



Zomia's vestiges: Illegible peoples and legible crimes in Omkoi, Northwest Thailand

Bobby Anderson

School of Oriental and African Studies, UK

South East Asia Research
1–20

© SOAS University of London 2018

Reprints and permission:

sagepub.co.uk/journalsPermissions.nav

DOI: 10.1177/0967828X17752710

journals.sagepub.com/home/sear



Abstract

Opium poppy cultivation in Thailand fell from 12,112 hectares in 1961 to 281 hectares in 2015. One outlier exists: Chiang Mai Province's remote southwestern district, Omkoi. Ninety percent of the district is a national forest reserve where human habitation is illegal. However, an ethnic Karen population has lived there since long before the law that outlawed them was created, unconnected to the state by road, with limited or no access to health, education and other services. Omkoi's Karen increasingly rely on cash-based markets. Their lack of citizenship precludes them from land tenure that might incentivize them to grow alternative crops, and their statelessness precludes them from services and protections. Nor is the Thai state the singular Leviathan that states are often assumed to be; it is a collection of agencies and networks with divergent interests, of whom one of the most powerful, the Royal Forestry Department, has purposely made Omkoi's population illegible, and has consistently blocked the attempts of other state actors to complexify Omkoi beyond the simplicity of its forest environment. These factors make the state illegitimate to Omkoi's Karen just as Omkoi's Karen are illegitimate to the state, and make the cultivation of short-term, high-yield, high-value, imperishable opium a logical economic choice for poor Karen farmers, especially given the historical lack of law enforcement presence. However, that presence is growing, as Omkoi becomes one of the last areas of Thailand to experience the historical extension of lowland Padi state power into an ungoverned, untallied highland.

Keywords

Alternative development, drug control, forestry, Karen, migration, Myanmar, opium, swiddening, Thailand, Zomia

Corresponding author:

Bobby Anderson, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, Bloomsbury, London, UK.

Email: rubashov@yahoo.com

Introduction

The Thai government blames us for deforestation. But where Karen live, there are forests; where Thais live, there are none. (Phaw Luang Jorni Odochao)

Thailand's opium poppy cultivation fell from 12,112 hectares (ha) in 1961 to 281 ha in 2015. By most standards of measurement, the country's 'war' on drug production succeeded, especially in comparison to other drug-producing countries such as Afghanistan and Myanmar.¹ UNODC has not included Thailand in its World Drugs Report since 2008. Thailand is also widely heralded as a successful example of 'alternative development' programming, which seeks to replace illicit crops with licit ones, and which is conducted in tandem with coercive policies to eliminate the opium economy, comprised of poppy cultivation, refinement into opium, conversion to heroin, and export/sale.

One outlier exists: Chiang Mai Province's remote southwestern district, Omkoi, where the majority of known opium cultivation in Thailand occurs. Ninety percent of Omkoi is classified as a national forest C-Zone reserve area: people are prohibited from inhabiting, cultivating or otherwise utilizing it. But a large ethnic Karen population of swiddening cultivators has lived there since long before the law that outlawed them was created. They reside in areas unconnected to the state by road, with limited or no access to schools, health centres or other services. Select among them are the grassroots cultivators of Omkoi's opium supply, which is sold onward to opaque networks the state is struggling to identify. While past studies (Hinton, 1983) allege that Karen do not cultivate opium, field research demonstrates that not only are Karen growing opium now, but they have been growing it in Omkoi and other areas of Chiang Mai for at least 50 years. While most Karen no longer engage in opium cultivation or consumption – indeed, most have been incorporated into the Thai state as well as Thai culture – in remoter parts of Omkoi, cultivation rates are the highest in Thailand. Historical drug control efforts overlooked this district, and possibly others hosting drug production not yet identified by the state, because it did not host an interrelated communist insurgency, nor were cultivation rates as high as in other areas.

Opium's profit hardly accrues to the farmer. Those who grow opium do so because they have little other choice. The encroachment of 'development' upon Omkoi's Karen has already occurred through their growing reliance on lowland markets where currency is the only form of exchange, and opium is the highest value cash crop around. A lack of citizenship precludes much of the rural population from land tenure that might incentivize the growing of estate crops with a lower rate of return and a longer cultivation period. Statelessness also precludes them from services, credit and other protections. Even if they had citizenship, their presence in a C-Zone reserve area still leaves them 'illegal'. And if these issues are all overcome, a stark truth remains: there is no alternative crop that can equal the price a farmer earns from opium. Previous alternative development programmes did not succeed because of agriculture, but because of the increased presence of the state.

Nor, in the case of Omkoi's Karen, is the state the Leviathan it is assumed to be; it is a set of agencies and networks with divergent and contradictory interests, and this hobbles the state's alternative development approach. Omkoi's complexity has been simplified by state actors focusing on environmental concerns, but the attempts of other state actors to make Omkoi's

1. For the sake of continuity, this article uses the country names Myanmar and Thailand throughout, including in pre-1989 instances when Myanmar's official name was Burma, and pre-1939 instances when Thailand's official name was Siam.

inhabitants legible has led to contradictions. For example, Royal Forestry Department (RFD) officials refuse to allow the Department of Local Administration (DOLA) to gazette settlements and provide services, and state extension agents are unable to provide substitute crops that require land clearance or supporting infrastructure. In a reversal of 'classic' statebuilding practice as described by Anderson (2006), Scott (1998), Tilly (1985, 1990) and others, the Royal Forestry Department purposely makes a population illegible. These factors serve to make the cultivation of short-term, high-yield, high-value, easily transportable and imperishable opium the most logical choice for poor farmers, especially given the historical lack of law enforcement presence in the area.

That presence, however, is now growing. Omkoi has already been bureaucratically constructed – the Thai state certainly doesn't see it as stateless – but the complex realities on the ground do not match the deliberately simplified prisms through which the district is viewed. Omkoi is one of the last areas in Thailand to undergo the historical extension of lowland Padi state power into an ungoverned, untallied, ephemeral highland, as described by Scott (2009). As the government destroys opium poppy but does not replace it with alternative crops, the potential for future unrest cannot be discounted. However, a middle ground between the state's contradictory positions can be discerned.

The following analysis is based on substantive field research and over 60 interviews with Thai government officials, Karen leaders, security actors, academics, civil society representatives, local businesspersons, ex-cultivators and addicts in Omkoi, Chiang Mai and other areas, from December 2015 to June 2017.

Prologue: Lowland intrusions in South East Asian highlands

Put vegetables in the basket: put people in the Muang (village). (Thai saying)

Van Schendel (2002) coined the word 'Zomia' to describe the upland South East Asian land massif that stretches from Vietnam to Tibet, and which includes northwestern Thailand: an area traditionally resistant to centralized rule due to its high elevation, extensive forest cover and rugged topography. Unlike monocropping lowland Thais, Bamars and others who typically cultivated Padi rice, highlanders (including Thailand's Karen, Akha, Hmong, Lah and Lisu) historically cultivated a wide variety of crops that were hard to seize and tax, such as tubers. Their swiddening kept them mobile, and their societies impeded the emergence of centralized rule: egalitarianism predominated, and Myanmar's Kachin often killed emergent leaders who seemed too ambitious (Leach, 1954), as did Thailand's Lisu (Durrenberger, 1983: 218).

Scott (2009), Van Schendel (2002) and others postulate that much of the Zomia population, including the Karen, migrated to the hills in order to escape from the centralizing rule of lowland and wet-rice cultivating states that sought to capture and transport populations near to wetland rice producing areas, putting them to work cultivating monocrops, which could then be taken, taxed and stored for long periods. In addition to monocropping, these lowland states were characterized by other strategies of conformity, including: permanent settlements; uniformity of culture, language and education; the propagation of dynastic and cosmological myths to justify the ruling order; the record-keeping made possible by literacy; the levying of tax; and conscription in pursuit of all of the above. Such states thrived, to the benefit of emerging elites, and to the chagrin of captured populations that eventually became members of uniform ethnicities and religious groups. The Padi state that caused the most migration was Han China, with wave after wave of non-Han

fleeing, first from the river valleys of central China, and then from Sichuan and Yunnan, as myriad dynasties seized more land and people. Those who did not flee eventually became assimilated as Han. Tai people originally fled Han expansion, but they replicated Han practices in the lowland areas in which they settled. Eventually, the most successful of the Tai statelets, Thailand, came to pose the same threat to other highlanders that the Han once posed to them, as they, and their lowland Bamar neighbours, encroached upon the hills. Highlanders fleeing an expanding state not only constituted the constructed ethnicities of highland populations; they were also made up of select Bamar, Han, Tai and other lowlanders who sought freedom in the forests and hills.

