014) encountered the topic of a bee war also in connection with a powerful Katu spirit place (ibid, 379ff).

[259] It becomes evident here how local Katang culture, formally "lao theung" (i.e."animist"), is imbued with elements of lowland (Buddhist) culture.

[260] As for the meaning of Alao Dong/Khoke, the name "Alao", according to elders, derives from "arao", the name of a vegetable growing close to water springs. Due to lack of land, Ban Alao split up into Alao Dong and Khoke ("dong" referring to forest, "khoke" meaning a dry place).

[261] There might be a Japanese source since an ethnographer from Japan reportedly studied the villages of Vongsikaeo and Nyang.

village of Dong Sakee. People therefore continue to respect the forest and the monkeys. (Coudrat 2011a)

Let us start from this description and add some points for completion and correction according to what I was told by villagers (mainly from Vongsikaeo). This seems important because whether conceptual and political justice can be done to the local in upland transition depends on how local beliefs are understood. The representation above, in turn, may lend itself as it stands to problematic indigenist thinking, as we shall see.

According to local informants, the territorial spirit (*phii meuang*, *phii phroong*) had decided in times immemorial to pick his residence in that forest. He picked honest and morally good people from the villages around to live with him there in a forest village. Those people turned into what is well known in Laos as *khon bang bod* (also *phii* or *thewada bang bod*): half-human, half-spiritual, well-meaning beings believed to inhabit forest villages. A common notion is that *khon bang bod* are *thewada* ("angels") that descended from the sky/heaven in order to live like humans, supposedly in order to work towards their own salvation.[262] Not human themselves, they cannot live together with them but reside in remote forest places. As celestial beings, they can be considered as inhabiting a different dimension than humans, which is why they are known for moving unbelievably fast, and for being present in different places at once.[263] There is "evidence" of *khon bang bod* throughout Laos.[264] They are commonly related to ethical behavior in the Buddhist sense and known to be seen only by those humans who are honest and have a pure heart.[265] Narratives about *khon bang bod* and real experiences with them may thus present an indicator of how people normatively perceive social transition and themselves.[266]

Local Katang versions are original interpretations of that mythical figure: As mentioned by Coudrat above, inhabitants of "Dong Sakee village" are known by

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[262] According to Lao Buddhist belief, incarnation as gods and celestial beings indicates high merit and good karma but makes attaining nirvana impossible. Only humans can strive for Enlightenment, so that *thewada bang bod* came to earth.

[263] I thank Sitthisone Xaysongkham for this explanation.

[264] Common reports include how a human person came to spend time in a *bang bod* village, for example for a celebration, and how upon returning home, much more time has passed than experienced. In Meuang Hiam (Huaphan Province), a school forest was created between the local hot springs and the NEPL NPA management office. Although the area was troubled by spirits since long before the school forest was established (riders had to get off their horses when passing by or they would be thrown off), only since then does relatively dense forest exist there. My field assistant's friend said his boss claimed to have met *khon bang bod* in the school forest and to have been brought to their village for a party. For a recent sighting close to Vientiane; see (in Lao): http://www.bailane.com/Blog/ViewBlog.aspx?sid=132&hid=16698, accessed November 10, 2014.

[265] See for example the discussion (in Lao) on: http://www.member.bailane.com/Blog/Detail/17130, accessed December 18, 2014.

[266] In a fashion similar to Singh's approach of treating Lao discourses about forests as indirect political statements (2012a, 2).

locals to fix quite everything for them, from tools to clothes. A prominent story is how villagers from around Dong Sakee would hang worn-out or ripped clothes at the forest's fringes and get them returned shiny and new the next day; or how villagers borrow beautiful dresses for weddings and parties. What Coudrat does not mention, however, is that this type of exchange, based on honesty and reciprocity (in the sense of returning what was borrowed), is seen as having deteriorated in recent times. I will return to this presently. As Coudrat narrates, furthermore, Dong Sakee derives its name from an accident in the *bang bod* village. But there appears to be a misunderstanding here on Coudrat's part based on a confusion of the words "room" and "loom": according to my informants, one day, the son of the "village" head fell from a weaving loom (*sa'kee*) and died. According to one interpretation, he was lured by a beautiful weaver who was perhaps an evil spirit which eventually killed him. This incident further complicates Coudrat's narrative. According to some villagers, this accident was seen as a sign that the forest spirit (*phii paa*[267]) wanted *bang bod* villagers to leave, and so they did. According to others, they still reside there but do not interact with humans anymore. There are also different accounts for the link between these "villagers" and the monkeys.[268] Some say, as Coudrat, they are incarnations of those *khon bang bod*; others maintain they are the spirits of the dead parents of local Katang people; still others say there is no relation except that both monkeys and *khon bang bod* are protected by the forest spirit and part of his "family". Furthermore, both have the ability to make themselves visible to humans only when they want to be seen. The differences in local explanations point to the fact that "local culture" is not as fix and monolithic as above quote indicates. Other local cultural features and their relation to Dong Sakee also remain unclear.[269]

The taboos, in contrast, appear at first sight to be rather unequivocal: if someone cuts trees (but again: some say any, some say those thicker than a human arm)

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[267] As mentioned, the spirit owner of Dong Sakee is a territorial spirit (*phii meuang*), but is mostly referred to as *phii paa* ("forest spirit", "spirit of the forest").

[268] When mentioning to my informants the confusing diversity of their accounts, one of them suggested to just pick the one I like best. It does not seem too unlikely that such pragmatism is part of villagers' own approach to "local custom".

[269] The Katang around Dong Sakee traditionally erect *lak la'peup* (lak = post) on the buried ashes of their deceased parents. Villagers explained that this ("animist") practice is much like *het bun* (making Buddhist merit) and the posts are comparable with *stupa* where bones of deceased Buddhists are placed. The body is burned, the ashes are wrapped in fabric, buried where the parents wished, covered by sand, and the post is put on top. After six, ten or twenty years, a buffalo provided by the sons-in-law must be killed; the number of buffalo depends on that of the sons-in-law. The communal consumption of the buffalo(s) is believed to make the parents' spirits strong enough to become reborn again. Furthermore, *lak la'peup* "is where the spirit of the dead family member/ancestor is called before it enters the house to combine with the house spirit [which] protects the house if the families treat it well." (Jim Johnston, personal communication). Although villagers claim that this tradition is unrelated to the belief about Dong Sakee, the normal locality for offering to and asking permission from the forest spirit to enter Dong Sakee is in front of two *lak la'peup* at an entrance into Dong Sakee.

or hunts and kills monkeys inside of Dong Sakee, some person (not necessarily the perpetrator) will inevitably die. Such indigenous, spiritual-ecological accounts appear to betray a deep, encompassing, existential connection of people to their immediate environments, in contrast to modernity's alienation. The unconditional death penalty on cutting trees and killing monkeys, attributed to the power of the forest spirit, seems like a strong incentive to obey the spirits. However, leaving local beliefs at that would be imprecise and problematic; and it would mean succumbing to the seduction of "sacred Nature" which, to members of late capitalist societies, presents a "field of attraction" (Tsing 1999) that idealizes and elides local realities, thereby subjecting these to a vision partly made up by unquestioned desires. Instead, a closer look will have to go "beyond the sacred forest" (Dove et al. 2011).

Beyond the sacred forest

Village elites related how exchange with *khon bang bod* has deteriorated as people nowadays are increasingly becoming dishonest. Humans have started to spy on the half-visible forest dwellers, watching them repair their tools, and no longer return the beautiful dresses borrowed from them. Such narrations may present indirect accounts of the ecological deterioration in and around Dong Sakee (below). While *khon bang bod* may or may not reside in the forest, furthermore, the monkeys are reported to leave Dong Sakee. Although villagers do not know why that is, it signals that the forest spirit wants them to leave, indicating some kind of spiritual reason.[270] However, it is only inside of Dong Sakee that they are protected by the spirit, so that at a certain distance from forest and village, monkeys can be hunted. Furthermore, taboos, strict as they seem, appear to be negotiable: permission must be asked from the spirit beforehand and an appropriate sacrifice must be offered.[271] My own entrance into Dong Sakee was worth one chicken, the same as tourist visits.[272] Vongsikaeo elders confirmed that cutting trees is also a matter of appropriate sacrifice. In Alao Dong, in contrast, elders claim that there is no such way of dealing with the spirit at all.

It is also notable that the institution of *chao cham*, the central mediator between people of both villages and the forest spirit, was given up by the last man to fill this position (a man from Vongsikaeo).[273] His life, he recounts, was threatened too often by the forest spirit when other villagers misbehaved in Dong Sakee, as he

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[270] Villagers also said that with increased population the number of animals has decreased in Dong Sakee as they become more disturbed by humans.

[271] A small road was built through Dong Sakee, dividing it into a large and a small part, which cost one buffalo; monkeys were surveyed by a conservation organization (see below), which cost one pig. The main road passing by Dong Sakee was upgraded, costing two buffalo, which were offered after the road was built and people became seriously sick.

[272] Some guides suspect that the money provided by the provincial eco-guide unit for that chicken is often not invested into an actual sacrifice, but kept by villagers.

[273] One *chao cham* was shared by the two villages.

was held responsible. With him, the central institution to set the terms of symbolic-material exchanges with Dong Sakee has disappeared, so that it is each villager's own responsibility now to deal with the spirit and request permission. According to the elders, this means an increase of Dong Sakee's power, as each villager is personally liable. However, it also means that the terms on which spiritual-material exchanges take place undergo individualization and flexibilization, potentially becoming watered down. The narrative of the ex-*chao cham* certainly indicates that people are likely to break the rules.

Deforesting the sacred?

An important context for Dong Sakee is illegal trade in endangered species, such as precious timber and wildlife (4.2.2).[274] Chinese demand makes prices soar which has led to a commercial run on remaining stocks, such as of Siamese rosewood, so much so that "Siamese rosewood is now all but gone, and as a result attention is now being focused on other precious replacement species" (EIA 2014, 1). Directly against national law, logging is still rampant in the ethnic periphery where villagers often provide cheap labor to extract the logs. In this way, "[y]ear by year, the logging frontier moves on, leaving in its wake villages that have had their most valuable resource removed […]" (Hodgdon 2008, 61). Notably, those being expropriated actively participate in this "cheap nature" strategy (see 2.1.3); to them, the lower end of the profit margin still means considerable income.[275] The district of Phiin was a key source area for Siamese rosewood (*mai kha'nyung*) but the rosewood frontier recently closed: since spring 2014, this species is seen as extinct in Phiin district.[276] Quite obviously, inhabitants of both villages are involved in providing precious timber, supposedly to Vietnamese traders, some of whom also express interest in monkey bones (Coudrat et al. 2012, 878). Logging increasingly focuses on lesser value species such as Burmese Padauk (*mai dou*).

In most of the National Protected Area logging is rampant, but the noise of the chainsaw can also be heard inside of Dong Sakee. In fact, because the extinction of rosewood will direct attention of the next logging wave on Padauk or Burmese rosewood (*padong*), Dong Sakee becomes a target since, as opposed to *mai kha'nyung*, *mai dou* grows there (Singh, personal communication). Regarding this issue, some rivalry exists between the two villages: according to Alao Dong elders, people from Vongiskeo are "bad" because they cut trees inside the forest

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[274] While the area is more obviously struck by deforestation, Dong Sakee apparently is quite prominent among Lao who enjoy monkey for food, according to an informant.

[275] Worth up to 50,000 US dollar per cubic meter on end markets while value on local source markets is around one to 2,000 US dollar (Singh 2013, 3; EIA 2014), rosewood is "scattered across inaccessible forest areas, necessitating traders' reliance on artisanal loggers" (Singh 2012b, 7; EIA 2012, 11). These loggers derive from the local population and can make between 300 and 3,000 US dollar per logging trip (ibid, 8). Singh's numbers derive from fieldwork on the Lao-Cambodian border and are taken here as approximation only.

[276] According to Keith Barney on LaoFAB as well as to informants in Savannakhet.

while Alao Dong people never did that. This conflict has led to the separation of Dong Sakee into a northern (Alao Dong) and a southern (Vongsikaeo) part, and Alao Dong elders stress that all the cutting happens in the southern half (for a diverting observation see Coudrat 2011a, [10] figure 4).

In light of this extractive context and the relativization of the taboos related above, I hypothesize that local customs and spiritual practices do not *per se* function as natural conduits for preserving Nature but are equally likely to lead to deforestation of even sacred forests. This does not necessarily imply, however, a general decline in perceived spiritual force.[277] As research among communities from the same Katuic branch in Nakai-Nam Theun NPA indicates, the forest spirit might well choose a new place to stay, or remain master of the land whether it is forested or not.[278] This, however, is an empirical question and depends on a range of local factors as well as individual interpretations, and does not simply follow from hypothetical local or animist "belief" as such. Relatedly, anthropologist Grégoire Schlemmer, in a consultancy report on NEPL NPA, stresses that, in principle,

Sacrifice should not be understood as being of a different logic than economic activities. For people who perform sacrifices, it is no more than a business deal. The objective of the rituals including sacrifices is to purchase a good or service in exchange of another and make it a profitable and beneficial exchange. The only difference is that one of the business partners is invisible, as is the good that people want to obtain (souls, prosperity, good luck etc.). (Schlemmer 2001, 75)

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[277] That villagers of Vongsikaeo are truly afraid of spiritual forces became clear on the second day of my 2014 fieldtrip, when we were obligated to buy a lizard (*laen*) for dinner from our hosts. When the animal was brought to us, neatly tied up, I took pictures of it. A heavy thunderstorm drew in, more severe than either my assistant or I had ever experienced before. Some of the policemen, Katang themselves, became visibly afraid, especially when lightning hit the simple electronics of the house under which we were taking shelter, causing sparks to fly. After the storm was over, villagers were agitated about a tree hit by lightning, not far from our position. The charred mark on the tree was a sure sign that *phanya in* (Lord Indra) was angry with me for taking pictures of the lizard together with village kids. Lizards are food and therefore a serious matter that is not to be played with. The policemen, interestingly, were quick to downplay the seriousness of the affair, claiming that villagers were of course joking and this was just their culture (*watthanatham*). This explanation seemed less convincing when the storm returned in the evening and hit the house again during our conversation. The *naaibaan* was obviously afraid that I would be killed in his house, so we had to immediately perform a ritual of my submission to Lord Indra's power, rubbing the blunt side of a large knife on the side of my neck. This experience makes it hard to believe that spiritual fear or the "traditional lore" is being lost, as some claim.

[278] The Makong are also neighbors of Katang in Dong Phou Vieng. A Makong *chao cham* narrated how their village possesses a sacred forest (*paa saksit*) which they had to turn into a swidden field due to land shortage within NNT NPA. The spirit is still the master of that land, he reports. On the notion of Katu people of spirits that move and relocate as a consequence of major environmental interventions see Arhem (2014, 317).

One may add that the goods obtained through such exchange can often be very tangible and material as well. Schlemmer reminds us of what the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* already suggested in the mid-1940s, namely to view sacrifice as an outsmarting of the gods. Rather than merely a religious "belief", animist sacrifice and magic are central elements in an economic subsistence strategy, weapons of the weak (Bourdieu 1990, 200ff)[279] which constantly revive and reinvent traditional ontologies in the context of economic and ecological transition. Thus, if animist taboos may not *per se* prevent a spirit forest from being deforested, one must be skeptical about opposite claims, such as by village representatives – who will be the first to meet external observers. Their representations usually display village harmony and downplay internal problems and frictions in order to maximize benefits for the community (Ireson 1996, 243f). Experience from ecotourism to Dong Sakee suggests that local elites employ a strategy of indigenist politics (8.4). Also, the fact that the Katang of Dong Phou Vieng NPA are known for their powerful black magic is certainly exploitable by the Katang villagers, feared as this magic is by provincial ecotourism guides and development workers. As Sarinda Singh confirms, the *meuang-paa* dialectic, a civilizing frontier vision already at work in precolonial times, becomes evident in current Lao views of the forest (2012a, 43ff; see 4.1). Yet, although animists are not unlikely to cut endangered wood species inside Dong Sakee themselves, village leaders and conservationists alike equate animism with environmentalism and legality while blaming those who seem to not respect the forest spirit for cutting trees and hunting monkeys inside Dong Sakee, especially newly converted Christians.

