Coping with rural transition in northern Thailand: an analysis of rural economic diversification and social movements' response.

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A Pro Gradu Thesis of
Sociology and Master's Programme
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ABSTRACT

The aim of this thesis is to explore how rural social movements in northern Thailand have responded to land tenure systems changes within the actual socio-economic structures of rural communities. Special attention is given to the Northern Farmers Alliance (NFA) movement. This survey is important since industrialisation, modernisation and international trade have speeded up processes of rural transition in developing countries. Nevertheless, social transitions have not been free of social conflicts, economic inequalities and negative environmental impacts.

Data for the analysis is derived from the findings and conclusions of previous research carried out in the region, systematic observation of selected villages and events accompanied by fieldnotes, individual and group interviews with farmers, academics and NGO staff, and analysis of selected documents.

The findings suggest that economic growth has reshaped rural communities. The transformations on land tenure systems and land ownership reflected directly in the new economic structure of rural communities and on its social and political organisation. Labour migration patterns, the insertion of a rural non-farm economy and new farming activities, and the permanence of a smallholding mode of production (all happening simultaneously) have contributed to a process of class diversification and multiplicity of livelihoods within the communities. Rural social movements have also evolved and reinvented themselves. On one hand, factors as religion, economic security, higher levels of education, criminalisation of farmers and social demoralisation contribute to the non-participation of farmers in organized movements. On the other hand, changes in religious beliefs, strong and steady contact with 'external' groups, well-built group cohesion and economic instability have fostered the participation of rural people into forms of protest such as land occupation and demonstrations.

Finally, a conclusive discussion re-examines the concept of peasantry, challenges the applicability of the moral economy approach in modern rural Thailand and suggests that the current localism discourse used by academics and some NGOs is not always supported by rural dwellers.

Keywords: rural transition, Thailand, rural economic diversification, rural social movements, peasants.

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ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ALRO __ Agricultural Land Reform Office (1975)

BAAC __ Bank for Agriculture and Agricultural Cooperatives

CPT __ Communist Party of Thailand (1942- 1981)

DOL __ Department of Lands (1901)

LTP __ Land Titling Program (1984)

NDF__ Northern Development Foundation

NFA __ Northern Farmers Alliance (1998)

NFN__ Northern Farmers Network (1994)

NGO__ Non-Governmental Organisations

NPF __ Northern Peasant Federation

PFT __ Peasant Federation of Thailand (1974)

RFD __ Royal Forest Department

RNFE __ Rural Non-Farm Economy

RTG __ Royal Thai Government

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1. INTRODUCTION

Agrarian transition is a complete process in most western-capitalist countries. In the developing world, however, the transition from an agrarian society to an industrial-capitalist society is an incomplete process. Furthermore, both types of society coexist simultaneously, and processes of change are taking place constantly.

This transition is highly related and dependent on land tenure systems, rural economy and socio-economic, political and cultural structures of rural/ farming communities. During the process of change social actors might take different stances on the matters that influence their lives leading to social conflicts and different practices of civil society organisations.

In Thailand, land tenure systems, land use patterns, the management of natural resources, and the government policies on the economy suffered deep transformations after the World War Two. This was mainly due to the presence, financial and technical support of the United States of America and the further immersion of the Thai economy into international trade and global economic systems. These changes have caused impacts on rural communities that in turn, to some extent consequently, led to different responses of organised rural social movements and other civil society organisations.

The aim of this research is to explore how rural social movements in northern Thailand have responded to land tenure systems changes within the actual socio-economic structures of rural communities. I try to achieve this purpose by answering a multi-faceted research question. That is to say, although there is a central question directing the study to its goal, other dimensions of the research question are presented so that a linear process of enquiry can be set up.

The research question is divided in three complementary sub-questions;

a) What are the changes on the land question in Thailand after the World War Two?
b) What are the socio-economic, political and cultural implications of these changes for rural/ farming communities?

c) How rural social movements have responded to these changes? What factors influence farmers' decision to engage in land occupations and other forms of protest?