The lowland Thai state grew from struggles with its Khmer and Bamar neighbours, who warred against one another to capture populations rather than territories. Thailand's position between French and British colonies served as a buffer between the two and so the state consolidated internally, expanding its rule into peripheral areas not claimed by the European powers. State encroachments upon Zomia's patchwork of non-state spaces increased exponentially after the Second World War, with the armed incursion of fleeing Chinese nationalist armies into Myanmar, and later Thailand and Laos, serving as a catalyst to Zomia's deconstruction, especially due to KMT involvement in the drug trade (see below). State encroachment was further driven in Thailand by worries of communist insurgent recruitment amongst hill tribes. Zomia effectively ceased to exist in the latter half of the 20th century, although its remnants are found in rare areas where state-driven legibility is incomplete. The reduction of opium's position in hill tribe livelihoods in recent decades through alternative development and eradication is a subset of exactly that broader expansion and consolidation of lowland state power into highland non-state spaces from which it was previously absent.

A brief history of opium in Southeast Asia

The opium poppy (*papaver somniferum*) is indigenous to the eastern Mediterranean, and was first described by Hippocrates. From Anatolia its cultivation spread to the Balkans, Iran, India and China, where it was used as medicine a millennia ago.

Refugees entering highland South East Asia in flight from Han expansion and successive failed rebellions likely brought opium poppy with them from Sichuan and Yunnan, where it was long cultivated and consumed by Hmong (Miao) and Lisu in particular.² Opium usage became incorporated into the hill tribe cultures of southwest China, northern Thailand, northern Laos and northwest Myanmar, as a social and a religious activity. It also became currency, with many products until recently priced in *jo* of opium. Opium was also a means to store wealth: unlike other crops, it travels well, and when dried, can be stored for long periods. It became a representation of stability, continuity and wealth, its seed given by parents as wedding gifts. Opium was also a broad-spectrum medicine for a variety of ailments, its persistence enhanced by the remoteness of many non-state spaces to other treatment options. It reduces hunger pangs. Lastly – or perhaps firstly – some people like to get high.

British India seized upon opium to 'right' the balance of trade with China, and fix India's chronic shortage of silver, by exporting it to China and other markets. Later waves of Chinese labour migration to South East Asian colonies as well as Thailand in the 19th and 20th centuries brought addictions with them. The Thai King Rama II first banned opium in 1811, but the country ultimately bowed to British pressure; Rama IV legalized it, and instituted a government monopoly.

2. Interviews with villagers, CRSPO, ONCB, Mae Tuen/Omkoi town, Omkoi, March 2016.

The state benefited: at the end of the 19th century, monopolies on opium, alcohol and gambling constituted at least 40% of government revenue (Lintner, 2000). Whilst opium was wholly imported from British India, the possibility of cultivating opium outside state monopolies and selling at monopoly prices was soon acted upon by traders, corrupt officials and holders of monopoly concessions. Highlanders were encouraged to plant more opium, which they would exchange for rice. This also occurred in China, with illicit opium cultivated in Yunnan finding its way into the Thai drug market. The British increased opium cultivation in Burma's Shan state, which borders northwest Thailand.

Historical drug production and the reaction of the state, 1949–2000

Opium cultivation in Thailand did not begin in earnest until the 1940s. The fall of China's Guomindang (Kuomintang, hereafter KMT) to the communists in 1949 led to remnants of the KMT fleeing to Myanmar, where they expanded cultivation of the only cash crop in northern Shan – opium – which would reach international markets via Bangkok. Systematic cultivation percolated into Thailand, with highlanders fleeing KMT conscription and taxation (Lintner, 1999; McCoy, 1973). Demand for South East Asian opium exponentially increased as a result of the success of eradication programmes in the Balkans, Anatolia and Iran; organized criminal syndicates searched for new sources of opium, and found it in the Golden Triangle (McCoy, 1973). Zomia's non-state spaces were convenient for state actor involvement: in Thailand, this illegal economy operated with the implicit involvement of the Thai police and army, who fought one another over control of the trade. Swiddening, or slash-and-burn agriculture (Thai: *Rai Mun Wian*; Burmese: *Taungya*), historically a sustainable farming practice, mutated into the clearance of entire hillsides for poppy. Communist Party of Thailand (CPT) insurgents also profited from this trade; highlanders were their farmers and foot soldiers, and state fear of highlanders joining insurgencies led state officials to ignore much smallholder opium cultivation (Hanks and Hanks, 2001). It was in this era especially that, for many lowland Thais, highlanders – swiddeners, opium growers, rebels – became associated with environmental destruction, crime and threat. These stereotypes have created an atmosphere of suspicion and distrust that continues to colour the lowland–hill tribe relationship.

Northern Thailand's opium economy began to wane in the early 1970s, when US President Richard Nixon declared a 'War on Drugs' in response to a rising urban heroin epidemic, which was partly fueled by addicted American soldiers returning from Vietnam. The Thai government, with US pressure and funding, increased the scale of alternative livelihoods programmes, which had initially begun under the auspices of the Border Patrol Police and Thai King Bhumibol Adulyadej's *Royal Project* (est. 1969). The Royal Project's approach to alternative livelihoods included:

1. Research and development of geographically suitable alternative crops, which would not compete with lowland products;
2. Agricultural extension services including provision of seeds, fertilizer and training, and construction of supporting infrastructure (dams, irrigation, farm feeder roads, etc.);
3. Post-harvest and value-added processes, such as transportation, grading, processing, packing, marketing, etc.

While the United Nations Development Program, working alongside the Royal Project, initially managed many alternative development programmes on behalf of the state (Renard, 2001), the

Thai Government soon created a specialized agency, the Office of the Narcotics Control Board (ONCB), to oversee drug control policy, alternative livelihoods and, later, eradication. In line with the implicit mission of alternative development as an exercise in the consolidation of lowland state power and the weakening of threats to the state, the ONCB established its first five regional offices in CPT insurgent strongholds (Race, 1974), where they worked as extension agents.³

The Royal Project introduced over 150 new crops to opium poppy farmers, including Arabica coffee and tea. Other less valuable crops included: apples, beans, cabbage, corn, decorative flowers, herbs (seasoning), lettuce and peaches. Padi rice was also encouraged.

The government established price floors for alternative crops and became the guaranteed buyer for Royal Project produce, in order to match the price farmers once earned from opium poppy cultivation. The Royal Project initially focused on large-scale monocropping, which primarily served state interests by making highland labour and produce accurately quantifiable, and in service to lowland markets rather than household needs. These were aspects of lowland 'best practices' transplanted to an area that was not appropriate for it, and monocropping caused many former opium cultivators to abandon the project.⁴ Consequently, the Royal Project soon allowed for polycropping.

Poppy *eradication* did not begin until 1984, simultaneous to disarming and demobilizing (and, in the Pieng Luang area, killing) the last vestiges of KMT forces on Thai territory.⁵ This was a full 15 years after alternative development began, when suitable alternative crops were in place; the ONCB coordinated eradication efforts, which were primarily conducted by the 3rd Army. In addition to the destruction of crops, authorities began actively arresting cultivators. Between 1984 and 1985, Thailand's area under cultivation dropped from 8290 ha to 2428 ha (Renard, 2001: 36), and accordingly rose in Myanmar,⁶ where the opium harvest, from an average of 300,000–400,000 kg per year, would peak at 1,500,000 kg in the mid-1990s. This peak coincided with government ceasefires with numerous highland insurgents who emerged from the collapsed Communist Party of Burma. The new groups, especially in Wa and Kokang, concentrated on drug production. Cultivation also shifted to Laos, peaking at 126,654 kg in the 1990s.