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[279] Bourdieu (1990) notes that "magical or religious actions are fundamentally 'this-worldly' (*diesseitig*), as Weber puts it; being entirely dominated by the concern to ensure the success of production and reproduction, in a word, survival, they are oriented towards the most dramatically practical, vital and urgent ends" (ibid, 95). Bourdieu goes on stating that understanding ritual practice in precapitalist societies means: "[…] describing the most brutally material bases of the investment in magic, such as the weakness of the productive and reproductive forces, which causes a life dominated by anxiety about matters of life and death to be lived as an uncertain struggle against uncertainty. […] this collective experience of powerlessness which is at the basis of a whole view of the world and the future (it is expressed as much in the relation to work, conceived as an unconditional tribute, as in ritual practice) and which is the practical mediation through which the relationship is established between the economic bases and ritual actions or representations" (ibid, 97). Notably, however, Bourdieu speaks about precapitalism and is not clear about magical practice in capitalism, a problem extremely relevant to transformation in Laos and Southeast Asia. Yet we can interpret it as not entirely different from the situation of capitalism, or at least the situation of frontier capitalism. The persistence of magic as a "weapon of the weak" (also Scott) might be explained by the persistence of social conditions of economic weakness – be it insecurity towards the "caprice of nature" (Scott) or regarding an abstract world-market.

8.2 The evangelist project

Evangelization is a strong undercurrent in the transformation of the Lao uplands, and illicit conversion was an issue in almost all visited locations. Christianity has always played a role in Laos' colonial and post-colonial past. Members of the royal family converted to Catholicism under French rule while Protestantism, having made more lasting inroads into the uplands since the 1940s, was an active element in the U.S.'s clandestine guerrilla war.[280] Thus it appears unsurprising that the current Lao government views Christianity with suspicion, especially since the rapid increase in illicit church planting activities that began in the 1990s (Morev 2002, 402). Quite naturally, research on these matters is sensitive and empirical evidence difficult to provide, but it seems reasonable to assume that the recent wave of evangelization in the Lao uplands is productively intertwined with the overall transition to capitalism (e.g. Salemink 2004, 125). It is notable, for example, that religious conversion is often explicitly associated with economic benefits such as the saving of livestock for sale instead of its offering to the random will of a spirit, as repeated by converts and animists alike.[281] Also arrangements such as security funds shared among Christian community members provide economic incentive for conversion. While in some regions, Christians are harassed for not participating in community rituals, such as the "feeding of the village spirit" (*liiang phii baan*), Christians participate in others by paying into the village fund for organizing the ritual, albeit not actively involving themselves. Whereas in some areas, such as Vongiskaeo, Christians are harassed and ostracized, village elites in other places seem more relaxed.[282]

In Vongsikaeo and Alao Dong, several villagers have embraced Christianity since church planting began in the area around 2009. A main focus of missionary activity was Alao Khoke/Mai, several kilometers south of Alao Dong. Currently, there are two churches in this village, one belonging to the official Lao Evangelical Church Savannakhet that conducts services every Sunday, and, it seems, one South Korean church.[283] My intended visit to that village was unconditionally prohibited by district authorities on account of "religious problems". Religious

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[280] Hmong and Khmu were among those ethnic groups with the highest rates of converts. The romanized script of the Hmong was developed by Catholic and Protestant missionaries in the 1950s, and the clandestine army in Northwest Laos was established by the son of a missionary couple (see Dwyer 2011, 53ff; 4.1.3).

[281] See Baird (2009, 461) on a diverting view "that highlanders have no money to buy medicines, but that they do not need cash to sacrifice their own chicken, pig, or buffalo, thus making Animist rituals more appropriate for "poor" people. They sometimes mention that people spend millions of riel at the doctor but are still not cured, whereas sacrificing a single chicken can sometimes do the trick" – which is still an economic (rather than cosmological) argument.

[282] Such as elders in a NNT village: "No matter what, Christians are always only talking about God [*pha chao*] … They believe in this and I am Buddhist myself, but with them words fail me."

[283] According to a development worker and a leading person in LEC Savannakhet's youth organization, this church "causes trouble", but they did not elaborate how. A higher ranking representative of LEC denied that there is a second church.

rights organizations report about religious-political conflicts in Vongsikaeo and Alao Khoke; authorities reportedly forced Christians to renounce their faith, swear oaths to spirits, and drink cleansed water, or else face expulsion.[284] Presumably, converts are explicitly threatened with being treated as generalized culprits for any local problems.[285] In fact, they are blamed for logging and hunting in Dong Sakee because – and this is almost too obvious – they allegedly do not respect the forest spirit anymore (also Baird 2009, 464).

It has been suggested (e.g. Salemink 2004) that conversion to Christianity is not solely an economic matter but also of symbolic importance to upland groups in capitalist transition. Traditionally in tension with lowland states (Scott 2009), minority groups often access "modernity" by bypassing lowland hegemonic symbolism. Evangelization is thus an instrument of identity politics intentionally used by upland groups, such as, to gain membership to a world religion other than that of the ethnic majority so as to regain agency in the face of not achieving autonomy (Baird 2009, 460). Such interpretation of conversion among Southeast Asian ethnic groups sits uneasy with Holt's (2009) proposition that Christianity, like Buddhism before, is simply appropriated into an essentially animist structure of meaning. This dynamic might be one aspect or phase of conversion, or it might be the case in one place but not in another, but it is far from being the whole story. The slowly but constantly increasing presence of Christianity in the Lao uplands not only testifies to the advent of a new economic reality; it also adds a new symbolic-material quality to frontier places instead of representing only an animist re-reading: it incorporates and transcends this-worldly spirits.

8.2.1 Applied frontier theology

Such ambivalent integration of animist reasoning into a Christian worldview is evident when looking at what may be called frontier theology. Missionaries' perspectives on local Katang culture betray an open contradiction that reflects a certain conservation-development tension. The Joshua Project (an online resource for Christian missionaries) copies from a book titled *Faces of the Unreached in Laos* (1999, Asian Minorities Outreach, now Asia Harvest, a Christian ministry) when bemoaning both the assimilation and loss of culture among the Katang and the fact that "[m]ost Katang are too bound by fear to consider converting to Christianity."[286] As far as material culture is concerned, that is to say, Katang customs

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[284] See "Vongseekaew" and "Allowmai", e.g. on the website of *Human Rights Watcher for Lao Religious Freedom*: http://hrwlrf.net/, accessed November 10, 2014.

[285] After having presented their village as purely animist to, Vongsikaeo elders, confronted with such alternative information, admitted that there are Christians in Vongsikaeo. At this point, when their indigenist strategy was exposed, elders openly expressed their anger and disapproval of the Christian families and that they are unwanted in Vongsikaeo. Some of the Christians had left for Alao Khoke.

[286] See: http://joshuaproject.net/people_groups/12566/LA, accessed February 5, 2015.

should be preserved while their mindset is to be altered. This is analogous to instrumentalist concepts of local culture found in national politics, tourism and sustainable development.

Similarly, a peculiar relation exists between scientific evangelizing methods and mythical theological contents. On the one hand, modern evangelizing is conducted on the basis of scientific methods, such as cataloguing, mapping and categorizing "unreached people groups". The Joshua Project describes itself as "a research initiative seeking to highlight the ethnic people groups of the world with the fewest followers of Christ" (project website) and links Christian belief to social science: "Accurate, regularly updated ethnic people group information is critical for understanding and completing the Great Commission." Internet media and pop culture are professionally applied to draw funds and personnel. Reaching "the Unreached" is thus framed in a scientific, quantifying way, with all sorts of indicators for the state of evangelism among certain people groups.[287] Such modern scientism goes hand-in-hand with theological elements that are partly magical. A default prayer on prayerguard.net (linked by the Joshua Project website), for example, happens to include the Katang into the following prayer:

[…] I stand right now in the authority of Jesus, and I bind the spirit of deception that has captured the minds of the Katang of Laos. I resist your influence over them and I command that you release the hold you have on them. They have been purchased *by the sacrifice of Christ and you have no right to hold them back from the truth of their salvation. As Moses said to Pharaoh, I say to you, you deceiving spirit, "Let this people go!"* (emphasis added)

This prayer claims theological superiority over the "spirit of deception" but is itself magic as it acknowledges the existence of the spirit by addressing it directly. The entanglement of economic rationality ("purchased") with spiritual force reproduces the acknowledgement of spiritual power; because this power is framed as "deceptive", such acknowledgement is to ultimately serve spiritual emancipation, however. This is expressed in the concept of "spiritual warfare", a centerpiece of frontier theology that recalls the animist roots of the Bible. As Sitton (1998) "explains"[288], evangelicals believe in

[…] a literal living devil, who has demons under his control, and who is actively devising detailed strategies to destroy Christians and to keep unreached peoples in bondage. […] Therefore, whether facing a jungle witch doctor or a big city bureaucrat, theologians and missiologists agree that we

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[287] According to the Joshua Project, 0.08% of the Katang (People-ID 12566) are "Evangelical"; the progress of evangelization is 1.2 (step two on a scale of four, depicted as speedometer). This makes them one of the "least-reached" people groups (measured by availability of Bible translations and other media to convey the message, such as the Jesus Film; see: http://jesusfilmmedia.org/, accessed February 5, 2015).

[288] See also the videos "Radical" and "This is War" on http://joshuaproject.net/resources/videos, accessed February 5, 2015.

are up against far more than merely a flesh and blood foe. […] Spiritual warfare is what hap-
pens when believers aggressively take the Gospel into a situation where Satan has a stronghold
[…] through the process of spiritual warfare captives are set free. Deliverance *is the demolish-*
ing of Satanic strongholds (2 Cor. 10:3-4). This is done through the proclamation of the Gospel,
accompanied by a 'demonstration of the Spirit's power' (1 Cor. 2:3-5[289]). (ibid, 72f; emphasis
original)

Such theological backing equips evangelical missionaries with an ontological link
to the beliefs of "the unreached" not simply rejecting but respecting animist rea-
soning – in order to take up the fight against it.[290] This fight is combined with
systemic fund raising, decentralized and illicit action based on statistics and map-
ping.

Evangelism can thus be considered a full blown frontier project, given the way
upland people are pictured as "unreached" and even "lost", and given the media
renderings of frontier evangelization, already in CMAs periodical *The Challenge of
Laos* between 1953 and 1969.[291] Its frontier mentality is also indicated by its theol-
ogy and its supportive role in social transition, enabling a more economically rea-
sonable behavior (in the sense of capitalism). Christianity celebrates work as god-
service and induces an industrious work ethic;[292] in its Protestant form, as classi-
cally pointed out by Max Weber (2011), it intensifies this rationale up to the point
where industriousness and wealth become indicators of salvation itself. Frontier
Christianity is thus a veritable frontier project targeted at the "abundance" of
"lost" souls to be saved by the Good News before the world comes to an end –
not least, of course, for the sake of one's own salvation.

8.2.2 A Katang Christian

Rather than a mere economic or a mere animistic function, Christianity offers a
set of economic as well as symbolic, in any case existential benefits to marginal-
ized upland livelihoods. The pragmatism with which Katang approach conversion
became clear to me at one occasion in Alao Dong. Closely supervised by district
tourism authority and local police, I was allowed to talk to one Christian from
Alao Dong who was part of the village elder group we were meeting with. Usually
such encounters were prevented (as in Vongsikaeo: "You can talk to them, no
problem. Right now they are out in the field, unfortunately."). Right before we

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[289] This Bible passage reads: "I came to you in weakness with great fear and trembling. My message
and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the
Spirit's power, so that your faith might not rest on human wisdom, but on God's power."

[290] It is thus very fitting when Baird notes that "missionary discourses are generally not encouraging
Animists to abandon their beliefs, as those who believe in spirits are generally more open to
Christian proselytizing than those who have abandoned Animist beliefs" (2009, 463).

[291] See http://www.cmalliance.org/resources/archives/challenge-laos, accessed January 28, 2015.

[292] For example: "If any man does no work, let him not have food." (II Thessalonians 3:10).

started, one of his animist fellows announced in the direction of attending officials that he might change to Christianity in the future but is not sure yet. This pragmatic attitude does not preclude that Christian theology has a real bearing on converts, however.

As for the Christian person, he had kept in the background during group discussion but when asked about his faith he would confidently relate his story while all his animist fellows, including the *naaibaan*, listened attentively, smiling while having their own thoughts. He claimed to be the first Christian of Alao Dong and that the faith was passed down to him from his father. He struck me as exceptionally serious, thoughtful, humble and firm, compared to most animist Lao I have encountered.[293] These characteristics reflected his explanations of how embracing God means connecting with the creator of everything, including of Dong Sakee spirit. Belief in God and in Christ as his son takes away the fear of death for Christians will go to heaven, he insisted, lending him confidence and hope in life. When shaking hands after our talk, he wished me, an agnostic, Godspeed (*pha chao uai phorn*) looking firmly into my eyes, and I had to return the blessing.

From this perspective, animism is not just a lens through which Christianity is conceptualized and the latter is therefore not simply a version of the former, as Holt (2009) posits. In this account, religious conversion is not *primarily* an economic affair – although this is an important part of existential relief offered by the Christian faith. Belief in God connects to the creator of spirits and thus transcends spiritual fear; God's power encompasses spirits and their powers. Therefore, the man is not afraid of forest spirits, although he acknowledges their existence and respects the rules of his fellow villagers. On Sunday morning he dressed carefully for the church service in Alao Khoke.

8.2.3 Christians and Dong Sakee

The ambiguous transcendence of animist potency and fear *could* lead to defying animist taboos, but it may just as well induce respect for God's creatures. Certainly, being a Katang Christian demands respect for the beliefs and powers of animist villagers, and especially so in quite repressive conditions. The assumption that Christianity provided a trigger for Dong Sakee's extraction nevertheless presents a possibility; as Coudrat (2011b) relates, animists claim that the disrespect of other villages not sharing

[…] the same beliefs as other Katang villages around Dong Sakee […] lead to the loss of spiritual beliefs through generations among animist villagers as observing other people cutting trees, not followed by any bad events on the family, decreases the belief among animists villagers. (ibid, 6)

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[293] Especially when compared with the Lord Indra experience referred to in footnote 277. These two events can be regarded as portraying the difference between faith and fear.

I argue, however, that neither does spiritual fear appear weak among the Katang of Dong Phou Vieng NPA, nor are Christians *a priori* more (or less) inclined than their animist neighbors, by way of their cosmology, to materially profit from symbolic-material exchanges with Dong Sakee. This is especially so since all studies so far, mine included, mainly rely on the claims of village representatives – who are animists throughout. And it is this animist elite which obviously derives personal wealth from timber trade, while Christians remain far less visible.

Authorities, from the local to national level, legitimize repression against Christians by labelling Christianity a "foreign" religion; the same logic is applied when representing the issue of illicit extraction to outsiders. However, to the degree that the evangelist frontier logic links up with "indigenous" people as it resonates with their lived realities, becoming Christian is as much "indigenous" or native as it is to remain animist. Within a context where "indigenous knowledge" is increasingly valued and valorized, however, indigenist make-believe neatly links up with the workings of other frontier projects approaching local communities in a participatory manner, such as conservationism (8.3) and ecotourism (8.4). Christians are generally suspicious from the perspective of these projects, which introduce their own symbolic-material complexes.