In this study I analyse data referring to the Northern Farmers Alliance (NFA) that is a farmers' organisation present in Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai, Lampang and Lamphun provinces of Thailand. Consequently, some of the findings are limited to the areas studied and, as a general statement, to the north region of Thailand.

The land question has been an important theme among social scientists, especially those interested in Latin American, Asian and African societies. The realities in the continents, and in each single country, are different and demand different approaches. Coming from Brazil, I am deeply interested in social processes that are somehow related to land such as the government land reform, land occupations by organised groups, land conflicts, criminalisation of farmers, land tenure systems and rural-urban-rural migration.

My interest in the land question and in rural social movements in Thailand came firstly from my initial perception that much of the literature on the land question, agrarian change and peasant s' movements refer mainly to case studies and the realities in countries in Latin America (Brazil, Mexico, Bolivia) and Africa (Zimbabwe, South Africa and Kenya). When applying for my internship I was offered the opportunity to carry out research on the same issues in Thailand, which I enthusiastically accepted.

Secondly, literature on land and development tends to either concentrate in less developed countries such as India, China and some countries in Africa and Latin America or in western or/ and capitalist societies –Japan, South Korea, France and so forth. Development studies at times neglect countries in transitory stages from developing to developed status. But, it is in these countries that the biggest challenges to concepts like democracy, economic growth, human development and human rights take place. The analysis of transitory countries –Thailand is one of them –may help us to understand undesired consequences and social constraints caused by development initiatives.

Thirdly, despite all the economic growth that has taken place in Thailand, wealth inequality is growing constantly and rural and urban levels of development are still way

apart. There has been a resurgence of social movements since the political event of the Black May of 1992. Nevertheless, rural social movements are still not strong enough to cause significant impact on policy-making process.

This study is divided in eight chapters beginning with this short introduction. Chapter two examines the literature on peasants' and rural communities and social movements' studies. It also introduces the Scot-Popkin debate and its more or less renewed version translated into the 'globalisers versus communitarian's debate' in modern Thailand. Chapter three elaborates a political and economic background of Thailand. Chapter four looks at the methodology applied in this study. Chapter five, six and seven develop the analysis and answer the research questions. Chapter five looks at the transformations in the land question in Thailand after the WWII. It discusses some aspects of land tenure systems and farmers problems and summarises important government policies on land. Chapter six explores the socio-economic and cultural changes that have taken place in rural communities in the country. Chapter seven examines how social movements have responded to the process of rural transition, looking closer at NFA. In addition it summarises important factors that influence forms of protest in rural northern Thailand. Chapter eight presents final conclusions, a brief discussion over the theory and proposes some further research questions.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter aims to present the relevant theory, which, this study lies on. First it discusses peasants' societies. Then it moves to analyse three theories, represented by the work of James Scott, Samuel Popkin and Jeffery Paige that attempted to explain peasantry behaviour. Next section reviews selected social movements theories, and gives special attention to civil society in Thailand. Finally it describes the current globalisers versus communitarian's debate in Thailand.

2.1 Defining peasants and peasant societies

Karl Marx, (Marx, 1976: 230-1) describes the French peasants as a large mass that shared an economic mode of production (based on the small-holding, family labour and rudimentary technologies) but who did not share an identity of interests neither a political organization. This self-sufficient mode of production contributed to a non-existent division of labour, to a nil level of specialisation and to the lack of "wealth of social relationships" (aggravated by the poor means of communication and high levels of poverty among the peasants in France at that time). Thus, Marx affirms that peasants are a class, in so far as we compare them with other classes, but they are not a class by themselves since they lack a sense of "class identity", shared interests and culture.

These characteristics, Marx additionally states, make the peasants incapable of organizing themselves and imposing their interests. They are not capable of representing themselves, but someone else represents the peasantry. In this way, when politically represented, the peasantry undergoes a process of subordination and disempowerment carried out by their representatives.