Harm Reduction was a late addition to drug control policy. Thailand's initial response to its multifaceted drug problem concentrated on supply, driven by foreign, primarily American, concerns, as well as the need to synoptically assert state control over contested spaces. Only in the 1990s did authorities note that grassroots poppy farmers were also consumers of a culturally acceptable product, which provided a form of escape from the state, and therefore drug demand required addressing as well (Anderson et al., 2016). An increase in heroin consumption briefly

3. Interviews with ONCB, Chiang Mai, December 2015.

4. Interviews with project participants, Nong Tao, 24 June 2016; with ONCB, 21 June 2016; and with Phaw Luang Jormi Odochao, Nong Tao, Chiang Mai, 24 June 2016.

5. Thailand expelled the Shan–Chinese heroin trafficker Khun Sa from the country at this time. For a description of KMT veterans and their descendants in contemporary Thailand refer to Qin (2015).

6. By the late 1980s, Myanmar was the world's largest supplier of heroin, which was also used as a currency because of a collapse in the value of the Kyat. Following US government pressure on Myanmar's State Law and Order Restoration Council to crack down on heroin-manufacturing insurgents, most notably Khun Sa's Mong Tai Army, the world epicentre of poppy cultivation and heroin manufacture shifted to Afghanistan, where the Mujahideen group Hizb e Islami began synthesizing heroin in Helmand after the Soviet withdrawal in 1989. The Taliban's declaration of heroin manufacture as haram or forbidden in the late 1990s caused cultivation to shift back to Myanmar.

provided urgency: for a short period in the 1980s and 1990s, its use exploded in young highland communities – Hmong/Miao in particular – before AIDS just as rapidly killed the highland injecting population.⁷

The success of the overall alternative livelihoods and crop substitution programme in Thailand did not result from substitute crops increasing incomes; rather, the threat posed by eradication and increased law enforcement/state surveillance, and the potential loss of both income and freedom, were factors in the decisions of former cultivators to switch crops.⁸ The state's conversion of non-state spaces through the arrival of its bureaucracy and coercive authority led to changes more than any new crops – none of which provided the same level of income that opium did. But the price floor established by the Royal Project did partially bridge the gap between illicit and licit income. The Royal Project continues to pay inflated prices for substitute crops.

An important factor in the success of alternative livelihoods, according to Renard (2001) and others, was the awarding of Thai citizenship to hill tribe members: citizenship gives those who hold it a vested interest in the state and its laws; it provides minimum levels of security and protection, even in areas where the rule of law is still in adaptive phases. In Thailand's evolving state-citizen compact, it provides free education and subsidized health care. It allows ownership of land and access to credit, and is necessary for longer-term investments. Licit crop substitution is implicitly an encouragement in long-term investment, particularly for estate crops such as coffee, tea and orchard fruits. Arabica coffee is ideal; it grows at the same altitude as opium, travels well, offers better returns compared to short-term crops and requires the shade of larger trees, so deforestation is less of an issue. But Arabica takes at least three years to reach maturity for harvesting. Providing tenure encouraged farmers to shift away from an illegal crop with a short cultivation window and a high rate of return by giving them the security of knowing they would not be expelled from the land they cultivated. In areas designated as protected by the Royal Forestry Department (see below), limited tenure was also allowed, sometimes grudgingly (Renard, 2001).

The impact of crop substitution cannot be disentangled from other forms of the imposition of the state in the form of development, namely roads, electrification and telephone cable – the circulatory systems within the state corpus through which information and personnel flow.

Negative impacts abounded. Hill tribes saw alternative development as an imposition from Bangkok that stripped them of their culture and sought to turn them into caricatures of lowland Thais (Prasong and Carson, 1998; Renard, 2001); they were the passive recipients of such programmes, and their voices played no role in their shaping. Alternative development targeted opium poppy, but it also targeted swiddening in general, and state actors rigidly enforced the 1971 law banning the creation of new villages implicitly established through swiddening migration. In the areas it was successful, the elimination of this practice changed the very reason why highlanders cultivated crops, from household unit consumption to sale in markets. The projects largely ended the symbiotic relationship between hill tribe swiddeners and forests. This was, and remains, traumatic.

The nutritional diversification accompanying former swiddening techniques ended due to crop substitution, and rural food security declined as a consequence. This is the opposite of claims made by alternative development advocates⁹ who assert that the cash earned from monocropping allows

7. Interview with public health official, Omkoi, March 2016.

8. Interviews with former cultivators, Mae Tuen, February 2016; and with ONCB officials, Chiang Mai, December 2015 to June 2016.

9. Interview with HRDI, Chiang Mai, March 2016.

for the purchase of varied foodstuffs which were once cultivated. The market price of a monocrop, however, is volatile, especially for high-value crops such as coffee, and so a collapse in its price signifies a collapse in household purchasing power and, therefore, the collapse of a diversified food supply, which was previously a constant in the swiddening era. This reduction in food security is not quantitatively measurable due to a lack of preserved data from past projects and a lack of previous monitoring and evaluation, but Karen and other hill tribe interviewees attested to it. The reduction in swiddening further integrated highland cultivators into Thailand's cash economy, thus increasing their dependence on the state and its markets, and necessitating non-traditional forms of work paid in currency. This integration also encouraged seasonal and sometimes permanent migration of highlanders to towns and cities, often for construction and other casual labour: in many highland areas, remittances became the primary income streams for cash-based needs. Select Chiangrai activists make a connection between declining opium cultivation and increasing trafficking in hill tribe women to brothels in the south, but this is anecdotal.

The end of swiddening, however, cannot be blamed solely on the state which imposed its writ: the victory of the Chinese Communist Party in 1949 sparked off waves of migration across Zomia, as did Myanmar's myriad insurgencies. Hanks and Hanks (2001), for example, notes that in the Muang Kham 'area', the population doubled between 1964 and 1974, mainly due to refugees fleeing Myanmar; and food supplies declined as yields fell and soil degraded and forests became denuded of game. Famines in the early 1970s indicated that limitations to the land's capacity to support a growing population by practices traditional to Zomia had been reached.¹⁰

Overall, state surveillance and control implicitly increased in areas where it was previously not present, through roads, troops and bureaucrats, and non-state areas were integrated into the Thai state over time by virtue of this coercion, as well as Thai migration and the spreading usage of the Thai language.

Opium, in this era, could be regarded as less of a commodity and more of a proxy indicator of the state of hegemonic power relations between lowland and highland, shifting inexorably in favour of the lowlands by the lever of alternative development. This state imposition of rule on egalitarian highland areas, touched off decades before by the flight of the KMT, is referred to as 'development'. But in its economic conversion of the highlands to serve lowland interests, it may be better described as 'capitalist terraforming'.

Contemporary opium poppy cultivation in Northwest Thailand

While opium poppy cultivation declined significantly, it did not end (Figure 1). The majority of known opium cultivation in contemporary Thailand occurs in Chiang Mai's Omkoi district: an area

10. Many contemporary Karen interviewees are adamant about their right to swidden and yet they no longer move homes as their fields change locations; they are also cultivating stationery crops such as Arabica, peaches and nuts, investing in fixed assets, driving pickup trucks and sending their children to school, first to Buddhist monasteries and then to universities, in Chiang Mai and further afield. Swiddening serves as a marker of identity, but it is not, for contemporary Karen, an enviable lifestyle. Across the Myanmar border in Kyaukkyi, Karen forced into flight by the Tatmadaw switched from rice cultivation back to swiddening to survive; due in part to the knowledge lost by a few generations of living in fixed positions and depending upon markets, they went hungry, and swiddening, far from being a cultural more, was only illustrative of their precarious state. A fixed abode is now considered to be stability over the oft-times parlous freedom to roam.

bypassed by a half century of encroaching state authority through alternative development and eradication, although residents note that opium was cultivated there since at least the 1960s. Omkoi's western and northern fringes are the entirety of 1960s highland Thailand in microcosm, where communities are uncensored and unrecognized by the state, which regards them as a threat, and a political economy of illegality exists, which is only now being mapped. The district lies 170 km (a four hour drive) from Chiang Mai town, in the far southwest of the province near the Myanmar border, which is as porous as it is under-patrolled.¹¹ Of the 281 ha of opium poppy uncovered by Thai authorities in 2015, 142 ha occurred there – a significant decline from the 246.37 ha identified in the previous year. In 2016, however, ONCB surveillance revealed the highest cultivation identified since 2009. The price of a *joi* (1.6 kilos) of opium in Omkoi fluctuates between 120,000 and 170,000 Baht; despite claims that Omkoi's opium is only for internal markets, these fluctuations causally match international markets. Opium usage in Omkoi is also prevalent. The Chiang Mai University Medical Faculty's substance abuse research centre estimates that Omkoi hosts 5000 addicts, but their estimate is based on an arbitrarily assigned average of five to 10 addicts per village. No one knows the level of addiction in Omkoi, although anecdotally it is high.