8.3 The conservationist project

Dong Sakee has, as mentioned, raised the attention of monkey conservationists for its populations of silvered leaf monkeys and douc langurs. Whether coincidental or not, these monkey species are at the same time taboo inside Dong Sakee and registered as endangered on IUCN's red list.[294] Dong Sakee is "probably the last remaining natural habitat in the central Lao PDR" for silvered leaf monkeys, who are "now probably the rarest and most threatened monkey in Laos" (Vongkhamheng 2013, [1f]). Even more, "the non-Sundaic populations in Dong Phouvieng particularly Dong Sakee Sacred Forest is probably unique and not yet scientifically approved on its genetic identity" (ibid). Several conservation initiatives, the most recent (at the time of writing) conducted by the Lao Wildlife Conservation Association,[295] in cooperation with local, district, and province authorities and funded by the Critical Environmental Partnership Fund (CEPF, involving GEF/World Bank, EU Commission and others), initiated participatory conservation projects in Dong Sakee.

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[294] The coincidence of animist taboos on threatened species has been repeatedly remarked (e.g. Dudley et al., 2009; Colding/Folke 1997), and Arhem (2014) argues that Katuic spirit lore expresses ecological wisdom. However, also non-threatened species are taboo as much as are ecologically unimportant sites.

[295] See: http://www.lao-npa-network.org/lao_wca.html, accessed February 5, 2015.

8.3.1 Indigenist conservationism

These projects rely on the supposition that the beliefs regarding Dong Sakee are an indigenous institution that is conducive for monkey protection. Therefore, ways must be found to "enhance traditional belief" (ibid; also Coudrat 2011a and 2011b), such as by encouraging elders to transmit their knowledge to youngsters in order to make concepts like wildlife and conservation more easily accessible and found them in tradition (Coudrat 2011a, [14f]). In this line of reasoning, Christians are explicitly singled out as potential environmental threats for adhering to a foreign religion:

[…] Dong Sakee Sacred forest has been long protected by traditional practices as people believe the forest is home to their village spirit. Any killing of wildlife and cutting down trees in the forest area were not allowed. If someone made violation, he/she may bring a bad luck to his/her own family. For instance, at Ban Vongsikeo, two years ago, a man had cut a tree in the Dong Sakee, he was died later. This image stops people in this village entering into this secret forest. However, villagers from Ban Alao has changed a religion from animism to Christian, some villagers poached some trees (may also hunt the animals) in Dong Sakee, they got no problem. This is now a key challenge for securing the long-term conservation of this monkey in its natural habitat. Therefore, immediate interventions are highly required to focus on a control of poaching trees and wildlife by outsiders. (Vongkhamheng 2013, [7]; grammar original)

From the viewpoint of indigenist conservation, in other words, there is no objection to making Christians renounce their faith. However, conservationists also feel – and this appears to be the flipside of the flawed coin (above) – that "tradition" loses its hold upon the animist villagers. The project thus introduces further techniques, and fetishes, of modern conservation.

8.3.2 Conservation techniques

Apart from capitalizing on a supposedly environmental indigenous mindset, conservation strategies proceed scientifically and legalistically. Transect monkey surveys have counted individuals and groups and registered their distribution. For this purpose, the Lao WCA project divided Dong Sakee into 26 transect lines, supported by mapping and GPS, so that "ground truth" data could be gathered on the size of Dong Sakee's monkey population. Interestingly, such methods do not generate "ground truth" to the traditional belief that is deemed conducive for conservation work. This is seen by the fact that while villagers participated in the survey, they also expressed skepticism towards such an endeavor: How could one ever know the accurate number of monkeys in Dong Sakee if they can only be seen when they want to? "Sixty? There could be two thousand!" From this perspective, animals can hardly be regarded "endangered" since non-visibility does not equal non-existence.

A more legalistic method of monkey conservation in Dong Sakee that inter-links with ground truth surveys is "Land use planning, boundary demarcation and installment of signs for Dong Sakee to secure sufficient habitat for the monkey need" (Vongkhamheng 2013). An initial study tour had set up wooden signs to designate Dong Sakee sacred forest (Coudrat 2011b). The Lao WCA project now proposes designating Dong Sakee as "silvered leaf monkey preservation area" (*kheet anulak taalung*) in addition to being a "sacred forest" (*paa maheesak*) and sug-gests to enlarge that area to include places just outside of Dong Sakee where monkeys were located (Vongkhamheng 2013, photo 8 and figure 6). First signs were put up. Further steps would be interesting for studying the interaction of local belief and livelihoods with national and international environmental regula-tion. The project recommends establishing village conservation teams to regularly conduct patrolling and monitoring. Another strategy that is part of the environ-mental toolkit is awareness-raising among villagers regarding the significance of the monkeys as well as about legal issues. This introduces a new and decidedly modern enchantment of external natures.

8.3.3 Charismatic megafauna

One part of these projects were "[e]ducational activities with children of Ban Vongsikeo via children books" during school lessons (Coudrat 2011b, 5). A story-book designed by a PhD primatologist was used in these activities, funded by Care for the Wild International. *Save Douky, the red-shanked Douc* (Coudrat 2011c) tells, in Lao and English, the emotional story of a baby monkey living with his family and other animals in the forest. But: "One day, men came to disturb the peaceful for-est and caught Douky and his mum! Douky was so frightened!!!" Locked up in cages, both were brought to the market where "Douky was separated from his mum forever." Cute Douky was bought by a family to please the children Kim and Tam. Here, the story takes a turn for the better as the children recognize Douky's sadness and, after learning about his eating habits, decide to bring Douky back into the forest: "Kim and Tam understood after this that monkeys and all other animals should always stay where they come from: their natural habitat, where they have to be protected." Consequently, the forest where Douky is even-tually released has an entrance gate overwritten with "National Protected Area". This story perfectly reflects the strategic rationale of environmental awareness-raising which ties Nature's emotional values to national and international legisla-tion in the name of empowerment, achieved through education.[296] What is shared as "knowledge" via "tools like this book" is a peculiar notion of environmental

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[296] The organization which funded the printing of *Douky* believes "[…] in empowering local people and communities worldwide to protect their wildlife through education. Young people are the future guardians of our planet. By providing them with tools like this book to increase their knowledge, we aim to help pave the way for this future responsibility. Through sharing this knowledge with family and friends, children can also influence our actions now."

relations. For example, the pre-disturbance state of Douky's life is imagined as expressed in picture 3a.

Picture 3a: Undisturbed forest family (from Coudrat 2011c)

Transported in this seemingly random, neutral and innocent imagery is an increasingly powerful symbolic universe. This becomes evident when comparing this picture with one as innocent and objective (picture 3b).
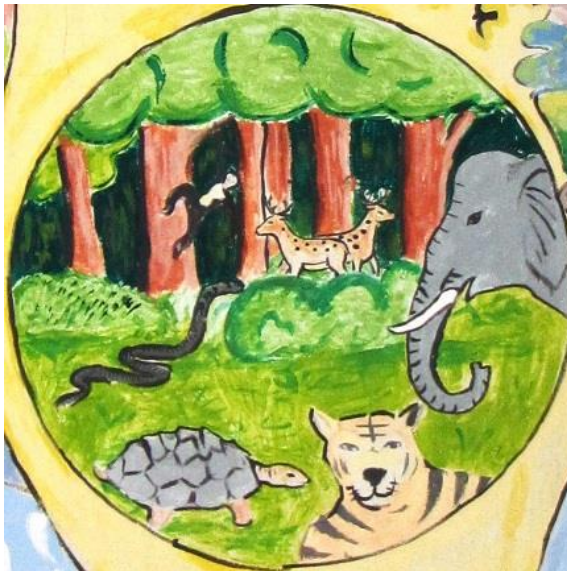
Picture 3b: Centerpiece of an "environmentalist triptych"

The similarities are striking; despite their different empirical origins, these pictures are almost identical. The second picture is taken from the former building of the US embassy in Vientiane Capital. Painted across one of its walls (at a central traffic light in downtown Vientiane), it represents the centerpiece of what might be seen as an "environmentalist triptych" proclaiming the value of sustainable development. Both pictures draw from the same symbolic universe, featuring a core trope of neoliberal Nature spectacle (2.2.3): charismatic megafauna.

Basically, this term denotes large mammals with some sort of appeal to humans. Charismatic species are important for conservation as well as for ecotourism (Entwistle/Dunstone 2000; Ducarme et al. 2013; Skibins et al. 2013). Striking animals become employed as "flagship species" in environmental campaigns to bring in necessary funding or draw paying customers. The WWF panda is the global emblematic example, but tigers, elephants and monkeys are also qualified candidates. Thanks to modern media technology also rather inconspicuous species are increasingly lent charisma. Such fixation on Nature as spectacular, charismatic and nonhuman, arranged in peaceful, family-like forest settings, answers a longing and desire in "modern" humans for the nonhuman. If charismatic megafauna is part of a spectacle in Debord's sense, its attraction is not just employed to tap finances but it also transfixes the orientation of conservation itself, working as a selective principle (see Burckhardt 2006). Charismatic megafauna is thus an eco-capitalist resource fetish (2.1.3), the super-elevation of nature as symbolic correlate of treating nature as a resource (Schmidt 1971, 154).

Charismatic attraction is often rationalized, however, in terms of conservation biology: protecting the tiger means protecting the whole area the tiger lives in; it represents an "indicator species" for the overall health of the ecosystem. An uncharismatic but endangered and ecologically important species might be saved because of the presence of elephants which attract the funds. As such, charismatic megafauna does not exclusively represent an irrational fixation, but it does betray a quite recent form of re-enchanting Nature with self-referential desires and discontents that are projected onto a suitable locality, such as Dong Sakee. Conservationism thus partly capitalizes on indigenist politics but also introduces new relations to Dong Sakee which entail new ways of enchanting the spirit forest with charisma.

The fourth and last project discussed here is ecotourism: as has been shown in Chapter 6, it partly drives on indigenist stereotypes about ethnic local communities. From the perspective of its set of homologous oppositions (3.3.1), ecotourism practice entangles and fuses tradition and modernity, the secular and the profane, the indigenous and the foreign – and, not the least, conservation and development.

8.4. The ecotouristic project

As elaborated, ecotourism strongly overlaps with conservation which also holds for the "Katang Trail." Overall objectives for the ecotourism pilot project in Savannakhet resemble those of other integrated conservation and development projects (3.2) in the country (see EPS 2002, 3). Primate conservationists, for their part, also suggest including the existing ecotourism project into their efforts (Coudrat 2011b; Vongkhamheng 2013). Awareness-raising with school kids and village conservation teams was additionally envisioned by the ecotourism project (Johnston/Ladouanglerd 2002). Beyond this general conformity with conservation efforts, however, there is not yet any institutionalized link between monkey protection and ecotourism in Dong Sakee. In personal communications, Lao WCA members also express skepticism regarding whether ecotourism is truly beneficial for monkey preservation. This suspicion is not unfounded, as will become clear presently.

8.4.1 The Katang Trail

The establishment of the Katang Trail in DPV NPA was part of a pilot project started in December 2001 by the Provincial Government of Savannakhet with funding from the Royal Netherlands Embassy and technical assistance provided by SNV. Its implementation was mainly in line with the idealized implementation process examined in Chapter 6, and it included study tours to and from the Nam Ha project (see Johnston/Ladouanglerd 2002 for details). The project established trails mainly in Dong Natad PPA (the most successful thus far) as well as Dong Phou Vieng and Phu Xang Hae NPA (the least successful and most remote). This provincial ecotourism project can be considered as a continuation of ICAD projects under the Lao-Swedish Forestry Programme that focused on village-based forestry. The pilot phase went until March 2004, including an extended pilot phase. After this period, an SNV advisor worked partly in Savannakhet and partly in Houaphan, with more effort going into the Houaphan operation (Vieng Xay caves) (pers. comm.). When SNV pulled out of their pro-poor tourism strategy altogether around 2011, the advisor for Savannakhet had already left (ibid).

The tour

The ecotour that includes Dong Sakee is a three days/two nights adventure from Savannakhet operated by the Provincial Ecoguide Unit. Customers take public transport to Phiin town and from there are taken halfway to Vongsikaeo in order to hike for about eight kilometers to the village. After arrival, settling into their homestay, a village tour and dinner, a wrist-tying (*baasii*) ceremony is held in the evening of day one (8.4.2). Early next morning, a walk through Dong Sakee is scheduled before breakfast in order to spot monkeys. After return and breakfast,

the group treks on for about 18km to Nyang village (the origin of Vongsikaeo founder Vong). After an overnight stay in Nyang, the group floats down Xe Bang Hiang to have lunch at Kaeng La'berng Nang rapids before travelling back to Savannakhet by *sorngthaeo*.

This tourism product is comparably expensive (around 150 US dollar), involving an inconvenient five to eight hours *sorngthaeo* ride from Savannakhet to Phiin district town and back, as well as bumpy and dusty travel to and from the trekking area. When external assistance phased out and the situation of the ecoguide unit deteriorated at the end of the 2000s, this product became subordinated to more economically viable and comfortable options, such as visiting Dong Natad sacred forest just outside of Savannakhet.[297] Currently, the trek is booked about once a month on average in the tourist season, but at times not even that. The deterioration of the environment of Dong Phou Vieng NPA adds its part to the situation.

While advertisement for the Katang Trail on flyers and at the office highlights Dong Sakee, the spirit forest plays a surprisingly small role on the actual tour. This seems due to the state of affairs in the ecoguide unit at time of writing, which was understaffed as well as underpaid and underequipped, and not eager to spend two days *yuu phuu* (in the mountains) when ultimately risking financial losses instead of gains. The profit margin is narrow as it is, the deterioration of bonds between guides and villagers and the rising food prices around Dong Sakee further complicate the situation.[298] How much a product like the Katang Trail can turn unattractive under such circumstances is illustrated by a feedback e-mail to the ecoguides by an angry customer:

It was the worst trekk I have ever done! We didn't learn much of the habits and beliefs of the communities we went to see because our guide was completely inexperienced and clearly told us he didn't understand the interest of this trip.
From what we were told the massive cutting down of the forest we witnessed is illegal, so why are we still going there ?? We should only go if they respect their environment, in order to show them that if they still want our money they have to take care of their surrounding nature!!
The Baci ceremony was without dancing, music, translation of what was said was poorly done. I had to show the program to the guides to have some explanations on totems...
According to our guide local people don't want to talk about their village and knowledge, so why are we going??
Finally, apparently there is no control on the use of the money that is given to the community. We saw big car, saws,... but apparently the school would need only 40 books!!

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[297] The guides I travelled with were also quite openly addressing their discomfort in the remote countryside, saying they prefer to stay close to Savannakhet.

[298] Such price increases in NPA villages are also a problem in NNT, which is related to the presence of people who can afford to pay any price, such as Vietnamese traders and park management staff.

At the least the guide needs to be changed and reconsidering the whole trekk is urgent! (dated December 18, 2012)

With funding phasing out, those guides who were properly educated, experienced and comparably well paid left the ecoguide unit for more promising jobs, for instance at WCS. Those who worked there during my research lived on a precarious basis, forced to have one or several additional jobs.[299]

The Dong Sakee experience

Given this situation, it is only apparently surprising that the sacredness of Dong Sakee and its story are not exposed in the actual conduct of a tour. Moreover, the forest walk follows a night of potentially heavy drinking at the *baasii* ceremony (below), and starts off early in the morning. Customers have likely had a rather bad sleep since rice pounding starts at four-thirty in the morning. Tired, without coffee and food, fighting her way through the dense jungle of Dong Sakee on barely recognizable trails and surrounded by poisonous spiders, huge ants and thorny underbrush, the Dong Sakee experience is a rather strenuous affair. Although it is damp and cool, the moisture turns into streams of sweat as the customer makes her way forward in search of monkeys. If customers are lucky, having started out as early as possible in the morning, local guides sense, then spot a group of monkeys and point them out to the tourists.[300] The Dong Sakee revenue scheme can be considered an early version of "wildlife-based" tourism in that village guides receive extra benefit if monkeys are seen by tourists (5.3.2). This scheme provides an incentive for local guides to reveal monkeys to tourists, to the point where they chase them from their hideaways in the trees. Such behaviour is doubly revealing: it shows that the conservationist's suspicion towards ecotourism is justified; and it demonstrates that monkeys can be considered sacred and at the same time can be frightened and chased.[301] If customers are unlucky, no monkeys make themselves visible and all their early morning investment was for next to nothing. The history of Dong Sakee was not at all conveyed to the customers of the tour I took part in.