This Marxist conceptual tradition of class analysis sees the peasants as exploited class positioned at the lower layer of the social power structure. Another tradition looks on how the specific family farm economic structure determines the peasant social structure. The third tradition understands peasants as a cultural leftover of former national tradition. And this permanence of the "old" peasant culture is based on the "inertia typical of peasant

societies". Finally, the fourth tradition, based on Durkheim's ideas, divides society into traditional (more coherent, united, isolated) and modern or organic (based on the division of labour and interaction of parts). Thus, peasant societies are traditional (Shanin, 1976: 13-14).

How can one define peasant societies? A holistic definition of traditional peasant societies should include the four traditions presented above. First, the peasant family is the central production unit, the moral and social base where all the relationships within the societies are based. It is the family solidarity and morality that shapes the everyday actions of the individual (William & Znaniecki, 1976). Family members have different roles and responsibilities but they all converge to the production of goods aimed to self-consumption. Peasants rely mainly –at times exclusively –on his land and on his family labour. He has not any other source of security or investment (Saul & Woods, 1976). Farming enterprise is integrated to family life. There is no separation between 'home' and 'work'. Second, production is determined by consumption. There is a low level of market integration and a high level of market independence. The degree of specialization and innovation, however, is rather low (Shanin, 1976a). Third, rural villages where peasant societies are found are culturally different from other social and geographical settings. Paul Stirling (1976: 41) affirms that village solidarity is harmonized by 'internal intensity'. Within a village social relations are greatly intense. Contacts are frequent, they involve high levels of emotion, are among people who know each other since they were born, involve clear and stable rights and duties and, often, are restrict to villagers. It is these meaningful intense social contacts that sustain village solidarity. Fourth and last, due to the very mode of production based on the smallholding and family labour the peasantry, as a social class, is usually fragmented. Its geographical, market and social isolation from other groups and from other peasant families create weak social identities and political linkages (Marx, 1976).

Although peasant societies have constituted half (at times more than that) of the world population, it had not become a major area of interest in sociology till the turning of the 19th century. Rural sociology and rural studies emerged in USA and Europe focusing on the sociology of farming. The rough division of the world into pre-industrial and industrial, into capitalist and socialist did not let much space for those concerned with the peasantry to develop significant theories. Anthropology, however, turned its attention to the

peasantry after its students could no longer found "primitive and isolated communities" across the globe (Shanin, 1976: 12). Then scholars moved to study the peasant, the peasant society, peasant economy, and peasant cultural aspects in distinct countries such as Russia, Turkey, China, India, Mexico, Colombia and many others.

The liberation wars in Africa, Asia and Latin America all had, to some extent, the participation of the peasantry. Furthermore, peasants, united with a crescent proletariat born during the expansion of industrialization process in the fifties and sixties, were key figures in communist revolutions such as in Cuba, Bolivia and Vietnam, reminding us of the events in Russia and China in the beginning of the 20th century. According to Scott (1977: 240) there exists a tendency to consider the peasantry a "class of low classness" most due to Karl Marx description of the peasantry in the Eighteenth Brumaire. But, yet "in the Third World, it is the peasantry rather than the proletariat which has formed the main social basis of revolutionary movements".

Today, however, at the beginning of the 21st century, there is a lack of academic interest in peasant studies. First it is argued that the world has gone through a global process of industrialization and modernization that peasants no longer exist. Second, if they do exist, the pace of transformation is too fast and they will not last that long anymore. Finally, religious conflicts, human rights, cultural and environmental issues have lured social sciences students' attention. Nevertheless, grassroots organisations, NGOs and peasants' organisations have tried to produce and disseminate either scientific research or/ and advocacy research on the transformations and continuity of the peasantry. For instance the Brazilian Landless Workers' Movement (MST), the international La Via Campesina and smaller groups across Southeast Asia and in Africa have endeavoured to keep the interest and attention on peasants' issues alive.

2.2 The Scott-Popkin debate (moral economy vs. political economy)

2.2.1 The Moral Economy

The debate starts with the publication of James C. Scott's "The Moral Economy of the Peasant" published in 1976. The work of Scott - including the classical "Weapons of the

Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance" –and others such as Eric Wolf's "Peasant Wars of the Twentieth Century" released in 1968 –constitute what is known as the moral economy approach.