Despite the implied specificity of this information, accuracy is lacking, as is data on population, and health, education and other indicators. Omkoi's six sub-districts contain roughly 100 villages, although no agreed-upon figure exists: many of the 'villages' are only a set of homes populated by a single extended family. The district population, according to the Department of Provincial Administration, is 62,317: each government agency has a different population figure.¹² Most of Omkoi is inaccessible during the rainy season; beyond select main roads, the district lacks schools, medical facilities, roads and electrification, due to its national forest status (see below). Beyond sub-district capitals, the area lacks government presence, and according to interviewees, serves as a place of exile for incompetent civil servants who are often absent from their duty stations.¹³ The lack of educational opportunities in Omkoi over generations results in a waiver of the civil servant prerequisite of a secondary school diploma; in Omkoi, civil servants only need to speak Thai.

Eighty percent of Omkoi's population comprises non-Thai hill tribes that still practice swiddening – mostly Karen with family links to Myanmar. Anecdotally, most of the indigenous population living in the remotest areas of Omkoi lack Thai citizenship (UNESCO, 2010); the further one travels from a road in the district, the fewer Thai citizens one encounters, even though nearly all Omkoi's Karen have lived in Thailand for generations.

Karen in Southeast Asia

Contemporary issues of cultivation in Omkoi involve Karen in particular. In 1983, Peter Hinton asserted that the Karen do not grow opium (Hinton, 1983). But interviews with ONCB, academics and Karen informants indicate that in particular areas of the highlands, they do grow opium, and they already did in 1983. For example, in Chiang Mai's Nong Tao, a village in the Mae Wang River basin, Karen began growing opium a century before, after it was introduced by Hmong migrants from China¹⁴ who planted poppy on hillsides cleared of teak. In Omkoi, Karen have been

11. While select interviewees state that the border is well-patrolled, the majority of them assert otherwise.

12. Interview with CMU professors and ONCB, Chiang Mai, December 2015.

13. Interviews with ONCB, Chiang Mai, December 2015.

14. Interview with Karen leader Phaw Luang Jorni Odochao, 23 June 2016.

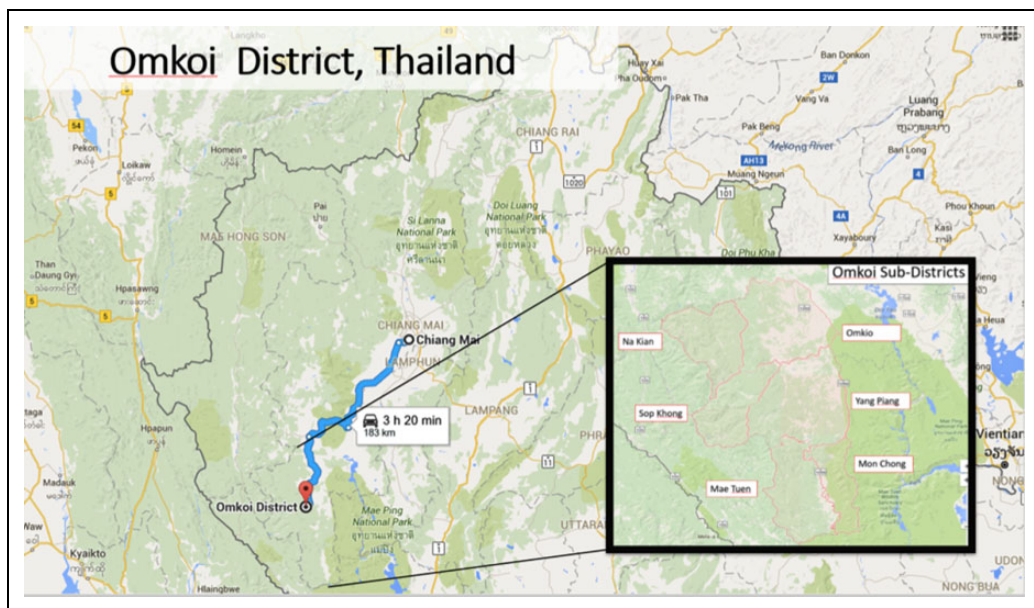


Figure 1. Map of Omkoi District, Chiangmai Province, Thailand.

Source: Map courtesy of Tian Yeow Tan'.

growing opium for at least 50 years; informants in Mae Tuen and other areas also state that cultivation was encouraged by Hmong.

Southeast Asia's Karen predominantly reside in Myanmar, where an estimated 4–6 million live. Delang (2003) estimates that roughly half a million Karen live in Thailand, while Karen interviewees claim one million. Thailand's Karen are concentrated along the Western border with Myanmar, from Mae Hong Son to Ratchaburi/Petchaburi. Chiang Mai Province contains one-third of Thailand's Karen. Sgaw are the largest Karen language sub-group, followed by Pwo (alt: Po). Two much smaller groups exist: Dtawng Soo/Pa'o and Kaya/Baway. Karen historically reside at elevations ranging from 600 to 1000 metres,¹⁵ in small villages often comprised of extended family units, of between 10 and 200 households. These village units were historically ephemeral, with villages subdividing constantly; entire villages would move as fields were planted, harvested for a few seasons and then left fallow. The latter half of the 20th century saw ever-larger numbers of Thailand's Karen move from the hills to valleys and cities, especially the youth population.

Karen have been continually displaced across centuries. The oral history of Nong Tao's Karen, for example, places them in Chiang Mai for 700 years, first in Mae Wang; after 400 years, 'Northern' Thais fleeing 'Southern' Thais drove them out, after which they settled in Nong Tao. Not all Karen left Mae Wang: many stayed and became Thai.¹⁶

15. In Myanmar, lowland Karen populations are found in delta areas that were once malarial forests and swamps prior to the British relocation of the capital from Mandalay to Yangon. Delta Karen allied with the British and against the Bamar, who were their oppressors; against the historical norm, they did not flee, and Karen communities remain in the Ayeyarwady region, although many no longer speak Karen.

16. Interview with Karen leader Phaw Luang Jorni Odochao, 23 June 2016.

The Karen identity appears to signify the external peoples and modes of governance which Karen wish to distinguish themselves *from*, rather than what Karen *are* in the absence of the other. The identity was promoted in early 20th century Myanmar by British officials, in order to simplify their census (Cheesman, 2002), and by missionaries who midwived Karen nationalism. Cheesman, Scott and other scholars note that the Karen, when viewed as a whole, share no common language, culture, history or religious belief: their languages are not mutually intelligible. Their religions include Buddhism, Catholicism and Protestant sects; some are purely animist, while elements of animism are found in Karen practices of other religions. The delineation between Karen sub-groups is unclear, as is their delineation from other non-Karen groups such as Kachin and Shan. Although all identities, including Han and Thai, are constructed, the Karen and numerous other highland tribes are particularly stark recent examples of the ephemeral nature of ethnicity. Leach, Scott and others note that highlanders have switched identities from Kachin to Shan within two generations, and multiple ethnicities can simultaneously occur in individuals. The same person can be a Kachin in one town, a Shan in another. In contemporary Chiang Mai province, a Karen in Omkoi becomes a Thai in Chiang Mai town, and these mimicries solidify into identities over time.