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[299] It may be that the situation of tourism to Dong Sakee will change for the better in the future with the implementation of a new product involving village stays in Alao Dong and Vongsikaeo as well as an extended walk through Dong Sakee; surveying started in 2011.

[300] The advisor explains that taking pictures or pointing with fingers inside Dong Sakee used to be taboo in the beginning. Upon my visit, no such taboos existed – to the contrary.

[301] Vonsikaeo villagers confirmed that chasing monkeys in Dong Sakee is unproblematic.

Indigenist politics

Indigenism is also actively enacted in the ecotouristic project, even if less regarding the sacred forest but rather in relation to village life. Despite having a substantial amount of Christians and also some Buddhist converts in their own village, for example, Vongsikaeo elders keep on telling paying visitors that all inhabitants are animists. Until some internet research from my side, even the guides believed villagers representations and were thus caught up in the act of self-othering. Consequently, this influenced the way guides presented village life to tourists. After the elders, decided animists, were presented with information from the internet about Christians in Vongsikaeo, they finally admitted that this is the case. As touristic actors, village elites thus play the animism card because of the revenues that are derived for the village from maintaining an "authentic" appearance. They also stated that Christian families are excluded from any tourism-related activity by the village's tourism management. Ecotourism thus realizes its projection of a cultural frontier via active local indigenist politics. Another aspect of this is the fact that some provincial guides (as well as development workers) are afraid of Lao Theung black magic, seen as exceptionally powerful in these villages. Guides are therefore reluctant to express their dissatisfaction with village services or demands.[302]

8.4.2 Katang-style *baasii*: enacting a glocal *communitas*?

It would be oversimplified, however, to regard the experience of "authenticity" as a mere result of a self-fulfilling prophecy of othering and self-othering, or to assume that tourism renders local livelihoods "inauthentic" simply by commercializing them. Rather, the recreational frontier must be seen as foundationa to the authenticity of a destination as it becomes part of "indigenous" affairs. This subsection examines a part of the ecotouristic village experience that was examined already in 7.4.10; by enacting a more inclusive form of "authenticity", parties and celebrations may at times blur the boundaries between "local culture" and its capitalist commodification to the degree where it becomes impossible to claim that the latter perverts or undermines the former, or vice versa. Instead, through the enactment of an inclusive *communitas* during a *baasii* ceremony as part of the tourism itinerary, both aspects are brought into a mutually supporting relationship: capitalism is embedded in specific socio-cultures as these are embedded in capitalism. Soft variants of "primitive accumulation" such as ecotourism evolve partly through communing with the "local", temporarily transcending the barrier of host vs. guest and creating a glocal *communitas*.

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[302] Such as when guides are not content with villagers' performance during forest walks or with the price charged for village services.

Exclusive authenticity

But let us start with the stereotype, which is what I term here "exclusive authenticity" As already pointed out, ecotourism's frontier vision is constituted by the desire for experiencing the actually existing "authentic", such as in apparently precapitalist places. Authentic experience, in this mode, is realized by the *appearance* of *largely* precapitalist conditions (7.6), and it is based on framing hosts as others. This kind of authenticity experience was largely the subject of Chapter 7's examination of village experience; exclusive authenticity is consubstantial with the distance-proximity awkwardness that was highlighted there. This exclusive side of authenticity, the othering of the "local," is exemplified by Lonely Planet's (2014) description of Vongsikaeo. In a box set off from the main text, and under the slightly salacious headline "Sleeping with spirits", it says:

The Katang villagers […] live in a starkly different world to the Lao Loum […]. They are not Buddhist, but instead believe strongly in the myriad of spirits that surround them in the forest […] and as a visitor it is vitally important you don't break the taboos. (ibid, 209)

The seriousness of the taboos in Vongsikaeo was pointed out in the pilot phase as restrictive but also attractive for tourists as "strange custom" (EPS 2003, 16). Against the background of this chapter so far, and as has been noted throughout Chapters 6 and 7, the discrepancy between this projection and local reality is notable. The taboos listed in Lonely Planet like on a signboard were hardly enforced at all when staying at Katang houses. Such authenticity jargon (2.1.3), the diction of the ecotouristic marketplace, is answered by local self-othering, as we have just seen. The self-fulfilling prophecy thus created results in the expectable, ordinary experience of extra-ordinariness, e.g. via taking pictures of village life and Katang people.

Inclusive authenticity: a glocal communitas*?*

Exclusive authenticity is important and is at times even explicitly demanded as the customer's right.[303] But there is another dimension of authenticity involved in ecotourism that builds on the former. Village experience was mentioned as a highlight by almost all tourists to Vongsikaeo. Appreciated were not so much tradi-

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[303] A passage in the feedback forms of the Katang Trail that was already cited reads: "We were lucky to see "original" village. But since electricity will come and TV, loudspeaker increase as well as the toiletts were not working, in future some has to think about the high price of the tour. Suggestion (don't know if it works): for that night when tourists are there, no TV[,] and loud music should be avoided. As tourist I pay a high price for the tour to support people. So it would be nice as reward to have at least the feeling of ancient village." (grammar original)

tional costumes, dances or other markers of difference but rather "mixing with people," "sitting and talking with local people in a very natural way:"

I feel like we saw the local community as it really is – not a little section tided up for tourists […];
This was a great trip – enjoyable from start to finish – especially staying with the local people in a working village – it was a real privilege to share their homes and their hospitality.

Thus, although exclusive authenticity is an important part of the ecotouristic experience, a more inclusive kind is sought as well.

How local culture becomes intertwined with commercialism in a way that defies a simplistic equation of commoditization with inauthenticity is exemplified in the *baasii* ritual for the tourists in Vongsikaeo. While clearly a staged and commodified event for the paying visitor and an opportunity for the hosts to display the animist other, it is also one of the most popular parts of the tour. One tour participant explains why the *baasii* was one of the highlights for her:

I had the feeling that at the ceremony the people were being authentic […] when they were singing and chanting, even though the language barrier was obviously a problem for us, there, you know, with the alcohol flowing, I didn't have the feeling that they were just putting up a show for us but that they were enjoying it too. Because maybe it was a break from their daily routine for themselves, I don't know. But I didn't have the feeling that this was anything that was staged. So that's what I liked. (DE, f, 24)

The meanings of staged-ness and authenticity and the relation between the two become complicated here. First of all, the Katang *baasii* is not a complete touristic invention. Rather, its "traditional" ritual content is already linked to issues of travel, departure and return, and the touristic commodification does not stand against this – on the contrary. It therefore has a somewhat "hybrid" structure: to a large part, it is "traditional" in the sense that at least certain ritual elements do not have an origin in ecotourism, or in capitalism more generally. There are various forms of conducting *baasii* at Vongsikaeo, depending on the occasion. At the tourist *baasii*, all participants sit in a circle outside, surrounded by stilt-houses. Village leaders tie threads of yellow cotton around the wrists of visitors and invite the spirits of the participants to partake in the consumption of a chicken and *lao laao*. This is followed by telling the future luck of visitors from the chin of the chicken.

Until this point, locals have mainly displayed their exotic localness. However, it is not a show but a serious ritual which now enters into a different set of acts: improvised Katang songs are chanted to the sound of the *khaen* (traditional "panpipe"), accompanied by the continuous circulation of rice whisky poured, according to tradition, by unmarried girls while women and children watch from the dark

outer fringes of the ritual circle. Now tourists are asked to contribute songs from their respective countries, accompanied by *khaen* playing. The rather excessive consumption of alcohol makes the ritual typically "local" but also relates to very general, global ways of celebrating together. What is enacted in this part of the Katang *baasii* is, in other words, a temporary global-local celebrating *communitas* that is not troubled by language barriers but integrated into a feast of singing and laughing. Female tourists are most aware, however, of the strong localized structure of the event when complaining about the absence of women, about nine year-olds smoking or the excessive consumption of alcohol especially by local men.

In this ritual structure we can thus distinguish the enactment of different notions of authenticity: first, a more exclusive part, in which animist local community is enacted, and second, a more inclusive part, which integrates the tourists as equally contributing to the (however male-dominated) ritual. Despite, or rather *by* being commoditized as a service throughout,[304] hosts as well as guests truly enjoy this part of the visit as opposed to other, more awkward experiences (e.g. not sharing meals, not being able to communicate). The commercial nature of the ritual does not matter much during the event itself. The "traditional" content of wrist-tying is not necessarily contradicted or inhibited by the fact that it is done for money. It serves the ecotourist's longing for directly linking up with an animist local community and it reconfirms and refreshes "traditions" such as Katang *baasii*. Although it is a commodifying force, ecotourism does not necessarily despirit the ritual content, since the invitation of spirits is never done for mere show.[305]

This ritual is commoditized as part of a profane service agreement; it would not take place without payment for the experience. Yet its specific content manages to create a sense of communion that transcends – temporarily, of course, and probably not on a regular basis – differences between hosts and guests. Thus, capitalism is embedded in local traditions, but local traditions also become embedded in generalized commodity exchange. It should not be forgotten, however, that this ceremony is the result of and an active moment in the enclosure of Dong Sakee and Vongsikaeo by the legalities and illegalities that regulate the production and provision of "cheap natures" (2.2) at the resource frontiers of Laos. As ICDP, ecotourism ascribes to local Katang the roles either of service providers and biodiversity stewards or of poachers, while tourists constitute mere sources of revenue.[306] As a part of ecotourism, ritual liminality thus reaffirms and refreshes all the tensions and contradictions in and around ecotourism laid out in this study, and precisely through the temporary "antistructure" it may happen to create (Turner

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[304] Tourists pay for the ceremony to be conducted, for the chicken, the alcohol, possibly cigarettes and more alcohol.

[305] Since spirits are seen as really existing, it is expectable that animists will not "mess with the spirits".

[306] A SNV report projects them as long-term "'funders' of CBET" (Johnston/Ladouanglerd 2002, 29).

1969, 129). The next day, payment for the *baasii* service proceeds surreptitiously and quickly, hidden from the eye of the customer.

8.5 Discussion

The purpose of this chapter thus far was to add complexity to ecotourism practice by situating it within a locally specific constellation of frontier projects. I attempted to insert more empirical detail and local specificity into the investigation of ecotourism as a frontier practice.[307] According to the notion of the relational resource frontier as developed in 4.2 on the basis of Barney's (2009) conceptualization, projects of the resource frontier are relational in that they, first, are self-referential, guided by a particular vision that is to be realized for self-serving purposes. Second, they relate to and intertwine with one another, partly serving and partly undermining other dynamics going on simultaneously. In this discussion, I will first wrap up the diverse entanglements that were dealt with throughout the chapter (8.5.1) and then comment on the ideology of indigenism and its political relevance (8.5.2). To conclude this chapter and in order to lead over to the synopsis (Chapter 9), the remainder elaborates on the conservation-development tensions present in the case of Dong Sakee (8.5.3).

8.5.1 Symbolic-material entanglements

Let us look at some conflicts and alliances of the various projects considered. A basic conflict is obviously present in the relation of illegal timber and wildlife trade with attempts to preserve Dong Sakee. Conservation projects are a counter-reaction to resource depletion, conservation is thus conditioned by extraction. While both dynamics can thus be seen as oppositional, ecotourism relates to both in ambivalent ways: it is basically on the side of conservation, representing a tool to integrate conservation and development and applying similar methods of implementation. As we have seen, however, in practice ecotourism can also stand against conservation efforts. This is the case when the bonus system generating income directly from the presence of monkeys motivates locals to frighten and chase them – a classic case of "human disturbance". Another aspect could become relevant in the future: the tourism coordinator of Phiin District informed me about plans to feed Dong Sakee monkeys in order to make spotting them more comfortable for tourists. These plans result from "lessons learned" in the monkey spirit forest of Baan Dong Meuang, where macaques that are considered sacred are fed with bananas and sweets by tourists (mostly Thai) who dispose their

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[307] It was not possible, of course, to provide an exhaustive picture of all that is going on around Dong Sakee. Namely, issues such as UXO or methamphetamine consumption, which must be seen as crucial factors of local livelihoods in that area, have not been addressed, as were rural development projects (such as that of World Vision in the area) or in- and outmigration.

plastic garbage in and around the forest. Nevertheless, as we have seen from the feedback e-mail of an angry tourist, ecotourism stands like conservationism against illegal timber cutting. Both monkey conservation and ecotourism must be recognized as comparably weak dynamics, however, when measured against highly profitable illicit trade. Upon my visit, the village teacher of Vongsikaeo could not find the storybook examined above, he even hardly remembered having received it. Similarly, even though villagers were involved in the participatory project activities of Lao WCA, elders could hardly give any information on these activities. Meanwhile in Vongsikaeo, more and more large shiny homes are being constructed with formidable wood, under which saleable logs of *mai dou* accumulate.

All these dynamics resonate in different ways with local livelihoods and symbolisms. I have argued that the "indigenous" project consists of a subsistence orientation also constitutive for animist taboos and magic. Spiritual fear is consubstantial with existential precarity so that "tradition" is constantly reinterpreted and reinvented according to changing conditions in order to subsist in socio-economic transition. An animist villager relating Dong Sakee taboos while sitting on a huge pile of Padauk wood is thus not something of a living contradiction but simply normal from the local perspective.[308] Conservation and ecotourism relate to this livelihood reality mainly via indigenist politics that connect local power play with global participatory development (below). Employed by animists, e.g. in their conflict with frontier Christianity, indigenism is served by the national and international development community to capitalize on "local knowledge" while the religious conflict is either slipped over, as in ecotourism, or *a priori* decided in favor of the animists, as in conservationism. That Katang Christians do not exist within the scope of ecotourism does not mean that ecotourism is totally unrelated to this dynamic, however. After having learned about evangelization in the area, one guide recalled how several years ago some customers split off from the group to walk independently to another village. It is conceivable that evangelists (not unlike researchers) may use tourism infrastructure, especially when it conveniently brings them to "unreached places" in Laos.

In a sense, furthermore, frontier Christianity is not unlike ecotourism in that it draws on the attraction of off-the-beaten track places. The *Mekong Kingdom Movement* protagonists, for example, who evangelize among the So (Makong) in Khammouan Province (apparently inside NNT NPA) move and behave just like other independent travelers on "the Loop" from Thakhaek to the Vietnamese border and back, and picture their target people as living "in areas that are rural, mountainous, difficult and loads of fun to reach."[309] Conservation, as was pointed out, entertains an *a priori* suspicion against Christianity insofar as it equates animist

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[308] Without being asked, he would openly and friendly point out that this is *mai dou* and that foreigners pay a lot of money for it.

[309] See: http://www.mekongkingdommovement.com/#!the-so-people/c1gz1, accessed February 6, 2015.

taboos with environmental benign-ness, deducing or implying *a priori* Christian malignity.

8.5.2 Indigenism and justice

Above examination of Dong Sakee projects argued that the rather abstract idea of customary taboos automatically benefitting conservation goals does not do justice to the fluid and pragmatic nature of "tradition", and thereby tends to do symbolic injustice to those locals who do not share in certain local beliefs and rituals. The monkey preservation project (8.3) in its attempt to work through local customs basically applies a container model of culture that goes hand-in-hand with a similar notion of the local community widely shared by community-based approaches, where "communities" (not individuals or groups) are the ultimate targets, and which are acted upon as being homogenous and without internal friction (see 3.2.2).[310] This viewpoint correlates with the notion of the environmental animist as implied in the conservationist stance related above.