The most important concepts of the approach are that peasants were (before processes such as colonization and modernization) culturally distinct from other social classes, they had their own set of moral behaviour –mutual help, distributive mechanisms of wealth – and lived in closed villages. The traditional villages are supposedly egalitarian, corporate, peaceful, self-reliant and moral (Rigg, 1994: 124).

The typical village is to some extent self-reliant, based on patron-client relationships and have a morality towards the use of common pools, and mutual help in times of difficulties. Closed villages are also untouched by the threatening state institutions and the market. There is a common belief that non-market systems are more humane than those structures created by market relationships (Popkin, 1980: 414-22).

Moral economy sees the patron-client relationship as a necessary power imbalance to guarantee other village's characteristics such as security, morality and stability. In the light of a risk of poverty and unemployment it is even justified. On his study of Sedaka village in Malaysia, Scott (1985: 76-7) claims that mechanization has constricted the linkages between classes and their "bonds of interdependence and exploitation" since the dependence of richer villagers on local labour has decreased. Poor villagers are now lost and marginalized. "If they are no longer exploited, if they are now 'free', this is the freedom of the unemployed, the redundant". It is clear, thus, that it is better, within the moral economy view, to be tied up to exploitative relations and to have an occupation than to be free, unemployed and left aside.

Although the idea of a peaceful village where economic and socio-political imbalances are seen to be acceptable, it is Scott himself who makes clear that all this 'stability' is not free of conflict. In his book 'Weapons of the Weak', it is clear that the everyday forms of peasant resistance are part of this social organisation within the village. As he points it out (Scott, 1985:27) this resistance takes place on the "backstage" in the shape of gossip, foot-dragging, petty crimes and sabotage. Owing to imbalance of power, "onstage" social and ritual life is controlled by local elites.

What I am more interested here, however, is in the moral economy approach view of peasant politics or their answers to 'why peasants rebel?'. According to Scott (cited in Popkin, 1980: 414-416, and in Lieberson 1981: 3), when peasants loose their safety networks owing to the new political and economic order (the nationalisation and sale of communal land, forests and fisheries in Vietnam, for instance) they rebel in an attempt to re-establish their moral regime which was previously in place in the village. The new socio-economic order erodes peasants' standards of justice and legitimacy. Former peasants' social-constructed meaning is different from the one being imposed upon them. The security and protection the worse-off had from their patrons and the village are threatened by this new reality. In this way, food security might be threatened in the long-term. Hence, they rebel to re-establish a moral agrarian system

Scott (1977: 237) claims that even in social orders where disadvantaged groups (serfs, slaves, tenants) do not believe they can change their social status and economic conditions, there is a common-sense that this group is entitled to some rights such as protection, land and pasturage. If there is a situation where other social groups (the gentry, capitalist agriculture or a centralizing state) violate these rights, we may testify some agitation.

Wolf (1976: 270) analyses the new economic reality (in the late 1960s) of what he calls the middle peasant in a moment of increased rural-urban integration and industrialisation of the economy. The middle peasant, contrary to the poor one who ends up selling his land and migrating in search for work, stays in the village. It is his children who migrate to the city. Thus, the household unity is broken and conflict is eminent since the orientation of those who stay are no longer shared by those in contact with factory work and city's way of life. When analysing the 'revolutionary' role of the middle class, Wolf gets very close to the main argument of James Scott and the moral economy: "It is probably not so much the growth of an industrial proletariat as such which produces revolutionary activity, as the development of an industrial work force still closely geared to life in the villages. Thus, it is the very attempt of the middle and free peasant to remain traditional which makes him revolutionary" (Wolf, 1976: 270).

2.2.2 The Political Economy

The Political Economy approach was a response to the work of James Scott. Samuel L.Popkin released in 1979 "The Rational Peasant: The Political Economy of Rural Society in Vietnam". According to Paige (1983: 700), Popkin's work was influenced by Mancur Olson's 1968 "The Logic of Collective Action" and Edward Banfield's 1968 "The Moral Basis of a Backward Society".