Karen fates in South East Asia and the wider world are intimately tied to violent lowland state expansion and counterinsurgency. Centuries ago, the majority of Thailand's Karen began to migrate into northern Thailand in flight from expanding lowland Thai kingdoms, while later exoduses occurred from Myanmar's expanding Bamar kingdoms. The Myanmar migration has continued, with Karen insurgents and civilians fleeing Myanmar army (Tatmadaw) offenses against the Karen National Union, which first rebelled against the newly independent state in 1949. Although the KNU dropped demands for independence in the 1970s and instead advocated for federalism, this did not bring an end to the fighting, oft-times described as wars of annihilation. Tatmadaw campaigns in Karen areas included 'slave labour, systematic rape, the conscription of child soldiers, massacres and the deliberate destruction of villages, food sources and medical services' (MacGregor, 2005). The KNU's Karen National Liberation Army fragmented in the mid-1990s when a large number of fighters defected to the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army,¹⁷ which fought the KNU as a Tatmadaw proxy. 128,000 Myanmar Karen refugees remain in Mae Sot and other Thai border towns. An unknown number of these refugees have settled in Thai Karen villages, adding to already extensive cross-border family and trade linkages, which may also link Omkoi opium to wider markets.¹⁸

Thailand's Karen are, by and large, integrated into the Thai state to a greater degree than Hmong, Lisu and others; Hanks and Hanks (2001) notes that they were not even considered to be a 'hill tribe' by select authorities, although they were still considered non-Thai. Forsyth and Walker (2008) note the generalization of Karen by Thai authorities as 'protectors' of the forest, in stark contrast to 'destroyers' such as Hmong/ Miao.¹⁹ Karen traditionally cultivated opium for their own use, rather than for wider markets. The depth of this tradition amongst Karen is disputed by scholars as well as interviewees: nearly all agree that in the last century, opium was introduced by Hmong and integrated into Karen cultural practices, or simply used as a way to pass the time.²⁰ While most Karen no longer cultivate or consume opium, in remoter parts of Omkoi their cultivation rates are the highest in Thailand. Omkoi's Karen, then, are not only peripheral to Thais; they are peripheral to most Karen.

17. The DKBA later changed its name to the Democratic Kayin Benevolent Army. The DKBA later fragmented, with a splinter group reverting to the original name.

18. Interviews with village heads and extension agents, Mae Tuen, Omkoi, March 2016.

19. This dichotomy was most obvious in the Chom Thong upland-lowland dispute (Puginier, 2003).

20. Interviews with villagers, CRSPO, ONCB, Mae Tuen/Omkoi town, Omkoi, March 2016.

While James C Scott's research on Zomia is pivotal to analysis of Omkoi's recent history and to explaining the different strategies/practices Omkoi Karen and other highlanders historically adopted to evade state control, the model has its limits when it is used as a prism through which to view contemporary Omkoi. Scott himself states that Zomia has not really existed since the end of the Second World War; it is anachronistic, as per its intention. The framework developed by Forsyth and Walker provides clarity, demonstrating how the state uses environmental narratives to consolidate control over the land, resources and people (Forsyth and Walker, 2008, 231), and how environmental and security concerns are conflated, in border areas in particular; Omkoi becomes a crisis that must be solved to legitimate the state. Scott is instructive in that he describes the wilful myopia of the state, narrowing 'an infinite array of detail to a set of categories that will facilitate summary descriptions, comparisons, and aggregation' (Scott, 1998: 77), eventually transforming observed reality. This pattern is particularly obvious in the RFD's view of Omkoi, which acknowledges the forest but not the people within.

Omkoi's forest

... In national forests that the authorities declare to be reserved or restricted, people have long been there. It is strange to enforce the law against people who live in such areas, which have always been non-reserved, but only lately declared reserved because of some lines drawn on paper. The problem occurs when those boundaries are drawn, causing the people inhabiting those areas to become 'law-breakers'. In terms of legislation, they may be seen to violate the law, because the law is legally passed. However, if we consider the issue naturally as to who is actually breaking the law, it becomes clear that the lawmakers are, because the people lived in the area long before the law was enacted. (King Bhumibol Adulyadej, 27 June 1973)

Thailand's rapid population increase and explosive rates of economic growth and accompanying development between 1960 and 2006 resulted in a reduction of forest from 53.33% to 30.92% of overall land area (Preecha, 2011). While antithetical policies emerged in Thai government and activist circles, which classified highlanders as either detrimental or beneficial to forests, the limitations the state imposed on human activity in protected areas based on those classifications were broadly similar. One's designation as protector or destroyer only determines which side of the fence one finds oneself.

The Royal Forestry Department enforces C-Zone regulations in Thailand. It was initially created to protect and regulate Thailand's teak supply in the late 1800s, after highland Karen began 'illegally' selling teak to the British in Shan and the French in Laos. Ironically, the RFD is historically implicated in the introduction of opium to Karen: they banned Karen from growing rice, which would have required large-scale forest clearing, but allowed them to grow opium, which required much less clearing. Karen traded opium for the rice they were prohibited from growing directly; the government taxed the trade as well.

Catastrophic flash floods in Thailand in 1989, widely linked to deforestation, led to enhancements in the RFD's mandate, and it soon subcontracted Thai demand for forest products into Myanmar (Smith, 1991), and KNU areas in particular,²¹ while Thailand's own watershed areas

21. Interview with KNU representative U Mam Char, Taung Galay, Kayin State, Myanmar, December 2016. The KNU has recently declared a moratorium on forestry in its areas, and signed an MoU with the World Wildlife Foundation (*Irrawaddy*, 2016).

were preserved. Since its inception, the RFD has been at loggerheads with hill tribes, denouncing and seeking to end swiddening, which it and other agencies uniformly oppose under the mistaken impression that it is environmentally harmful, while many available studies demonstrate that it is, traditionally, a rejuvenating practice (Asia Indigenous People's Pact, 2012; Bruun et al., 2009; Erni, 2009; Luangaramsri, 2005). The Department of National Parks, Wildlife and Plant Conservation (DNP) has been hived off from the RFD but they have the same policies and the same regard for highlanders as their parent department.²²

The RFD has been instrumental in the configuration of Omkoi within the state as a C-Zone forest reserve.²³ Their prism through which the reserve is viewed prevents much of the population from state protection in the form of citizenship. While in most cases states seek legibility of populations, in Omkoi's case, the RFD purposely keeps populations illegible. And while Karen have traditionally found themselves regarded by the state as protectors, especially vis-a-vis Hmong, in contemporary Omkoi they are labeled destroyers.

A topography of 'criminality'

In 2009, the ONCB realized that much of the opium seized by authorities was originating in Omkoi. This occurred after roughly a decade where no cultivation surveys were undertaken in the district, theoretically because cultivation was thought to have ended.²⁴ Whether cultivation had ended at that time only to re-start later is, in hindsight, questionable: ONCB data reveal significant cultivation from at least 1995 to 2000, including a 485% increase in hectares under cultivation between 1997 and 1998. This increase in cultivation demonstrates Omkoi's connection to international markets; in the same year in Afghanistan, Taliban leader Mullah Omar issued a fatwa