The environmental animist

The environmental animist hypothesis is a problematic special case of the more general and influential paradigm of the environmentalism of the poor, which observes that in many cases

[…] the poor (whether indigenous peoples or not, whether women or men) are often on the side of resource conservation and a clean environment even when they do not call themselves 'environmentalists'. (Martinez-Alier 2007, 18; also Martinez-Alier 2002)

The coincidence of poverty and environmental care lies in the fact that "the poor, because of their direct reliance on natural resources outside the market (perhaps in the form of Common Property Resources), are often careful environmental managers" (ibid, 20). The poverty-ecology link proposed by Martinez-Alier is based on empirical evidence in cases of open resource conflict, such as in mining, and may not be open to generalization (Martinez-Alier 2013, 240). If contexts other than heavy-handed resource conflicts are considered, such as when access is restricted by a Nature reserve, the poor might be on the opposite side as well. Applied to contexts such as the one discussed in this chapter, the environmentalism of the poor optic might unwillingly support injustice, as the concept lends itself to indigenist stereotypes of the environmental animist which render those who are not framed as "ethnic," "local," "indigenous" etc. ecologically and legally problematic.

The case of Dong Sakee presented a complication of the "environmentalism of the poor" hypothesis, showing that it is problematic to view animist environ-

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[310] Notably, practitioners well know that communities are heterogeneous and dynamic. But the scope of the projects they serve stops at the community level.

mental relations as from a different ontological order than others at the local level. In the somewhat stronger words of Butcher:

A low impact on the environment can exist alongside a culture entirely open to the benefits of high impacts [...] the existence of a set of environmentally benign ideas about how to live, running counter to an environmentally destructive 'culture of industrialism' (Milton 1996: 140), does not exist in a rural developing world or anywhere else – there is no 'environmentalism of the poor'. (2007, 124)

At least, there is no *a priori* link of poverty, or indigeneity, and environmentalism.[311] Quite to the contrary, the latter is invariably a product of industrial and post-industrial affluence that consists exactly in the economic detachment from immediate natural processes and vagaries that dominate subsistence livelihoods – as are supposedly "universal" human rights of individuals or peoples.

The poverty-ecology link is thus not to be hypothesized; and it seems problematic to ascribe to it a moral dimension *per se*. In fact, that the poor must rely on their immediate environment is a sad tautology and the actual scandal. Defining an individual, rich or poor, animist or Christian, first and foremost through her direct link to a certain place or belonging to a specific cultural group or, in the case of Katang animists, both, tends to play out as symbolic injustice. This is especially so if the notion of justice is environment-focused and equates justice with sustainable access of local populations to *natural* resources (e.g. Martinez-Alier 2013, 241), acknowledging their right to subsist from the direct environment. Justice is thus not defined in terms of access to *societal* resources, such as, for example, in order to pursue a life as good and self-determined as possible, at least within a given society.[312] The environmentalism of the animist, in short, empowers the community only "by *tying culture to nature*; by limiting the agency of the community to the manner in which they can act as nature's guardians" (Butcher 2007, 166; italics original). Although such a notion of justice can be politically useful to attain more equality in a given situation, it is principally problematic as it naturalizes direct ties of certain people with certain patches of land. Thereby, and apart from tending towards racism due to the "blood-soil" connection, it sanctifies not only local power differentials but also poverty and material want on part of the locals.

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[311] Adopting Szerszynski's claim about "pre-modern cultures", we might dash the hope in such a link by suggesting that animist "cultures may encourage ritual limitations on the treatment of the non-human, but [do] not seem to encourage ethical or sentimental relations in the modern sense"; in such cultures "nature" is not seen "as consisting of sentient beings who should be treated as ends in themselves. To argue this way is anachronistically to project modern ideas of ethics onto cultures for whom they would make little sense" (Szerszynski 2005, 37).

[312] A more social view of justice and human rights was already proposed by Immanuel Kant when he argued that "no one originally has any greater right than anyone else to occupy any particular portion of the earth" (quoted in Derrida 2000, 5).

Cultural development

But such environmental indigenism no longer exists in neoliberal conservation in Laos, does it? In fact, it seems as if neoliberal approaches to local culture are on exactly the same page as my critique of the container view. A report of the UN-supported Lao government project on harmonization of international rights standards and national statutory law with local customary law maintains:

Studies of customary law systems reveal how they are more dynamic, flexible, and less 'tradition-al' – or based on ancient static practice – than is often assumed. Examination of the internal dynamics of supposedly 'traditional' communities reveal how community customs are never a unanimous 'whole' but, rather, represent a dominant interpretation of culture at a given point in time. Cultures are in a constant state of flux, responding to both internal and external pressures, and are driven by changing social norms and needs. […] The idea that any ethnic group in Laos lives in a hermeneutically-sealed environment, governed by rigid customary practice, is an outdated fiction. (GoL 2011, 9)

As early as 2004, the first Socio-Economic Management Framework and Operational Plan (SEMFOP I) for NNT NPA applied a similarly realistic, proactive concept of "cultural development". Because it "would be impossible to insulate" local culture, and since people "themselves have expressed a strong desire for integration […] and yearn for progress" they are to be equipped "with the necessary means and knowledge to participate in the national economic, social and political development" (WMPA 2004, 8). Although acculturation should be avoided,

The bottom line is that without interventions which ensure food security, a sustainable use of natural resources, protected rights and improved livelihood, it is unlikely that these small ethnic minorities could withstand the advance of the better educated, better organised and more advanced dominant culture and the market forces which accompany it. In order to 'preserve' cultural diversity in this region, a realistic plan is needed that ensures […] cultural development by supporting the communities to retain control over their own resources and decision-making mechanisms to promote biodiversity conservation. (ibid)

Culture is seen here from a seemingly advanced point of view as mediated by and mediating change, which appears to be the opposite approach to the container model: culture as constant flux. However, the Customary Law report also sees some intrinsic qualities of local customs that are detrimental to universal human rights and which should be confronted "head-on at their source" in order to

[…] shift the underlying normative values within the customary law systems responsible for generating violations. Given the entrenchment of gender inequality and suppression of children's rights, for example, profound processes of intra-cultural contest are needed that will gradually

substitute norms that create or sustain human rights violations with ones that will not. (GoL 2011, 105)

The effort for such "intra-cultural contest" should spring from the disadvantaged themselves in coalition with more powerful individuals or groups who raise attention to their cause (ibid). Instead of a "head-on" confrontation of local injustice, this suggestion sound quite half-hearted. An in fact, the perceived difference between the container and the development models of culture is mainly that between discourse and practice. While the *Customary Law Project* explicitly applies a top-down approach (ibid, 104) to align customary law with international standards (rather than the other way around), it may in practice turn out as a strategy of devolving and outsourcing state sovereignty to parastatal actors such as customary executors, given the notorious lac of state funds and capacities. In the case of NNT management – which is an element in the operation of NT2 dam – it is obvious that such "progressive" stance towards culture turns out to be unjust towards those who are approached with it within an overall "cheap natures" strategy. Apparently it could neither prevent "high mortality rates" and "unsuccessful attempts at sedentary agriculture" of Vietic forest dwellers settled down in agricultural villages (WMPA 2004, 19), nor the killing of people identified as *phii borp* (a kind of malevolent spirit) – agreed to by local officials, as reported by interlocutors from the NNT area.

In the context of a frontier country (4.2), the above quotes are thus to be read as eloquent policy rhetoric, feinting the possibility of empowerment through local participation in social change via "compet[ing] with the dominant group on a similar level" (WMPA 2004,8), as if such empowerment was not its actual opposite. SEMFOP I proposes to pursue "interventions which ensure food security, a sustainable use of natural resources, protected rights and improved livelihood" among the NPA villages and thus reproduces the "environmentalism of the poor" optic while the construction of NT2 dam and related relocation has aroused much international criticism for its negative socio-ecological consequences (McDowell et al. 2014). [313]

Both scopes, in short, the "environmental animist" as well as the "cultural flux", represent an instrumentalist take on "target" communities, which "fits into things at the very point from which one can take hold of them" (Horkheimer/Adorno 2002, 31). As such, both effect a transition that is bound to systematically put upland people at a disadvantage, rather than truly empowering them. In other words: by way of applying indigenist as well as "post-indigenist" visions, international environmental regulation works through local patterns, taking part in the continual re-definition of local "tradition" and "custom" within the internationalization and capitalization of the Lao uplands.

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[313] See also: http://www.internationalrivers.org/blogs/294-0, accessed February 6, 2015.

8.5.3 Conservation vs. development

Even though empirical "ground truth" was hard to elicit in the case of Dong Sakee because of the sensitive local situation, it is obvious to any visitor how the local is entwined with global dynamics of conservation and development. The tension internal to ecotourism practice between these alternatives, as highlighted in Chapters 6 and 7, is also found as an external one where ecotourism is situated within a constellation of frontier projects in an overall extractive landscape. Most clearly, Dong Sakee is constituted by extractive illicit trade as well as conservationist countermeasures, and both link up productively with local livelihoods and symbolisms.

Practice of structure

To the degree that conservation and development are oppositional alternatives of relating to external nature as a resource, local livelihoods appear as being contradictorily constituted by that opposition, as part of either conservation or extraction. However, from the perspective of local practice there might be no contradiction at all. Ethnic peasants can and likely do participate without much friction in unsustainable extraction as well in conservation efforts, aiming to derive as much community and personal benefit as possible to attain "development" (*phatthanaa*), "prosperity" (*khwaam chaleun*) and "civilization" (*sivilai*), with the help of any outside project, or elements thereof, that seem appropriate. The empirical side-by-side of the dense forest of Dong Sakee and depletion of wildlife and precious woods indicates the everyday banality of the coexistence of both dynamics, as does the logging inside Dong Sakee itself.

Local livelihoods are still largely subsistence-oriented (within and outside monetary structures), which means that they constitute an inclusive and flexible set of practices within an overall strategy of risk-minimization through diversification of options that cuts across scholarly notions of differences between hunter-gatherers, swidden or paddy cultivators, and capitalist wage laborers. While academic discourses derive from economic saturation – being able to *afford* an either/or, all-or-nothing logic – subsistence reality is defined precisely by the lack of such affluence – necessitating an as-well-as logic. This presents a formidable obstacle to Nature preservation and the success of ecotourism (9.2.3). Most importantly, however, such seamless practical and pragmatic synchronicity of conservation and development does not contradict the tension and contrariness of their structural relation. Rather, it is precisely through such practical compatibility and seamlessness that this structural tension is actualized and reproduced.

Ecotourism as extraction

The position of the recreational project of ecotourism within the local relational resource frontier is largely on the side of conservationism and directed against extraction and depletion of biodiversity. Indigenism, as argued above, is applied by local village elites in order to derive "development" benefit, e.g. in terms of tourism revenue. The position of ecotourism is slightly more ambivalent, however. The fact that local guides chase monkeys is questionable from an ecological perspective, as would be their feeding; these practices betray the fact that ecotourism is a form of extraction of economic value from Nature. This valorization is "symbolic" in that it does not depend on the removal of resources but on their remaining *in situ*, for intact nonhuman Nature is good. What is indicated by practices such as chasing monkeys is that symbolic extraction has material implications, since humans still want something *from* Nature, i.e. an aesthetic experience. This extractive aspect of ecotourism is at odds with the conservationist rationale.

Given the fact that ecotourism and conservation are parts of an overall extractive landscape, and only part of a comprehensive subsistence portfolio of strategies of marginalized upland people to safeguard existence and attain wealth by very contrary means as well, these projects are rather precarious elements of the relational resource frontier. Capitalizing on the presence of endangered biodiversity, these projects appear somewhat endangered themselves in an overall situation of environmental plunder. What this chapter has shown using the example of "sacred Nature" is that local customs and practices may actively conduct this plunder as much as they may facilitate conservation. It is here that a full appreciation of ecotourism practice at the recreational frontier becomes possible. The following final discussion provides a synopsis of the preconditions, modes and effects of ecotourism as integral to the capitalist frontier.

9 Final discussion: The recreational frontier

The preceding chapter has sought to complicate the local by situating ecotourism within the localized relational frontier setting. This provides the ground for a final discussion of ecotourism in Laos as a mode of ecocapitalist nature regulation. First, I will revisit the definition of ecotourism proposed in the introduction in order to rephrase ecotourism as world-ecological mode (9.1); second, the contradictoriness of ecotourism as crisis-ridden crisis remedy is discussed (9.2); in a third step, I sketch out some historical changes and continuities with regard to ecotourism on the resource frontier (9.3).

9.1 Ecotourism as world-ecology

This examination understood frontiers according to Moore as zones of accumulation by appropriation (vs. accumulation by capitalization) and made use of Barney's (2009) concept of the relational resource frontier in order to systematize the context of ecotourism, which is itself a frontier project. As elaborated (4.2.1), the resource frontier of Laos is relational, first, in that several projects relate to one another (e.g. compete against, stabilize, or undermine each other), partially overlapping in a given locality. We have seen how the "recreational frontier" of ecotourism is situated within a complex set of such frontier entanglements (Chapter 8). Second, these projects are relational in terms of the respective interests pur-

sued in the Lao uplands; they are world-making endeavors seeking to make reality conform to a particular, self-related vision.

The recreational frontier is interested in the untouchedness of Nature and Culture not so much in order to turn them into profit directly, but rather to "conserve" them via their experience. It goes without saying, however, that in practice this intention ties into and is part of the fundamental transformation of upland social ecologies. The following subsection applies the notion of frontier as zone of appropriation to the definition of ecotourism's political-ecological functioning provided in the beginning of this study.

9.1.1 Recreating human and nonhuman natures, integrating periphery and center

The scope of this analysis framed ecotourism in terms of its socio-structural and political-ecological function within current global capitalism-as-ecology. Ecotourism, it was argued, represents a paradigmatic example of the selective reflexivity of capitalism's nature regulation – a crucial element in what I termed "ecocapitalism" (2.2). Departing from the definition of TIES, I proposed to define ecotourism as *the recreation of nonhuman natures in the periphery (eco) via the recreation of human natures of the centers (tourism)* (Introduction). A rather empty phrase in the beginning has become laden with empirical matter and meaning in the course of this examination. Let us consider the different parts of this definition in light of the empirical results.

"recreation of nonhuman natures in the periphery…"

Ecotourism is a "recreational frontier" with regard to countries such as Laos, which has functioned as resource supplier since the advent of colonialism. In the Lao uplands, ecotourism becomes an active element of dynamic historical landscapes of extraction (Chapter 4). Ecotourism is peculiar in its specific function as conservation tool; conservation, in turn, is – contrary to what the term itself suggests – the active production of external, nonhuman nature, rather than the preservation of somehow "original" remnants of untouched Nature (Chapter 2). In conservation practice, such fictions of untouchedness are realized; by enclosing "false-and-real" realms of untouched Nature, the accumulated historical labor invested in creating the ecosystem now to be protected is disregarded and appropriated in one stroke. I demonstrated that the conservationist notion and ideal of untouched nonhuman Nature excludes local access. Such exclusion – expressed, for example, in zonation – is present even where conservation is decidedly inclusive; even stronger: it is through local participation in ecotourism that exclusion is effected. This became evident in ecotourism's ideal of experiencing authentic untouchedness as well as in the particular notion of hospitality. Authenticity and hospitality are instrumental in turning peasants into ecosystem servants (1.4.2, 3.2.1). Such economic-ecological conversion is an ecocapitalist way of producing natures by gently keeping certain groups of people out of the forest. The recreation of nonhuman nature in the periphery is thus effected by refashioning upland

human-nonhuman relations so that human natures of the periphery are also being transformed.

The "recreation" of untouched Nature intended by conservation can be conceptualized as a central practice of renovating the resource base pending another ecological revolution (Moore 2014). This practice is exclusive and seeks to recreate natural resources as biodiversity *in situ,* which may become quite cheaply available for future accumulation, such as by genetic industries (Görg 2003); as carbon sink, *in situ* biodiversity furthermore becomes an economic asset in carbon trading. With regard to Laos specifically, intact nonhuman nature secures the profitable operation of hydropower plants (4.2.4). In this context, ecotourism is thus not an element of "commodification" or "capitalization" of nature but rather the creation and making available of nature to be appropriated as cheaply as possible; at least in Laos, it is not an end but a means of "neoliberal" conservation (2.3).