Popkin's argument focuses on individual decision making. His analysis does not focus on the village but on the single peasant who, for him, is a rational actor, not much different from all the other economic actors in different social classes. Peasants maximize expected value and their production functions under selective incentives (Lieberson, 1981: 3-4; Popkin, 1980).

Very shortly, his main assumptions are that: peasants avoid risks, not for security reasons, but because they do not see that action as bringing personal gains; when villages are hit by hard times it is not only the poor peasant who suffer but also the better-off, consequently this situation leads to a lower capacity of the village to guarantee insurance to its poorest farmers; collective projects do not evolve because villagers are concerned with free riders, there is low-quality leadership and mutual distrust among peasants, and when farmers engage in commercial agriculture they are not responding to a desperate situation, rather than that, they are responding positively to new opportunities (Popkin, 1980).

Popkin (referred to in Lieberson, 1981: 4) (as some Thai scholars have argued recently for the old Thai village) claims that precolonial Vietnamese villages were not, necessarily, the 'good', fair and amicable village of James Scott. Patron-client relationship was one of suppression and power control. He goes on arguing that it was not the expanding market or new regulations that disrupted or destroyed a 'unified peasant ideology'. The fragmentation started from within since the smartest peasants initiated links and political and economic alliances with the new groups (colonial institutions in the Vietnamese case, or, for instance, new middle classes or new state bureaucrats, in Thailand), taking advantages of the new system.

When answering the question 'why peasants rebel?', Popkin's argument differs completely from Scott's. He actually turns Scott's argument upside down. Peasants rebel not to re-establish a prosperous past and restore the times of closed villages, rather, they engage in peasant politics, and revolts to challenge "the political and economic control exercised by elites in order to create new rural institutions which would raise their standard of living" (Lieberson, 1981: 4). Popkin further argues that political entrepreneurs, such as religious and communist groups played a key role as an engaged and committed leadership. They helped to organize the peasantry and provided incentives fostering support and avoiding problems of free riders.

Rather puzzling for our distinction of the two approaches is Scott's book 'The Weapons of The Weak'. Here, he is always reminding us that there is a disadvantaged lower class within the village resisting against the hegemony and the socio-cultural and political power of an elite. This "rebellious" behaviour is "informal and concerned largely with immediate, de facto gains" (Scott, 1985:32-3). As far as I can make sense of the main argument, Scott is, somehow, agreeing with Popkin's argument that peasants are goal-oriented rational individuals who are not completely satisfied with the functioning of a moral economy. If not, what would they engage in "everyday forms of peasant resistance" for?

Both authors are well known for their approaches and exceptional fieldwork and books. Yet, I agree with Jeffery Paige (1983) and Marcus Kurtz (2000) [1] that both arguments have their pitfalls and that they can't be applied to all peasant societies across the globe. Moreover, they seem to have different concepts of peasants, which would make theoretically impossible to compare both theories. Hence, I believe a third approach to peasant studies and principally peasant politics is necessary.

2.3 The class-struggle approach to peasants' revolution, rural politics and village life

In his study of peasant revolution in Vietnam and Guatemala, Paige (1983) rearranges the three approaches and gives them new faces: the Durkheim: Moral Economy, the Mill: Political Economy and the Marx: Class Conflict. We may focus on the latter now.

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[1] Lieberson, (1981: 7) presents a similar criticism: "if Scott at times goes too far in emphasizing the peasant's 'moral universe', Popkin makes a comparable error: his peasant 'economic actors' are too skeletal and predictable".

Analysing peasant revolutions at the Mekong Delta of colonial Cochinchina, Paige (1983) denies the assumption that independent small holders actually carried out the revolution in Vietnam. He also opposes the idea of Popkin that the revolution took place owing to selective incentives and leadership. Radicalism in the Delta took place because of class conflict between a backward landed capitalist group and a rural semi-proletariat who had nothing but his crop share as wage. Landowners would not increase the wages of the workers, and this latter group did not have land to guarantee its minimum living standards. Paige's argument also claims that this type of conflict is typical "of sharecropping and migratory labour estate systems" (706).