22. RFD agents continually encroach upon rights recognized by Thai authorities, such as gathering fallen wood to use in cooking fires. Whilst ad hoc actions to defend such rights occur regularly, according to interviewees, a broader movement to guarantee hill tribe rights to engage in traditional practices has not yet emerged. In the mid-1990s, the Northern Farmer's Alliance, comprised of both highlanders and Thais, had promise, and the alliance organized a march from Nong Tao to Bangkok to protest the expulsion of Karen from Gampong Kit, assert their rights over the forest and decry RFD abuses; in Bangkok, they were able to meet the RFD minister 'for five minutes'. According to interviewees in Nong Tao, this was the pinnacle of Karen participation in civil society, and was followed by a fall in alliance members. Protests, interviewees note, are not easy to sustain over time, especially when 'people have families and need to work' (interview with Jowalu 'Oshi' Chindanai, Nong Tao, 23 June 2016). The last Karen community rights activist of note, Porlajee 'Billy' Rakchongcharoen, was illegally detained by RFD officers in Kaeng Krachan National Park, Phetchaburi, on 17 April 2014, on the orders of then-park superintendent Chaiwat Limlikitaksorn, who had ordered a Karen village to be burned in 2011. Billy was never seen again. In May 2015, Chaiwat was appointed by the DNP to head the Tiger Corps Operation Unit, a forest and wildlife protection unit. He remains the only suspect in Billy's disappearance. The RFD continues to blame highlanders for lowland disasters, including the 2011 floods and a 2015 epidemic of lowland haze.
23. Various forest management initiatives also occur in C-Zone designated areas, including the establishment of protected areas such as watershed areas, national parks, wildlife sanctuaries (Omkoi contains Thailand's last populations of wild elephant and mountain goat), non-hunting areas, forest parks, biosphere reserves, botanical gardens and arboreta.
24. The sudden end of surveillance in Omkoi in 2000/2001 makes little sense when one considers that 185.92 ha of opium poppy was identified there in the 1999/2000 season.

declaring that opium poppy cultivation and heroin manufacture were un-Islamic (Rashid, 2000). The price of heroin soon doubled in New York City, and nearly two decades ago unknown persons in Omkoi responded to opportunity.

In order to conquer a place, one must first map its people (Anderson, 2006; Scott 1998, 2009; Thongchai, 1994). This is doubly true when a stateless area's resources are utilized by a stateless people in a manner different from what the state intends; contestations over resources are implicit challenges to legitimacy.²⁵ In Omkoi this entails the continuing process of the conversion of entangled highland economies and cultures to serve lowland needs. Thailand's priority is security, and so it seeks the contours of a topography of state evasion manifested as crime. The Thai state does not yet know the identities of stakeholders in Omkoi's opium economy. The ONCB has identified a network constituted of financial sponsors (some of them non-resident Thai businesspersons operating in partnership with Karen leaders) and local government officials, both Thai and Karen. The former encourages cultivation and purchases the crop, while the latter is either directly involved in the trade or accepts bribes to let it continue. Many sponsors are anecdotally local politicians who finance electoral campaigns with opium earnings.²⁶ Of 305 local leaders and civil servants in Omkoi, the ONCB has initially identified 50 involved in the trade; this number will likely rise. The trade's Karen notables are often traditional leaders trusted by cultivators; they adjudicate disputes, and are repositories of tradition and knowledge.²⁷ They own assets, which cannot be explained by licit income streams, including vehicles, which people can use for rides into town, and this is why they can be mapped. The trade's godfathers have no concept of money laundering: they purchase assets and open bank accounts in their own names.

Anecdotally, in the state vacuum found in Omkoi, much crime exists besides opium poppy cultivation: stolen-to-order motorcycles and cars flow towards Myanmar, and trafficked people emerge from there, destined for Thai farms, fishing boats and brothels. Ivory trading and illegal logging also occur. In this, Omkoi's isolation is convenient, even purposeful: according to one ONCB director, the government 'intentionally makes Omkoi a forgotten place'. And although interviewed government officials claim that Omkoi is a place of exile for incompetent civil servants, it is more plausible that corrupt civil servants seek postings there, and likely pay a commission to the relevant human resource office to secure a placement in such a profitable district.

A network governance approach

In 2012, the Royal Thai Government created the multi-agency Centre for the Resolution of Security Problems in Omkoi (CRSPO), with a mandate to suppress opium cultivation, human trafficking and illegal logging.²⁸ As the CRSPO has more clearly discerned the complexity of the area, it has expanded beyond its initial security focus, moving beyond eradication and into

25. The inverse can also be found. Indonesia's annexation of Dutch New Guinea (later renamed Irian Jaya, followed by Papua) was initially contested by an insurgency that fragmented across decades. Vast tracts of the territory are not contested and in those areas the state concentrates on resource extraction; when people pose no threat, they are provided with no services, and in many areas they aren't even counted (Anderson, 2015).

26. Interviews with ONCB, Chiang Mai, December 2015.

27. Interviews with ONCB, Chiang Mai, December 2015.

28. Interview with 7th Infantry Colonel and CRSPO Secretary, Chiang Mai, 21 June 2016. While Mae Sot is the primary entry point into Thailand for smuggled persons and illicit/untaxed/illegal goods including

alternative development and harm reduction. The ministries and departments represented in the CRSPO increased to 22 in December 2015, and now include education and health. ONCB plays an overall coordination and eradication targeting role, while the Highland Research and Development Institute (HRDI) introduces replacement crops and provides extension services in eradication areas. The CRSPO also includes the RFD, the presence of which lays bare core paradoxes in the approaches of different state actors. The CRSPO has no hill tribe representation, civil society or otherwise.

Alternative livelihoods

The HDRI began work in Omkoi in 2009. Their contemporary alternative livelihoods model provides Omkoi cultivators with a geographically fixed short-term alternative livelihood, while preparing them for a longer-term one,²⁹ generally an estate crop with a three to five year cultivation period before first harvest. But this 'Royal Project Extension' is less successful than its predecessors elsewhere in the northwest. Firstly, while the project is implemented by the HRDI, it is not officially part of the Royal Project, and therefore does not carry royal authority. The Royal Project, by law, supersedes other laws, most importantly RFD regulations (see below), whereas the extension does not. Secondly, the Royal Project does not serve as a guaranteed, fixed-price purchaser of new substitute crops in Omkoi. Short-term crops such as cabbage, decorative flowers and lettuce are generally not travel-worthy. Good roads were an important success factor in historical alternative development (Renard, 2001), ensuring produce arrived in markets in a sellable condition, and keeping costs down; but good roads in Omkoi are scarce. The state-resistant areas where substitute crops are most needed are those same areas where ruined (or no) roads would most result in crops being spoiled en route to market.

Omkoi's licit crop cultivators are open to exploitation: farmers lack vehicles and are often taken advantage of by intermediaries with means of transport, who fix prices and reap the benefits at lowland markets.³⁰ Less-exploitative intermediaries would still need to pay low costs to the farmer in order to compensate for the percentage of the crops lost in transit. Other Omkoi farmers are caught in an abusive contract-farming model, with fixed prices far below the costs accrued through cultivation and maintenance. In remote areas, crop substitution is diversified subsistence. Even without exploitation, Omkoi's remoteness means that the costs of business will be high. Alternative development remains constrained by a lack of land tenure, which may be antithetical to watershed preservation: homes and plots in the C-Zone will not be legalized. And so cultivators have little reason to switch to legal crops such as Arabica that they will still cultivate illegally for less income over a longer time frame. A further impediment to land tenure is the inability of many Karen to prove Thai citizenship. These factors serve to make short-term, high-yield, high-value, easily transportable and imperishable opium the most logical choice for those poor farmers rendered illegible by the state, especially given the lack of law enforcement presence.

gemstones, logs and drugs (*BBC News*, 2007), due to its less rugged geography, state pressures on the illicit traffic crossing the Salween River result in places like Omkoi acting as secondary conduits.

29. This can theoretically include non-agricultural alternates such as vocational and technical trainings.

30. An interviewee noted that cabbages and tomatoes that her village cultivated were purchased by Thai intermediaries for as low as 1 baht per kilo; the introduction of Arabica caused a wholesale abandonment of other alternative crops, even though Arabica is also a buyer's market, with prices fixed of 20–25 baht per kilo.