We have seen how ecotourism in Laos takes place within a historically produced landscape, which it largely experiences as ahistorical. How this is possible was discussed throughout Chapter 7. I demonstrated how ecotourism in Laos builds upon and sets into effect the exclusionary logic of conservation. I argued, furthermore, that ecotourism represents not only the latest stage of the appropriation of the Lao uplands but also the nearing completion of this bicentennial colonialist project (4.1). In the context of the historical closing of the "Great Frontier" (Moore 2015, 84f), of which one of the last places is current upland Laos, ecotourism and conservation appear as strategies of realizing "fictitious frontiers" through the creation of artificial zones external to capital (but within its reach). This is achieved by deliberately excluding certain places and people from thoroughgoing participation in an actually already globalized market economy – which amounts to actively marginalizing them.

"…recreation of human natures of the centers"

In ecotourism, the recreation of external, nonhuman natures in the periphery, on the "resource frontier", is coupled with the recreation of internal, human natures in the capitalized urban centers mainly of Europe and Northern America. Explicit sources of conservation funding in the South are the pockets of respective "target groups" of clients in the North who function as long-term "funders" (Johnston/Ladouanglerd 2002, 29). A form of tourism, ecotourism first of all recreates labor power expended in exploitative, capitalized labor relations. Beyond the mere physical dimension of recreation, labor power and its recreation have a symbolic dimension in that the peculiarity of labor (its "use value") is linked to the cultures of particular social milieus. In "expeditive" and "socio-ecological" middle-class milieus (3.3.2), the quest for authentic experiences is an aspect of recreating "postindustrial" labor power (e.g. employed in "creative industries"). Put differently, ecotourists recreate their labor power and concurrently reproduce their respective social positions within certain middle-class milieus by enacting certain cultural values and prac-

tices deemed valuable in these respective circles. In doing so, they partake in recreating the resource base on the frontier (above). On this end as well, ecotourism is thus tightly linked to inequality reproduction (see below).

This complex issue also surfaced in the statements of ecotourists to Laos. The vast majority of ecotourists encountered in the field hailed from the white Western educated middle-classes, from social workers and teachers to engineers, accountants and, quite unsurprisingly, sustainable development experts as well as professional tour guides. For these individuals, physical relaxation was not the major motivation for going on an eco-trek; rather it was about experiencing Nature and traditional Culture "as unspoilt as possible" (Kleinod 2011) – a milieu-specific way of recreating human nature. Foreign to the particular places visited and pursuing self-related activities, tourists' experience of authenticity was constituted by an awkward "distance-in-proximity" which facilitated authentic experienced in "inauthentic" settings as well as customers' self-reintegration into their everyday symbolic-material structures.

It is also clear from the empirical data that ecotourism is necessarily coupled with dynamics external to itself. In terms of recreating one's physical labor power, classical relaxation (such as on the beach) is always one step in the itinerary of tourists' overall journey of which ecotourism is another. Such extra-ecotouristic forms of satisfying demand for recreation may in fact work counter to ecotourism's ambitions, such as when "ecotourists" engage in illegal, socially harmful activities (drugs, prostitution etc.); in general, long-distance flights, so essential for ecotourism in Laos, most clearly thwart the overall aims of environmentalism (see below).

We can thus say that recreation at the "recreational frontier" is coterminous with the appropriation of internal and external natures, in the periphery as well as in the centers. Ecotourism's "zone of appropriation" is not just located on the "resource frontier" (although this is where ecotourism takes place), but also in the very centers of capitalization itself. In a strong sense, human natures of the center – who are not just mere "actors" executing social scripts but also nonidentical with an exploitative system (1.4.1) – are (re)appropriated by the lure of an ideological utopia: Authenticity. This utopian dimension works as an ecological regulator in that it responds to actors' nonidentities.

9.1.2 Ecorational instrumentality

A central claim of this study was that the ecological crisis must first and foremost be approached from a sociological angle because it is a social fact. But sociology must simultaneously also account for the challenge that this crisis poses to its central disciplinary tenet that everything is to be explained by the social. The implicit circularity of this doctrine reflects a phase of capitalist organization untroubled by environmental problems – a phase of an irrevocable past. Today, in contrast, sociology must turn into social ecology in a comprehensive sense and under-

stand "society" essentially as appropriation and organization of natures human and nonhuman. This necessitates a shift of scope towards "negative dialectics" (Adorno 2004) in order to grasp nature not merely as a boundary condition of the social but as its central *implication*. While this suggestion seems banal in its generality, it is clear that "the social" as a way of organizing natures is always to be examined in the particular forms in which it is *practiced* (see below). Ecotourism is such a particular practical form, and its social ecology is peculiar: it exemplifies the nature of specifically ecocapitalist instrumentality as a mode of "putting natures to work" (see Moore 2015, 192) for renovating the resource base.

Above definition seeks to concisely frame the organization of internal and external natures by ecotourism in Laos in order to produce and make available external nature as cheaply as possible at a time of capital's historical "end of cheap natures" (Moore 2014). This is achieved, as just mentioned, by appropriating and capitalizing upon the alienation felt by Western urbanites in their everyday lives, as expressed in the longing and quest for authenticity sought in remote, exotic places. Because the "getting away from it all" (West/Carrier 2004) is actually a structural correlate of "it all", authenticity experience "is destined from the outset to lead back to its starting point" (Horkheimer/Adorno 2002, 113), and ecotourism proceeds practically as a ritual of self-reintegration (Chapter 7; below). The sole political-ecological function of this ritual is to install ecotourists as "funders" of a project. In search for genuine experience, guests are treated by ecotourism as consumers whose socially produced desires are to be catered to in order to tap their pockets for conservation-development integration. Guests, i.e. consumers of authentic experiences of Nature and Culture, are systemically kept at a distance from the locality they actually seek to engage with. This creates an awkward relation to hosts and serves mainly as an experiential, first-hand and reflexive confirmation of stereotypes on part of guests. Their observed re-integration into the everyday factual constraints of capitalist society is uneasy and temporary only, and must be continuously repeated and renewed.

Clearly, not only human natures of capitalist centers are appropriated by ecotourism's project of renovating the resource base: local desires, hopes, ambitions are also instrumentalized. Desires of locals for more "development" and "prosperity" are channeled into structures of limited development in which locals are turned from subsistence peasants into ecosystem servants by becoming ecotouristic hosts (Chapters 3 and 6). Ecotourism grasps the locality where it "can take hold" of it (Horkheimer/Adorno 2002, 31) in order to effect conservation: local people's desire for development. Instead of decidedly working towards fulfillment of those local needs that it draws from, economic incentives are set to isolate resources and restrict access to them. Ecotourism thus hijacks the desire for prosperity and partly turns it against itself. To the extent that this ecorational practice denies or ignores local desires, it will necessitate environmental relations that thwart conservation goals.

It is through their employment as "hosts" and "guests", respectively, that members of differential positions within the global social structure are instrumentalized for policy interventions designed to serve not so much their interests rather than the need of late capitalist accumulation for continued underproduction. It seems possible to make similar points about other actors involved. Although this was not central to my examination, it is conceivable that the integration of advisors into ecotourism practice includes similar forms of uneasiness, as they often set out to work towards a greater good, be it local empowerment or biodiversity conservation or both. Their actual work, in contrast, is often tedious and unrewarding as laborious progressions are undone by the single stroke of an "official" signature, or as individual motivation stands against policies of employing organizations.

Instrumentality can thus be defined as appropriation and functionalization of natures reduced to purposes of the system, regardless of the full range of needs and desires on part of the individuals organized. More specifically, turning subsistence peasants into ecosystem servants to achieve "conservation" (while locals long for more existential distance to their direct environment), and using leisure and authenticity seekers as funders of "conservation" (while guests seek more genuine relations with the localities visited) expresses an ecorational instrumentality.

Ecotourism as recreational frontier therefore exemplifies the political geography of nature appropriation very much in terms of Moore, who notes that frontiers of appropriation "can be found on the outer geographical boundaries of the system […] or […] within the heartlands of commodification" (Moore 2015, 144). In ecotourism, appropriation in boundaries and heartlands is entwined. Such a framing of ecotourism fits well with "world-ecology paradigm" proclaimed recently. However, within the ecocapitalist world-ecology, ecotourism "functions" in an utterly contradictory and crisis-ridden manner.

9.2 Crisis-ridden crisis regulation

The argument that ecotourism is a crisis-ridden remedy for the capitalist crisis directly follows ecotouristic nature regulation as just laid out. I have proposed a minimal formal definition of the ecological crisis as a social process which undermines itself by disregarding, overexploiting and exhausting its material conditions. The symbolic-material core of such a notion of crisis is found in the realization of false dichotomies such as Nature vs. Society through institutionalized practice premised on social domination. This argument builds on Adorno's notion of the "false alternative" of nature domination: the forced choice between society either dominating nature or being dominated by it. For Horkheimer and Adorno, the inescapability of this either/or choice "is that of power" (Horkheimer/Adorno

2002, 25; Görg 2003, 19ff). In ecotourism, it becomes clear that the second alternative in fact amounts to the first.

The oppositional schematism of Nature vs. Society is "false" in that it naturalizes an arbitrary and absurd condition, and "real" since this schematism is continuously realized by institutionalized practice. Reflecting the dominative, false-and-real duality of Nature and Society, the opposition of conservation vs. development represents the main tension of ecotourism practice. This false-and-real tension constitutes the tenuous internal and external dynamics of ecotourism at the Lao resource frontier.

9.2.1 Domination and inequality

The main dimensions of ecotourism practice – the implementation of a project and conducting an ecotour – proceed via a global structure of inequities and power differentials. This structure is enacted in the direct interactions of "hosts" and "guests" so that the differentials of socially and geographically distant milieus are reproduced. I argued that the specific relation of the structure that links peasant "hosts" with Western, urban "guests" (Chapter 7) can be extended to encompass the implementing structure (Chapter 6.1): in both phases of realizing ecotourism and its epistemic-institutional universe (below), members of certain sociocultural milieus have, as "guests", more definitional power than "hosts". As argued, advisors as well as customers come from very closely related social milieus in "postindustrial" societies. As "postindustrial" countries adopt ecocapitalism as an overarching paradigm, the "socio-ecological" and "expeditive" milieus spread the message of ecorationality across the globe. By realizing this paradigm on the Lao resource frontier, they execute an ultimately exclusionary and instrumental program of resource production, simultaneously reproducing unequal social positions and dispositions.

We have seen how the implementation process is dominated by the institutionalized world-making power of development cooperation. The central features of implementation are expertism, scientism, bureaucratism, legalism and economic viability as central arbiter of a project. The procedures are clearly based on inequity in terms of access to the necessary cultural and economic capital, the relevant knowledge being in the possession of external actors backed by mostly external funding power. The implementation of a distributional structure acknowledges, reinforces and intensifies the existential demands of producing nature as nonhuman. Through creating artificial stakes for local communities in untouched resources, and via contracts and agreements, implementation binds local communities tighter to national legislation and international conventions. Tour practice is dominated by the contorted dispositions of ecotourists' *habitus*, demands and expectations, since their satisfaction makes a project successful. On the guest side, milieu-specific cultural values and virtues are enacted which serve to reproduce socially elevated positions within sections of the educated middle and upper mid-

dle classes. At the same time, however, the reproduction even of powerful posi-
tions within global structures of social differentiation goes in hand with subjection
to the power of ecorational instrumentality. In a similar vein, ecotourism advisors
reproduce their social positions while subjecting themselves to the requirements
of an exploitative system.

Those approached as "hosts" by environmental interventions such as ecotour-
ism are to be converted from perceived environmental threats into environmental
caretakers. This is basically achieved by turning peasant-hunters into tourism ser-
vice staff through providing rather artificial economic incentives. Their integration
into the ecotouristic pursuit makes them legitimate, quasi-natural servants of af-
fluent customers and, thereby, also of "intact" ecosystems. Ecotourism's inherent
self-limitation as well as its general cultural opacity for Lao subsistence peasants
are central aspects of how the marginality of the "hosts" is reproduced even as
their livelihoods become fundamentally transformed. While introducing, under the
rhetoric of "alternative income", fundamentally new relations to external natures,
livelihoods of subsistence nevertheless persist because of the limited and indeed
quite modest scope of social development envisioned by ecotourism (3.2). On the
side of the hosts, as we have seen, those participating in ecotourism have the
chance to enhance their economic and social positions vis-à-vis their fellow villag-
ers, or retain positions of relative power; moreover, ecotourism implementation
necessarily builds upon and thus serves pre-existing inequities on the local level
(Chapter 6). Simultaneously, locals participating in ecotourism objectively engage
in systemic "participatory exclusion" from resources as well as from determining
the nature of one's economic pursuits: partaking in ecotourism excludes locals,
preventing them from resource extraction via implementation of a culturally for-
eign activity.

Between the two structural poles of hosts and guests – among the "mediators"
– there is a considerable dynamic and potential for upward social mobility. Town-
based guides and private tour operators as well as parts of project and NPA man-
agement staff appear to represent emerging ecocapitalist milieus among the Lao
population, induced by the presence of "Western" representatives of such milieus.
Being a member of these newly emerging social structures displays cultural avant-
gardism, but becoming a member may need considerable individual discipline and
effort in order to acquire and intentionally work towards a *habitus* largely unprece-
dented in Laos. Thus, while guests tend to reproduce their acquired *habitus* (see
3.3.2) through ecotourism practice, certain parts of the mediators *willfully* trans-
form their dispositions by exposing themselves to a largely foreign epistemic-
institutional universe. This complication of Bourdieu's *habitus*-field dialectic by the
category of nonidentity (see 1.2.1 and 1.6.1) must be taken into consideration to
fully account for social change. Individual mediators of the host-guest structure
are proponents of a new Lao social structure. Overall, the socio-structural side of
ecotourism suggests a notion of "transnational milieus", for, as far as ecotourism

is concerned, neither Westerners nor Laotians reproduce or enhance their respective social positions only nationally, but depend on a practical structure that mirrors the global social structure "in a nutshell".

To sum up, the relation between Westerners and Lao people as one of hosts and guests is central to ecotourism practice, which realizes the Nature/Society and conservation/development dichotomies (below), effecting ecocapitalist underproduction. Ecotouristic practice builds upon and reproduces the social distance between both poles: as we have seen, locals welcome ecotourism projects because of their poverty as much as Western urbanites are addressed for their affluence. As hosts, locals become legitimate servants of guests' self-referential desires; since ecotourism projects do not envisage locals to become (as affluent as their) guests, and since it is their poverty, veiled as "ethnic culture", which draws clients, the inferior position of locals as servants is naturalized. Similarly, Western experts and organizations are holders of knowledge as well as of money, both of which are to be passed on to Lao counterparts, such as in awareness raising and capacity building activities. Thus guests indirectly set the terms of ecotourism and Nature conservation in Laos, which hosts are to execute. Nonetheless, all participants in this "game" are *subjects of* it as much as they are *subjected to* the structural, symbolic-material constrictions of ecotourism.

9.2.2 Practice of contradictions

In order to outline more clearly and systematically the ways in which ecotourism represents a crisis-ridden crisis remedy, and in accordance with the overall research question (Introduction: argument and structure), this examination traced the conservation-development tension through the preconditions, modes and effects of ecotourism practice. Let us summarize.

Preconditions

The social preconditions of ecotourism practice – that is, that which makes ecotourism an understandable concept reasonably implemented and participated in – are encompassing. They range from the most general aspects (such as the existence of a socially produced encompassing crisis, the hegemonic paradigm of sustainable development, the spectacularization of Nature and Culture and so forth), via the concept of ecotourism and its specific presets, to the most practical constraints of realizing environmental ideology in protected areas.