According to Paige (quoted in Wolf, 1977: 742) different forms of agricultural organisation bring forth distinct agricultural conflicts.

> The fundamental causal variable in this theory is the relationship of both cultivators and noncultivators to the factors of agricultural production as indicated by their principal sources of income. Thus the theory is based on a strict definition of class in terms of relations to property in land, buildings, machinery, and standing crops and financial capital in the form of corporate assets, commodity balances or agricultural credit (Paige, J., quoted in Wolf, 1977: 742).

Paige's study on Vietnam stimulates my interpretation of Thailand's rural reality. It is the constitution of new socio-economic classes in rural Thailand (a continuous process since the government's launch of the modernization project in the 1960s-70s), and the presence of the state, together with new market forces that outline peasants' movements in the country.

It is important to recognize that stratification and class differentiation is not a new phenomenon only present in capitalist societies. According to Popkin (1980: 450-51) stratification did exist in precapitalist and precolonial societies. The concentration of wealth and power originated from mechanisms of control of allocation of village resources and taxes, control and trade of local production processes and goods and a manipulation of external linkages. Referring to various studies, Rigg (1994: 125-26) explains that socio-economic differentiation may not have been always based upon income. Class stratification was often related to access to land, patron-client ties and prestige. Java villages would

consist of different strata such as political leader landowners, the smallholder, the landless, the elderly and the non-agriculturalist. In northern Thailand, already in the 19th century economy, class differentiation was based on different levels of engagement in market exchange.

Social action does not happen only within the spheres of classes. Classes[2] in peasant villages, joined by kinship, neighbourhood factions and ritual links, constitute the bases of multiple identities experienced by peasants. "Class may be applicable to some situations but not to others: it may be reinforced or crosscut by other ties: it may be far more important for the experience of some than of others" (Scot, 1985: 43). I have no intention to dismiss other spheres of influences, such as kinship and family ties, taking place in rural life. Class relationships, however, has suffered constant attacks by post-Marxists and is considered to be irrelevant to explain socio-economic and political transformation in rural settings. Yet, class does still matter.

Hewison (2001: 2-3), looking on the transformation of Thai society from a subsistence economy to a capitalist economy, affirms that capitalism is not only a system of economic production but also a system of social organisation. The shift from smallholder farmers to wage labourers has involved a process of restructuring Thai society. Yet approaches to analyse and comprehend capitalism in the country have denied the importance of class struggle analysis. The latter has been reframed within social movements' struggle involved in development, environment and gender issues. He goes on arguing that, although there is a recognizable inequality in modern Thailand "there seems little explicit recognition of that class inequality can be the source of other inequalities and that the economic domination of one class can sometimes be the basis for political rule" (3).

Economic growth in several capitalist societies has been accompanied by increasing inequality. Those who rely on notions of class analysis to assess the present inequality have had to consider notions of exploitation and have situated conflict in the centre of the examination. "Class analysts see markets, states and institutions as products of interests

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[2] From hereafter class is understood as defined by Marxism. Class refers to a group of people with more or less the same relationship to the modes of production and with a certain level of political and social identity. Further discussion is found later in this chapter.

and conflicts emanating from class relations which are themselves generated by inequalities within societies by the forces of global capitalism" (Hewison, 2001: 8-9).

Bowie (1998: 469-70), through an anthropological perspective, analyses the process of gift giving in Theravada Buddhism (regarded as merit making) in several villages in the Chiang Mai Valley in northern Thailand. She argues that charity might be seen as an important practice "in mediating hegemony and resistance in the socio-political constitution of complex societies" (469). She then goes on arguing that rural political economy in Thailand (although the myths of egalitarian village and agrarian abundance try to prove otherwise) is characterised by social differentiation, class stratification and poverty. Social disparities are easily perceived through data, originated from five different studies, on land ownership and family income. Regardless the study it seems that always, at least, around 40% to 60% of all villagers are either landless or/and tenants.