The state's alternative development approaches are constrained by intra-state divisions, which the state's network governance approach has yet to streamline (Patamawadee, 2012, 2015). The 'state' is not monolithic, and Omkoi's paradoxical designations amongst state actors result in varying degrees of legibility based on the priority of a given department. This leads to policies that serve to cancel one another out, with competing interests most apparent in forestry policy. The RFD only grudgingly and occasionally acknowledges a human population, and typically ignores the CRSPO, despite its membership. The RFD's mandate, articulated in the 1964 National Forest Conservation Act, contradicts ONCB and HRDI cultivation reduction strategies, namely crop substitution, infrastructure, services and the 'legalization' of a long-term resident watershed population in an area that the RFD is tasked with keeping free of human habitation. The RFD has blocked HRDI attempts to build small infrastructure in support of livelihoods, and they have made the construction of roads in reserves difficult, if not impossible: the application process takes up to eight years.³¹ Only recently, the 3rd Army forced the refurbishment of the 107 km Omkoi ring road, through the intercession of members of the military currently in power in Thailand and allies on the Privy Council, which compelled the RFD Bangkok to approve the request. The RFD's prohibition of most road-building is not unfounded, however, as road building midwives illegal logging.

The Department of Local Administration, for its part, seeks to make Omkoi's population legible, and grant secure land titles. Despite the tenuous legality of these settlements, it is unlikely that the Thai authorities will relocate Karen in the national forest to other areas. According to relocation guidelines, they must volunteer, and be relocated to a similar ecological zone at a similar elevation. Authorities have undertaken land exchanges where, in exchange for *not* swiddening a 50 ha upland area, hill tribe members are provided with 5 ha of lowland Padi land to cultivate. This approach has serious limitations: upland Karen areas are distinguished by an abundance of land and a scarcity of people, whilst lowlands are the inverse. There simply isn't enough lowland Padi for upland cultivators. For those promoting such exchanges, this is not simply a matter of offering alternative livelihood; it is a matter of culture, and of incentivizing Omkoi Karen to be, in a sense, more Thai.

Despite its blocking approach, the RFD has not actively sought to evict Omkoi's Karen, and it allows the cultivation of crops that do not involve land clearance, namely coffee and avocados. The RFD also haphazardly provides limited land use permits for Karen farmers. This is a foundation upon which to build, but whether or not this might lead to a modification of RFD policy, and a middle ground arrived at through Participatory Land Use Planning, which 'seeks to achieve a successful marriage of diverse land management perspectives in transparent and locally inclusive ways' (Forsyth and Walker, 2008: 245), remains to be seen.

Eradication

Despite five years of eradication, opium cultivation continues, with little discernable impact on price, suggesting that CRSPO activities are not yet impacting supply. Eradication occurs in a non-systematic manner, partially due to the state's inadequate (but improving) surveillance capabilities in its peripheries. For example, the ONCB only quantifies plots it identifies and destroys, not the total number of plots under cultivation. It also only reports on the number of plots destroyed *once*, whereas the evasion strategies Karen cultivators have developed result in staggered crops which

31. Interview with ONCB and 3rd Army representatives, Omkoi, February 2016.

sprout on those same plots destroyed by the army, weeks after they depart. Each planting cycle is roughly three months, but the annual opium-planting season is eight months, with several overlapping planting cycles occurring. Other evasion strategies create even more difficulties. For example, Omkoi's main opium poppy cultivation areas are at least two to three hours by road (20 to 30 km) from Omkoi's district centre, followed by a hike. No roads lead directly to poppy fields, which lie far from settlements, and so no information connects cultivator to crop unless they are apprehended on site. Plots are purposefully kept small, averaging 0.25 Ha. Cultivation occurs on steep slopes, difficult to detect from satellite imagery. Furthermore, there remain areas that the state cannot see, even with satellites. The friction such rugged terrain generates to interfere with those who would attempt to administrate it remains as important now as it was in colonial times.³²

Conclusion: Development as self-defense

Thomas Hobbes' *Leviathan* (1651) serves as the foundational text of contemporary Realist state philosophies, and its bromides have been taken to heart by generations of International Relations theorists: people voluntarily surrender themselves to the munificent state in order to benefit from its protections and escape from the unceasing war of 'all against all'. This same mythology is utilized by descendants of the lowland Padi empires that European states colonized and remade in their image.³³ But the truth of the matter is that states, organized by violent entrepreneurs, came to dominate not because they brought peace to a State of Nature. Tilly (1985) demonstrates that states succeeded because they were logistically more effective than competing entities when it came to waging war, holding territory, mobilizing labour/conscription and levying tax;³⁴ they held 'a decisive advantage in the power to kill' (Landes, 1998: 88). States partnered with early modern capitalists in the extraction of resources from lands and peoples, and in order to access lines of credit (Tilly, 1985). Legitimacy arrived later: firstly in Europe, and later in the colonies, these exploitative entities became 'legitimate' by providing protection not just from themselves, but from others. States expanded over time to provide education, limited social protection mechanisms, a (usually) impartial police and judiciary protecting citizens from one another and from the

32. However, cultivation may decrease as cultivators gain an understanding of the technology being deployed against them. In Baan Mae Long Luang village (an area so afflicted by opium use that 'even the monks needed treatment', according to the ONCB) during a CRSPO meeting in February 2016, each village head denied opium was cultivated in their area; the CRSPO representatives then demonstrated satellite technology, showing on a laptop computer the opium poppy plots in several areas surrounding the villages of the attendees. It was the first time they had seen such a demonstration; some appeared shaken.

33. Tilly expanded Weber's minimalist definition, defining states as 'coercion-wielding organizations that are distinct from households and kinship groups and exercise clear priority in some respects over all other organizations within substantial territories' (Tilly, 1985). Tilly's initial research (1985, 1990) focused on Europe after the decline of the Roman Empire, when state organization was mostly informal and the work of a profusion of local lords who controlled relatively small areas; consolidation and growth served as an evolutionary process which created monoliths over centuries.

34. These claims are backed by select historical precedent: the political thought of Hobbes was entirely shaped by the 30 Year's War, when the war of 'all against all' killed one-third of the population of the German-speaking lands of Central Europe. The Treaty of Westphalia, which ended that war in 1648, was the beginning of the primacy of the state system.

state and so on.³⁵ As states evolved from indirect to direct rule, they homogenized populations through the construction of nationalisms, comprised of 'national' languages, religions and creation myths (Anderson, 2006; Scott, 1998, 2009; Tilly, 1990: 303–304).

Omkoï is a relic of an earlier time. Its Karen inhabitants once avoided expanding lowland empires by taking advantage of the friction of topography. In a world devoid of cash, where land was rich and the people few, the state was an imposition. But the lowland coercive authority that these highland inhabitants avoided has changed. The vitality of the *Pa*, or upland forest, has also changed, due to environmental and demographic pressures from the migratory flux of the latter half of the 20th century in Zomia; swiddening became less tenable, and hunting and gathering in lean times could no longer avert famine. Today's Karen children only see in zoos the barking deer their parents once ate.

The Karen have also changed. Ethnic identities are constructed, and the Karen identity has always been in flux; globalization increases this process. Karen are drawn to the state, and absorbed into its cash economy, and they need the tools that will help them better navigate it. As traditional lifestyles change, painful decisions must be made. Education, citizenship and market skills are tools that will not necessarily prevent Omkoï's Karen from becoming more Thai, but may allow them to play more of a part in decision-making processes, rather than simply have decisions made on their behalf. Development, in this case, is self-defense. Karen life will not continue in a vast outdoor museum, and young people generally don't wish to farm. As the state expands into rural Omkoï, some Karen will stay and work in agriculture or tourism, others will leave for education or work opportunities: part of an rural-urban drift found the world over. Such decisions involve not only a departure from topography, but also from culture. Those remaining in the villages might soon only be the elderly and the stateless. The very remoteness that once protected Karen now impels them to leave.

Opium, once a store of wealth and cultural practice, is now a symptom of poverty and distance. Eradication worked previously not only because of coercion, but also because the imposition of law occurred consecutive with increased legibility of and benefits to hill tribes, including: the provision of citizenship and the rights and responsibilities that embodies; the end of inaccessibility through the establishment of roads; increased access to schools and health care; access to markets and to credit, and all manner of other services and obligations that, together, constitute an ever-evolving social contract. This is also how opium cultivation will end in Omkoï. But first, the population must be made as legible as the forest.