Central to ecotourism practice is ecotourism's epistemic-institutional universe schematically outlined in 3.3.1 (see figure 1). It consists of a whole set of oppositions which are homologous in the sense that they mutually reinforce each other. Their homology lies in a similar relation of their respective relates – that of contradiction or opposition (see Bourdieu 1997, 161f). I argue that ecotouristic practice is guided by the specific contents of each relation, as well as by the mutual

reinforcement within this set of relations. In that practice is oriented along such lines of structuring the world, it actively reproduces them, ideologically as well as institutionally. The oppositional setup itself is indicative of societal relations of domination, which lie at the core of ecotourism's symbolic-material universe. As we have seen, this universe consists of one peculiarity, which in turn points to a central notion in the concept of ecotourism: the twisted relation of the Nature vs. Society and the Tradition vs. Modernity registers concerning the local community. In that hosts are on the "good" side within the latter (Tradition) but on the "bad" side within the former (Society), the classical *topos* of the noble-and-ignorant savage is encoded in ecotourism's universe.

This image of the locals is not the only doxic element engrained in this universe. The ecotourist's *habitus* is also ridden by the conservation-development tension as it bears the contradiction between the intrinsic motivation to experience supposedly "premodern" conditions and a habitual *hysteresis*, or inertia that calls for "development". Such development has to be "basic" (from the view of tourists) which, in turn, foreshadows a major way of how contradictions become practicable, that is, by gradation (see below).

The universe just recalled is preconditioned on ecotourism's *a priori* purpose: the "conservation" of nonhuman nature (at least in terms of my definition of ecotourism according to what I investigated in Laos). In the same vein, concrete ecotourism practice in Laos is predefined by the existence and realization of a social fact that might be criticized in principle but which cannot be ignored by concrete practice: a Nature reserve as enforced artificial zone of human non-use in order to create untouched Nature (see 4.2.3). Along with gradation, zonation is thus another major aspect of translating contradictions into practice. I will turn to this issue now.

Modes

Above universe of oppositions is only real if it translates into practice. But how can this highly abstract set of either/or's be enacted in concrete locations? In order for this to happen, the either/or relation must stay intact while taking on an as-well-as form. Two main ways of achieving this have already been mentioned: gradation and zonation. Gradation happens when an opposition is turned into a question of "more or less", for example, of conservation or development. The mutually exclusive character stays intact in that any "more" of conservation involves a "less" of development and vice versa. A common line of orientation for practice is thus that of a "balance" between the two, which must be struck in practice. Zonation is a way of spatially distributing the theoretical opposites in distinct zones so that they do not overlap and undermine each other. In this way, contrary endeavors may be pursued right next to each other at the same time. If the principal relation of the universe above were not contradictory, zones would not be

necessary. Typically, such distinct socioecological spheres are enforced by authoritative power, implying and indicating social domination.

As demonstrated (4.2.3), the primary object that any concrete ecotouristic practice is determined by, a real-existing Nature reserve, is a combination of gradation and zonation in that it consists of several zones which grade human disturbance of nonhuman nature, so that a Nature reserve can exist next to extraction. We have also seen how gradation and zonation structure the experience of ecotourists (Chapter 7). Gradation comes into play in tourists' self-reflexivity, for example, in that they do not expect "untouchedness" *per se* but conditions "as untouched as possible". The principle of zonation is central to tour practice, which is centrally divided into experiences of Nature and Culture, the first taking place in the Nature reserve, the latter on village (production) land.

Two further aspects are crucial in bringing about such experiential affirmation. First, tourists stand to the visited locality in a relation of detachedness-in-proximity – a structural effect of "short-cutting" the manifold mediations within the global social structure by bringing the poles directly together as host and guest. Thus, because of the abstract mediations behind concrete ecotourism practice, the guest "falls from the sky" in order to immerse herself with a random locality. Here, a second and related aspect comes into play: the self-relatedness and self-centeredness of ecotouristic pursuits. The level of immersion into the locale is zero, actually, since the activities in themselves do not resonate with locally lived experiences and requirements. Simply put, tourists "help" through self-indulgence rather than through building a school or teaching children. The locality functions as setting and projection screen for desires of self-actualization. While the Nature experience turned out as a rather smooth re-affirmation of "gorgeous" nonhuman nature (providing an opportunity to switch off), the village experience and host-guest interaction is fraught with a slight feeling of inconvenient awkwardness, based on the detachedness-in-proximity of being and not being part of the locale. This contorted relation of tourists to their destination also explains how the ecotouristic promise of authenticity can be fulfilled in rather "inauthentic" settings: the destination should, first of all, *appear* as authentic; and not perfectly authentic at that but "as much as possible". Both kinds of ecotouristic experience thus differ strongly in their respective contents and the accompanying general mood, but both "solemnize" the false-and-real (dominative) Nature/Society binary by (mis)taking the forest as well as the village as indices of some authentic wholeness.

Effects

Overall, we witnessed how practice, from the establishment of a Nature reserve to the "doing" of a tour, turned theoretical oppositions into a matter of degree, a question of more or less conservation, untouchedness etc. In this way, the exclusionary and powerful "universe" of homologous oppositions (3.3.1) is operationalized, enacted and reproduced, and so are the institutional differentials implied in

it. This is, on a very general plane, a major effect of ecotourism as crisis-ridden remedy.

However, in terms of the real effects of ecotourism practice, we would not do our topic justice if approaching it only with a sweeping fundamental critique. Rather, the fact that ecotourism is designed as an alternative must be appreciated. Ecotourism can make a relative difference, as opposed to more insensible ways of capitalist development. From a social perspective, it is hard to discount the considerable contribution that ecotourism can make to local livelihoods, first and foremost in terms of monetary revenue. In Nam Ha, for example, ecotourism revenues account for 16 to 43% of village and household earnings (Marquardt 2010, 262; on use and distribution of tourism revenue see Ounmany 2014, 106ff). Furthermore, to the extent that excessive environmental degradation must be acknowledged as an inevitable reality, any step towards a more considerate view of development points into the right direction. If ecotourism in Laos hardly lives up to its objectives of participation, empowerment and conservation, this does not in principle refute these objectives. Thus, ecotourism may have the potential to effect a relative improvement of local livelihoods both in terms of sustainable income as well as in terms of keeping resources in place rather than removing them physically once and for all. Given the factual constraints, ecotourism is more progressive than blatant resource depletion in various extractive frontiers. In the given situation, forms of development which at least reach the level of the community, or even of "indigenous peoples", appear more desirable than those fixated on the more abstract plane of GDP.

Nevertheless, ecotourism's "recreational frontier" remains an integral part of upland dynamics, which are rather destructive overall. As we saw throughout this study, it is afflicted internally as well as externally by the tension of conservation and development. Internally, by approaching local communities as either environmental "threats" or "guardians", neither of which does justice to actually-existing, marginalized people. Singled-out as targets of ecorational policy interventions, locals become confronted with a precast concept in which they figure as eternal servants; which has self-limitation built-in, the consequent imperative of restricted development; and which contradictorily employs ecotourism as alternative income (to "unsustainable" forms) and as additional (complementary) income. This dual approach in terms of "income" serves to clandestinely implant dependency on the global market economy where it has not existed before: "alternative income" suggests that money is not qualitatively different from subsistence produce; "additional income" calls for further market-based livelihood activities, such as in terms of animal husbandry or farming. The cultural conditions on which the concept rests are specific and largely foreign to the target communities.

Implementation of such an opaque epistemic-institutional structure is thus prone to escaping parts of the local reality in order to effect hegemonic sustainable development – and what is disregarded by the intervention is destined to

haunt it. To the degree that ecotourism does not address or even rules out local desires and needs, it is prone to becoming undermined by exactly those who are central to its practice, because those targeted by it cannot afford to apply the same either/or logic but must secure what is available, according to an as-well-as logic. A major effect of realizing ecotourism's contradictoriness thus seems to be the *aporia* that the imposition of a cultural and economic regime of either/or on a locality which legitimately longs for existential security necessarily produces reactions based on the logic of as-well-as.

9.2.3 Systemic downsides

A special kind of contradiction is the nonidentity produced by ecotourism's epistemic-institutional universe and the dominative aspects implied. Given ecotourism's peculiar instrumental reason (9.1.2), certain dissatisfactions are bound to occur which may undermine its intention of conserving, i.e. producing, Nature. The conversion of locals from peasants into ecosystem servants accords to the inherent ideal of restricted development – the result of a compromise between conservation and development, rather than a resolution of this tenuous antagonism. Such inherent self-limitation is clearly regarded "not as a stopgap measure, but as development itself" (Butcher 2007, 165). Such a conservation strategy is not well suited to alleviating local livelihoods on the closing frontier to a degree where marginalized people would have the choice to do without certain "unsustainable" practices. In that subsistence lifestyles are prolonged in the attempt to overcome them, ecotourism's contrariness reproduces resource frontier conditions when capital's Great Frontier is on the wane (see Moore 2014). To the extent that ecotourism does not meet, or even ignores, local needs, it produces its own downsides even where it resonates with local motivations ("We know that we must protect the environment but we don't know how because we're so poor"; villager in NNT NPA).

Thus, insofar as local needs and ambitions surpass the meeting of basic needs, local ecotourism hosts might *additionally* be involved in exactly those practices to be counteracted by ecotourism, such as illegal hunting and logging, slash-and-burn cultivation, growing opium, etc. That means that the restrictive set of either/or's in ecotourism's epistemic-institutional universe in practice necessitates further reliance on an as-well-as logic, which neatly sums up the issue of systemic downsides. The result of the second report on NHEP is instructive in that there is no indication that the project had any conservation benefits (Gujadhur et al. 2008, 45; see 5.3.1). In an interview, a Lanten elder estimates that there is perhaps one tiger left in Nam Na NPA – which is to say: none. The "wildlife-based" approach of the Night Safari, on the other hand, has yet to prove its efficiency. The ecotourism village is thus far the one with the most reported infractions on protected area regulations among all villages participating in this scheme, and wildlife is widely sold throughout the province of Houaphan: I witnessed venison being sold direct-

ly under a poster erected by the NPA awareness unit which prohibited hunting and selling deer. Equally, dead or caged bamboo rats were regular blind passengers on bus journeys from Vieng Thong to Vientiane.

As long as high prizes for rare and protected natures meet local aspirations and knowledge within an overall context of ecological plunder, chances of ecotourism and conservation look comparably bleak: how could the tangible benefit of ecotourism ever compete with the amount of money a dead tiger promises? From a local perspective, this is hardly a question of either/or, but one of as-well-as: the occasional illicit deal with rare nature may have to complement continuous but low-level monetary revenue from tourism, along with a whole register of other subsistence strategies. Local livelihoods are the arenas where ecotourism's internal frictions intersect with the external tensions and relations between several frontier projects. The presence of external tensions, that is, the availability of additional ways to secure livelihoods with "unsustainable" means, is due to ecotourism's situation within a landscape of frontier plunder. The rigid, modernist *either/or* rationale is rooted in socioeconomic conditions where such logic can be afforded; since it culminates in a development ideal of sustainability which precludes the attainment of similar material standards, it necessitates the persistence of an *as-well-as* logic among its "target population". Ironically, however, it seems that instrumentalist "either/or-ism", and the growing severity of its unintended consequences, lead to a point where even the affluent "West" is forced (back) into an as-well-as rationale, as the practice of this logic reaches a state of being existentially at mercy – not anymore of the immediate "natural" environment but of an exhausting global social system.

Furthermore, the fact that ecotourism is prone to becoming implemented exactly in regions where it occupies a precarious niche, such as at Laos' resource frontier, testifies to the peculiar crisis-riddenness of this intervention. It is noticeable that currently, the Nam Ha Ecotourism Project and the Nam Nern Night Safari are both threatened by extinction due to dam construction. Another major systemic downside is long-haul travel necessitated by ecotourism in Laos in order to bring in distant affluent milieus to tap their wallets. When pointing out the paradox of low-impact tourism and long-haul travel, Higham (2007) refers to a German study according to which on an average journey from Germany to Thailand, the flights alone consume 97% of the overall energy used (ibid, 126). The impact that ecotourism in Laos is bound to have against this background is thus conceivably minor, especially given the additional fact that "ecotourists" also engage in various other, not necessarily "sustainable", ways during their stay in Laos and the region.

9.2.4 Ecotourism as religion

If ecotourism is an aspect of domination, it likely bears motives that are situated between ideology (as symbolic correlate of domination) and utopianism (as symbolic correlate of nonidentity). As such, ecotourism is not just analogous to but part of "the misty realm of religion" (see Marx 1982, 165). I would like to highlight two central aspects which demonstrate that ecocapitalist instrumentality consists of a certain "rationality" which entails irrational, unquestioned desires.

Resource fetishism

We have seen how conservationism not only links up with animist myths but also introduces its own fetishes where it is unable to get hold of "tradition" (Chapter 8). As argued in Chapter 2, the notion of untouched nonhuman Nature might be termed a resource fetish of underproduction which, like the commodity fetish in capitalization, is "abounding in metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties" (Marx 1982, 163). The illusion of Nature as nonhuman and as untouched, I argued, derives from a certain position within the overall historical process of resource production, just as the results of production appear as either mediated products or as immediate means of production relative to a particular phase of the overall production process (1.3.2). What comes across as an immediate realm with economic and moral value in itself is actually "co-produced" (Moore) in the longstanding interaction of human and nonhuman natures.

While Marx's notion of commodity fetishism is employed as an "analogy" to religion (ibid, 165), the resource fetish embodies genuine religiosity: as several authors have argued, the very notion of Nature as nonhuman, untouched and sublime is already imbued with the sacredness of the Christian god (see Milton 1999; Cronon 1996; Groh/Groh 1991). To conceive of Nature in this sense is to embrace its "immanent sacrality" (Szerszynski 2005, 16). The resource fetish translates to the realm of society and culture where local hosts and their livelihoods are concerned: as argued in 3.3.2, local culture tends to be regarded as an appendage of Nature. To this extent, local culture is also endowed with charismatic qualities.

It is on the sacred grounds of such resource fetish that a culture-industrial spectacle of Nature can emerge to mediate societal relations via the imageries of threatened Nature (see Igoe 2010; 2.2.3). While untouched nature is constructed in high-technology media representations of vast landscapes and close-ups of "charismatic megafauna" (8.3.3), local people, as part of Nature, are depicted stereotypically as colorful ethnic tribes bearing some primordial, superior, spiritually grounded ecological wisdom. Ironically however, local lifeways, permeated as they are by spiritual fear and respect, are often far less based on "faith" or "conviction" than Western notions of religion assume – and perhaps even less than the environmentalist creed itself. Rather, "animism" is part of a comprehensive subsistence portfolio that cannot afford affluent either/or's, such as "sacred/profane".

Rituals of self-reintegration

I argued that ecotourism represents a ritual of self-reintegration for clients (7.5). Given the sacred implied in the resource fetish as well as the fact that ecotourism is crucially mediated by spectacles of Nature, this seems true not just in structural terms but in terms of content as well. As was argued in 2.1.3, (eco)tourism hijacks the nonidentical drive to escape and gain distance from everyday urban life. People seek to "get away from it all" (West/Carrier 2004) and to immerse themselves in exotic extra-everydayness, seeking to experience Nature and Culture "as untouched as possible". Personally experiencing the double "anti-structure" of a really existing supposed other to modern alienation and economically "underdeveloped" contexts, which oftentimes place serious demands on a "developed" *habitus*, as well as the mere structural force of limited leisure time – these aspects finally lead tourists to a more benign assessment of capitalist everyday life. As argued, however, such reconciliation is only temporary, incomplete and uneasy. After some time, the ritual is to be repeated.

As just mentioned, it seems insufficient to point out the formal aspects of ecotourism as ritual, for it worships the fetishes of pure Nature and unchanging Cultures, which have a religious dimension to them. The comprehensive, first-hand experience of Nature and Culture affirms and sanctifies a fiction of untouchedness realized by and for exclusionary political-economic resource regulation. Therefore, ecotourism is a prime example of the fact that "modernization" is not too rational but still not reasonable enough (see Schweppenhäuser 2000, 39).