Acknowledgements

The author extends his greatest thanks to Professor Patamawadee 'Jan' Jongruck at Chiang Mai University's School of Political Science and Public Administration, for her collaboration, guidance and friendship. The author also thanks Tian Yeow Tan and Samuel Francis Woodcock, who participated in earlier research at the National University of Singapore's Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, conducting research with the author in Omkoï and further afield. Micah Fisher at the University of Hawaii also provided valuable commentary. The author wishes to thank the Office of the Narcotics Control Board (ONCB) Region 5, especially Jerrapan Mugura, former ONCB Director of Strategy and Administration, and Karn Thaiyapirom. Thanks are also due to: ONCB Region 5 representatives Director Watin Damronglaohapan, Director Pipop Chamnivi-kaipong, Thippamet Sangawanna, Kraivudh Maneeratana and Varisara Yasamuth; 3rd Army representatives

35. Contemporary Thailand varies from a key attribute of the contemporary northern European state, namely a military that solely serves as the implementer of civilian-driven policy related to external defense.

including Colonel Suraput Numlong, 7th Infantry Division; Professor Ora-orn Poocharoen, Dean of the Department of Political Science and Public Administration at Chiang Mai University, and Professor Panom; Raks Thai Foundation Program Coordinator Sarinthip Promrit; Pattana, Royal Project extension director; Khun Tuen Noi village inhabitants including village leader Pamoti; Bi Po village Tambon Administrative Officer Som Chai; Musa Bat Tam Village inhabitants including the treatment camp interviewees; Mimi Saeju Win of the Chiang Mai Lisu Cultural Heritage Center; Nong Tao Village Leader Phaw Luang Jorni Odochoao, and Jowalu Oshi Chindanai. The author also thanks the faculty and staff at the National University of Singapore's Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy. Any errors of fact or interpretation are the fault of the author.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

References

- Anderson B (2006) *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London: Verso.
- Anderson B (2015) *Papua's Insecurity: State Failure in the Indonesian Periphery*. East-West Center Policy Studies 73. Honolulu, HI: EWC.
- Anderson B, Tian Yeow Tan, Woodcock S, et al. (2016) *Thailand's Last Opium War: Governance and Illegality in a Highland Periphery*. National University of Singapore Governance Study Project. Singapore: National University of Singapore.
- Asia Indigenous People's Pact (2012) Drivers of deforestation? Facts to be considered regarding the impact of shifting cultivation in Asia. Available at: http://ccmin.aippnet.org/attachments/article/956/Driver_%20of_Deforestation.pdf (accessed 29 June 2016).
- BBC News (2007) Illicit trade on the Thai-Burma border. 8 March. Available at: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/2/hi/asia-pacific/6430515.stm> (accessed 15 November 2016).
- Bhumibol (1974) *Speech of June 27, 1973, in Royal Addresses and Speeches, December 1972 - November 1973*. Bangkok: Royal Secretariat, p. 199. (translation by Patamawadee Jongruck).
- Bruun iB, de Neergaard A, Lawrence D, et al. (2009) Environmental consequences of the demise in swidden cultivation in Southeast Asia: Carbon storage and soil quality. *Human Ecology* 37(3): 375–388.
- Cheesman N (2002) Seeing “Karen” in the union of Myanmar. *Asian Ethnicity* 3(2): 199–220.
- Delang CO (ed.) (2003) *Living at the Edge of Thai Society: The Karen in the Highlands of Northern Thailand*. London: Routledge.
- Durrenberger EP (1983) The economy of sufficiency. In: McKinnon J and Bhruksasri Wanat (eds) *Highlanders of Thailand*. Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, pp. 87–98.
- Erni C (2009) Shifting the blame? Southeast Asia's indigenous peoples and shifting cultivation in the age of climate change. Paper presented at *Adivasi/ST Communities in India: Development and Change*, Delhi, India, 27–29 August 2009.
- Forsyth T and Walker A (2008) *Forest Guardians, Forest Destroyers: The Politics of Environmental Knowledge in Northern Thailand*. Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press.
- Hanks JR and Hanks L (2001) *Tribes of the North Thailand Frontier. Monograph 51*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Southeast Asia Studies.
- Hinton P (1983) Why the Karen do not grow opium: Competition and contradiction in the highlands of North Thailand. *Ethnology* 22(1): 1–16.

- Irrawaddy (2016) KNU signs forestry memorandum with WWF. 9 November. Available at: <http://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/knu-signs-forestry-memorandum-with-wwf.html> (accessed 4 January 2017).
- Jantakad Prasong and Carson S (1998) *Community based natural resource management from villages to an inter-village network: A case study in Pang Ma Pha district, Mae Hong Son Province, northern Thailand*. Bangkok: Thai-German Highland Development Programme (TG-HDP)/ Deutsche Gesellschaft fuer Technische Zusammenarbeit.
- Landes DS (1998) *The Wealth and Poverty of Nations*. New York: Norton.
- Leach E (1954) *Political Systems of Highland Burma: A Study of Kachin Social Structure*. London: Anthlone Press.
- Lintner B (1999) *Burma in Revolt: Opium and Insurgency since 1948*. Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books.
- Lintner B (2000) *An Overview of the Golden Triangle Opium Trade*. Chiang Mai: Asia-Pacific Media Services.
- Luangaramsri P (2005) Swidden agriculture in Thailand: Myths, realities and challenges. *Indigenous Affairs* 2(5). Copenhagen: IWGIA.
- McCoy AW (1973) *The Politics of Heroin in Southeast Asia*. New York: Harper and Row.
- MacGregor J (2005) A witness's plea to end Myanmar abuse. *New York Times*, 19 May. Available at: <http://www.nytimes.com/2005/05/19/world/asia/a-witness-plea-to-end-myanmar-abuse.html> (accessed 28 December 2017).
- Ongrasert Preecha (2011) *Forest management in Thailand*. Bangkok: International Forestry Cooperation Office, Royal Forest Department.
- Patamawadee J (2012) *Network governance through resource dependence theory: A case study of illicit drug policy in Thailand*. PhD dissertation, University of Manchester, UK.
- Patamawadee J (2015) From bureaucracy to (mandated) network: A changing approach to opium eradication in northern Thailand. In: 15th International Research Society for Public Management Conference, University of Birmingham, UK, 30 March–1 April 2015.
- Puginier O (2003) The Karen in transition from shifting cultivation to permanent farming: Testing tools for participatory land use planning at local level. In: Delang CO (ed.) *Living at the Edge of Thai Society: The Karen in the Highlands of Northern Thailand*. London: Routledge, pp. 183–210.
- Qin A (2015) In remote Thai villages, legacy of China's lost army endures. *New York Times*, 14 January. Available at: <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/01/15/world/asia/in-remote-thailand-the-lost-soldiers-of-the-kuomintang.html> (accessed 15 September 2017).
- Race J (1974) The war in northern Thailand. *Modern Asian Studies* 8(1): 85–112.
- Rashid A (2000) *Taliban: Militant Islam, Oil and Fundamentalism in Central Asia*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Renard RD (2001) *Opium Reduction in Thailand, 1970–2000*. Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books.
- Scott JC (1998) *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Scott JC (2009) *The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia*. New York: Yale University Press.
- Smith M (1991) *Burma: Insurgency and the Politics of Ethnicity*. London: Zed Press.
- Thongchai W (1994) *Siam Mapped: A History of the Geo-Body of a Nation*. Honolulu, HI: University of Hawaii Press.
- Tilly C (1985) War making and state making as organized crime. In: Evans P, Rueschemeyer D and Skocpol T (eds) *Bringing the State Back in*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 168–191.
- Tilly C (1990) *Coercion, Capital, and European States, AD 990–1990*. Cambridge: Basil Blackwell.
- United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) (2010) *Highland Household Survey*. Available at: <http://www.unescobkk.org/culture/diversity/livelihood/surveys/impacts-of-legal-status-on-access-to-education/> (assessed 7 April 2016).
- Van Schendel W (2002) Geographies of knowing, geographies of ignorance: jumping scale in Southeast Asia. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 20(6): 647–668.