9.3 Changes and continuities

Ecotourism not only represents a crisis-ridden crisis remedy but also exemplifies continuity-through-change in the historical making of the Lao uplands. I have adopted the view that the Lao uplands constitute a resource frontier of global capitalism, a zone of cheap appropriation of external natures (2.1.2 and 4.2). Transition at this frontier is thus characterized by so-called "primitive accumulation", that is, the social underproduction and cheap appropriation of (mostly nonhuman) natures. This process simultaneously represents continuity and change: on the one hand, appropriation, functionalization and civilization of the upland people and forests were already part of precolonial settings, and it remains the basic rationale of "putting the uplands into the state".

On the other hand, the upland frontier went through various, utterly disruptive historical phases, and the modes and conditions of cheap appropriation have significantly changed. This is exemplified by the advent of conservation and ecotourism on the resource frontier. The productive yet inconvenient tension between extractive frontiers and the conservationist and recreational frontiers is a most recent phenomenon that testifies to the unprecedented degree to which Lao upland natures are by now socialized through international forms of regulation

and appropriation. As was argued, the arrival of the French had signified the advent of a new phase in and vision of the Lao uplands as they introduced new, capitalist models of rule and productivity. That frontiers would have to be actively produced through the active exclusions of conservation and ecotourism, however, was inconceivable in early French colonialism, where the main task was to unblock Laos. The frontier was still quite real and posed serious obstacles to accumulation. The active, artificial creation and maintenance of preserves of Nature today, in contrast, testifies to the unprecedented sell-out of Laos' natural resources and, in fact, the closing of the frontier.

Thus, ecotourism continues the historical process of "putting the uplands into the state" but does so in a peculiar manner and perhaps on a higher level, by actively keeping the uplands as uncivilized as possible. The function of the conservationist and recreational frontier within the overall extractive setup is that of slowing down expanding depletion and exhaustion of external natures, that is, the active, "responsible", participatory prolonging of "primitive accumulation". The historic specialty of an ecocapitalist cheap nature strategy is that the costs of underproduction are partly accounted for socially, and even by the industry, for example via transaction payments from capitalization (such as dam operation) to underproduction (such as NPA management), as the Nam Theun 2 scheme illustrated (2.3 and 4.2.4). In this case, the levy amounted to not even one half percent of the total revenue. Thus, although the current crisis principally signifies "the end of capitalism's free ride" (Moore 2014, 303), natures are still comparably cheap and affordable at a relatively competitive price in Laos.

Because upland history from precolonialism to now involved instrumentality in various symbolic and material forms, "sociocultures" that developed during earlier phases often link seamlessly with socio-ecological transition; they often do so in quite proactive ways, so that those being excluded from resource access often actively participate in their exclusion. In the latest phase of upland history, characterized by internationalization and "neoliberalization", the product of past resource production is appropriated and actively produced as untouched Nature via protected area designation and continuous efforts to keep "human disturbance" out. Put bluntly, the historical transformation of upland people from *khaa* ("slaves") into ecosystem and tourism servants is indeed considerable; yet the amount and type of "progress" made in the name of this overarching *mission civilisatrice* within the timeframe of 150 years is also utterly questionable. The same could be said for the evolution of the *falang* ("Westerner") from colonial administrators into advisors or ecotourists. Upland transition can thus be perceived as a political-economic drama of "putting *khaa* into *meuang*" that "evolved" through diverse acts. The latest act fulfills the colonial dream of unblocking and valorizing Laos' hinterlands.

Conclusion and Outlook

This study examined the contradictoriness of ecotourism in terms of its concept as well as its practice in Laos. It did so by tracing the Nature/Society dualism and its derivatives through the symbolic-material preconditions, procedures and effects of ecotourism in Laos. In doing so, this study was interested neither in ecotourism nor in Laos *per se*, but rather in the more general question of the workings of nature domination after its failure. Using ecotourism in Laos as a case to study to exemplify this problem, I demonstrated how ecotourism as crisis-ridden crisis remedy becomes part of the historical making of Laos' upland frontier.

Against the backdrop of a combination of critical theories of societal (nature) relations, this study carved out the manifold ways in which ecotourism, contrary to its self-prescription as participatory and empowering, is conditioned by, proceeds through and results in domination and inequality. Using the "capitalism as world-ecology" lens (e.g. Moore 2015), I conceptualized ecotourism as part of recent, late-capitalist ways of underproducing and (re)appropriating natures, human and nonhuman. Defining ecotourism as the recreation of nonhuman natures in the periphery via the recreation of human natures in the capitalist centers, I was able to lend a critical twist to the official definition provided by TIES, and to reveal the instances of crisis and self-contradiction that remain silent in its the smooth wording. We have not only seen how ecotourism is based on the "false-and-real" duality of Nature vs. Society, which is the root of domination, noniden-

tity and crisis; we also saw how the conservation-development tension is central to unlocking the socio-ecological workings of ecotourism. In sum, ecotourism appears in this study as a paradigmatic case of an ecorational instrumentality: the institutionalized appropriation and exploitation (in a wider sense) of human and nonhuman natures for environmental purposes, such as the creation and maintenance of intact ecosystems. For example, in seeking to convert subsistence peasants into "stewards and custodians of biodiversity", options for social development are limited to one side of the "false alternative" of nature domination: the subordination of human possibility and desire to supposed "natural" constraints (which are, in fact, social or economic). The needs of locals come second, dependent on the perceived needs of the "ecosystem". The peculiar crisis-riddenness of ecotourism regarding its destination lies exactly there: it imposes its either/or logic of "Nature vs. Society", which calls for limited local development so as not to impede on the environment; by doing so, however, subsistence crisis is largely maintained, and with it the necessity of an as-well-as logic that directly contradicts established ecorationality. In the remaining paragraphs, I determine some limitations of this study and possible paths of future research, as well as indicating some practical implications for ecotourism and beyond.

Limitations and future research

As mentioned in the introduction, this examination of the recreational frontier used the case of ecotourism in Laos in order to begin to formulate a much broader theory of ecocapitalist nature regulation. This generalizing scope involves a host of limitations and blind spots, most of which are for the reader to determine. The most obvious ones pertain to the problem of empirical detail. First of all, while the local perspective was discussed in several parts of the argument, it remained underrepresented not least in terms of ethnographic data concerning the actual ways that ecotourism is dealt with within specific communities. Although such data was gathered, its complete inclusion into this book would have overloaded the argument. In addition, intermediary positions between hosts and guests, such as those of guides, tour operators and NPA management would deserve closer investigation. This calls for further in-depth studies into the motivations, practices and social existences of diverse ecotourism actors. In line with the theoretical approach advanced here, the issue of socially produced nonidentity might be an innovative future path of ecotourism research.

A further limitation of this study is its generalizing on the basis of ecotourism in one country only. While I believe that the way I framed ecotourism (as a means rather than as an end of conservation) might hold for quite a number of contexts outside of Laos, the picture might look different when taking African countries into account, where private parks are established for the sake of tourism. Comparative studies could thus re-evaluate, complement and systematize the theory of

ecotourism as a cheap ecocapitalist nature strategy as suggested here. Many other issues and dynamics included in this analysis were, furthermore, not tightly and completely integrated into the overall theory. A couple of loose ends remain which seek further theorization, such as: the issue of justice as both an epistemic and a political problem (Chapter 8); the nature of religion and the religion of nature in ecocapitalism; and the differentials in ecotouristic experience according to nationality, social position etc.

Moreover, and quite obviously, the overall thrust of this study – a theory of the practical regulation of internal and external natures – is not exhaustively dealt with by looking at ecotourism only. In fact, the call for a re-reading of the social as crisis-ridden organization of human and nonhuman natures might present a whole research program. Not least, the integration of the aspect of the nonidentical into the analysis of social practice, proclaimed here, is yet to be achieved. It would be most interesting, for example, to explore methods of eliciting and interpreting empirical data so as to carve out the ways in which capitalist society produces, organizes and draws on a diversity of nonidentities. In a similar vein, future studies might choose to investigate specific social practices as actualizations and localizations of a global structure of exclusion and inequity. Such line of decidedly sociological inquiry could link up with and productively integrate Jason W. Moore's "world-ecology paradigm" (Moore 2015).

Finally, the general thrust of future research on ecotourism specifically as well as on ecocapitalist nature relations in general might seek to draw conclusions from the critical insight that capitalist ways of socializing nature are actually unviable. In this vein, further research would critically examine those developments, practices or elements thereof, which appear well-suited to overcome capital's manifold, overarching crisis tendency.

Epistemic-institutional overcoming

When I explained my project to an ecotourism advisor in Laos, he replied that it all sounded interesting but that he would not read the book, for "what are the practical implications?" And he was right: What about them, given the principally skeptical and abstract take on ecotourism embraced by this study? One could reply with Adorno that theory equals critique, which has to be as radical as possible in order to live up to its term. "Constructive criticism", oriented towards immediate practical policy recommendations, would remain tied too closely to the structures examined and consequently compromise the attempt to examine ecotourism as part of the problem rather than of the solution.

Such a reply appears to be theoretically consistent. Yet, not only is it too convenient but also partly inconsequential because even (and perhaps especially) the most radical critique calls for action. Mere insistence on unimpeded radical critique, theoretically consistent it may be, finally gives in to the reality principle by

affirming the disconnect of practice and theory in current society. Such insistence, like the concept of the nonidentical, still obeys and subjects itself to the measure of what it seeks to transcend (see Adorno 2004, 193). This final inconsequence of mere critique needs to be transcended as consistently as possible if a solution to the capitalist crisis is ever to be envisaged – and this would be a question not of theory only but of forging new links between radical theory and practices geared towards a collective, comprehensive overcoming of a comprehensive crisis.

 "Overcoming capitalism" immediately evokes horrible or romantic images of "revolution". Indeed, given the urgency of many socio-ecological problems, a concerted and thoroughgoing social revolution that immediately installed a domi-nation-free society on a global scale would be ideal. As history thus far has shown, however, such an all-encompassing, sudden transformation is simply impractica-ble; which is the same as to say: it is largely the optical effect of synthetic theory oblivious of the constraints of practice (see Bourdieu 1990). The search for a "revolutionary subject" out there is the search of an ideal-type in reality.

Until the uncertain dawn of the revolution, crisis overcoming will have to make do with less ideal means, such as "radical reformism" (Görg 2003, 144). In contrast to mastering nature, the latest brand of which is ecocapitalism, politics of overcoming aim to master societal nature *relations* rather than nature itself: in prin-ciple, there is leeway in designing nature relations in other than dominative ways (ibid). Such design of social relations would be collaborative and acknowledge the necessary limitations of any social projection to do full justice to its human and nonhuman natures. The basis for collective organization would consist of a gen-eral consensus not on what is desired in the future but what is refused today by everyone of "us" as human natures. From there, overcoming would consist in a permanent collective and solidary process of learning and re-adjusting relations to ourselves as well as to our human and nonhuman fellows in order to gradually worm ourselves out of crisis-ridden institutions and epistemics, taking "stopgap measures" instead of cementing quasi-natural eternals. Epistemic-institutional crisis overcoming would involve critical self-reflection of and within society's most central institutions and seek to reconcile as much as possible the nonidenti-ties produced; it would be based on a more comprehensive notion of social self-determination that is unconstrained by the false alternative of nature domination (ibid).

As argued, new epistemics and final answers cannot be proclaimed at will from inside the given symbolic-material universe of crisis reproduction, nor can institu-tionalized epistemics be avoided (1.5). Overcoming would entail continuous self-critique of social projections and projects, involving conscious, sensitive and ac-countable uses of instrumentality instead of unacknowledged or veiled ones. This would necessitate acknowledgement of the principal limitations as much as the potential of any individual stance. Radical reformist overcoming would thus seek to include the full capacity of human reason to go beyond what is epistemically

and institutionally given – its logicality and intellect as much as its fantasy and dreams, spontaneity and intuition, for "the sole way of assisting nature is to un-shackle its seeming opposite, independent thought" (Horkheimer 1947, 127; also Bloch 1979). This will only be a way, however, if independent thought ultimately feeds into practices to which the most radical critique is most productive.

Post-ecotourism?

Such liberation of "independent thought" would mean a more constructive relation to actual practice than is the case at present. Although it would be consequential to withdraw to the position of the critic, the most radical critique turns into affirmation where it does not seek to become practice. This observation translates into the suggestion to start from the things we have and "extract" their transcendent aspects. What does this mean for ecotourism?

Regarding the guest side of the ecotouristic relation, forms of tourism are conceivable which seek to break the "ecotourist bubble" (Carrier/MacLeod 2005) by more decidedly attending to the guests' intention to truly learn about and immerse themselves in a place. First of all, instead of sliding over local realities and framing them "as untouched as possible", such stereotypes should be enlightened and disenchanted. Similarly, ecotouristic pursuits should be less self-related and self-serving by incorporating practices that are more meaningful locally (such as in forms of "voluntourism"). In contrast to conventional views, perhaps, travel can live up to its promise of providing unique experiences only where it overcomes the ideological glossing of the intervention it presents. Clearly, "interpreting the changes in the cultural and natural landscape for tourists" (Gujadhur et al. 2008, 2) not only in the face of undeniable environmental depletion but in principle would be a viable and desirable path for future responsible tourism. McCann & Hsu's (2014) call for "Animistic Ecotourism" might go some way in this direction, but it remains within the ideological and instrumentalist confines of traditional ecotourism approaches.

Regarding the host side, ecotourism needs to account for its huge package of socio-economic and cultural prerequisites that it imposes on certain localities. Put differently, tourism must become a more "original" part of local livelihoods in general, in the sense that people are truly enabled to command and manage such business in their interest. This would not only entail training locals in business administration, computational and language skills, and more, but also to revisit ecotourism's inherent imperative of self-limitation. Creating local capacities beyond their current state relates to the need to find alternatives to private sector involvement, given its uncomfortable alliance with ecotourism dynamics (Chapter 6). Consequently, host-guest interaction could provide for more genuineness of such contacts by better accounting for the distance-in-proximity ambiguity highlighted by this study (Chapter 7). Generally, ecotourism would overcome itself by

accounting for the impositions that necessarily accompany this policy intervention instead of sanctifying them as "empowerment" and "untouchedness".

In principle, however, as long as ecotourism remains a) tourism, i.e. a form of culture-industrial instrumentalization of human nonidentity; and b) geared towards conservation, i.e. the realization of the exclusionary fiction of pure nonhuman Nature, it remains part of the problem rather than of the solution. The latter starts with thoroughly "'de-forest[ing]' our minds" (Peluso/Vandergeest 2001, 766), for only

[i]f wildness can stop being (just) out there and start being (also) in here, if it can start being as humane as it is natural, then perhaps we can get on with the unending task of struggling to live rightly in the world – not just in the garden, not just in the wilderness, but in the home that encompasses them both. (Cronon 1996, 25)

As this book has demonstrated, current ecotourism as found in Laos is not going to lead us very far in this respect. At worst, ecotouristic conservation-as-enjoyment of Nature is caught in the grand and devastating tautology of capital's world-making, partaking in the quasi-natural reproduction of a dysfunctional "dialectic of plunder and productivity" (Moore 2015, 138). At best, it makes for a tepid drop on an overheating naturalized machine that lets crises follow instrumentality just as shadows follow light.

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This study treats ecotourism in National Protected Areas of Lao PDR as a "recreational frontier" which instrumentalizes the recreation of human natures in capitalism's centers for that of nonhuman natures at capitalism's (closing) frontiers. This world-ecological practice of ecorational instrumentality – i. e. of nature domination in the name of "Nature" – presents a remedy for capitalism's crisis that is itself crisis-ridden, enacting a central tension of ecocapitalism: that between "conservation" and "development". This epistemic-institutional tension is traced through the preconditions, modes and effects of ecotourism in Laos by gradually zooming from the most general scale of societal nature relations into the most detailed intricacies of ecotouristic practice. The combination of Bourdieu, Marx and Critical Theory enables a systematic analysis of the recreational frontier as enactment of various contradictions deriving from the "false-and-real" Nature/Society dualism.

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