Class differentiation is also reflected in religious practices. In Thai villages, in the past, the elite had higher chances to be ordained into the monkhood. Boys were sent to serve as temple boys. The families who did not follow the practice were the ones who needed the boy working in the farms. Today, however, the scene is rather different. The sons of the rich are most likely to follow secular further education. Temple boys, novices and monks almost always come from the poorest families where there are too many people and too few employment opportunities (Bowie, 1998: 473).

I would like to conclude this section affirming that the class-based approach to rural politics and rural life is one attempt to bring back class analysis to the centre of the enquiry process of modern Thai society. Yet, it should not, and it seeks not to, exclude other approaches. Farmers and non-farmers villagers are not exclusively economic actors and other dimensions of social cohesion and structure – religion, kinship, political orientation etc –have to be taken into consideration.

2.4 The relevance of social movements' theory

Different theories have looked at distinct features of social movements and tried to better comprehend its mechanisms. Historical events such as the Industrial Revolution, the proletarianisation of workers, wars, racial conflicts, economic growth and environmental depletion have helped to shape these theories[3]. In the case of studying peasant/ farmers' social movement in a developing country or newly industrialized country context, as it is the case of NFA in Thailand, three theories are appropriate.

First the Political opportunity approach. This approach tries to analyse under what political conditions social movement and protest happen. Central to this theory is the analysis of the political situation of a country in a given time. Pioneer studies concentrated on the opportunities of the political context, but Tarrow (1998:20) reminds us that it is not only opportunities but also constraints that influence movements' activity. As it will be illustrated in the next chapter, Thai history has plenty of examples where the state, the monarchy or even international political momentum has contributed or hindered the surge and performance of social movements.

Second the collective behaviour/ collective action approach. The collective behaviour, as Blumer (1986) thinks, is the main concern of sociology. The core of sociology is to understand collective behaviour that, in his vision, derives from symbolic interaction. His core argument is that 'social unrest' is a prerequisite for collective behaviour. The later takes various forms and follows an evolutionary line ending up as a 'social movement'. Another key element of the theory is that of *'esprit de corps'* that is, roughly, the cultural elements and beliefs of the social movement.

Third the new social movements approach. To understand this approach we must revise the debate on Marxist vs. Post-Marxist approaches. A Marxist concept of class defines it as a group of people with more or less the same relationship towards the means of production: classically work, land and capital. Throughout history the number and characteristics of classes have changed.

> For Karl Marx, the key source of "history-making" conflict and the principal propellant of collective action were material interests engendered in class position. He associated contemporary protests and movements with the articulation of class interests and class outlooks by the principal

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[3] For a thorough analysis of social movement theories see Crossley (2002) and della Porta & Diani (1999).

'challenging classes', first the bourgeoisie and subsequently the proletariat. Marx saw workers' protest as structurally determined and historically central: they were the key engine of social change (Pakulski, 1995: 55).

If we accept that social change may be originated from or/and within social movements, and that "there is no doubt that class relations, that is, relations of exploitation, underlie or heavily influence the course of all social movements and countermovements" (Foss & Larkin, 1986: 3), the analysis of class relations is fundamental to understand social change.

This study assumes that even though the core of the activities of the new movements are not based in classes struggle, in the end of the day –regardless the main 'cause' –the results of the movement actions will have influences in different groups of people. Though they might not be called "social classes", those new 'social categories' will be separated in winners and losers. For instance; "they (the new social movements) are movements which strive for more justice, for more rights and freedom; and they are simultaneously movements which oppose categories of people to other categories, thus creating a conflict arena over issues in which the gains of some are necessarily coupled with the losses of others" (Eder, 1995: 22).

Marxist concepts are seen as embedded in 'economism' and class reductionism. The new social movement approach is a post-Marxist approach because it renounces class conflicts and class relations and transport social movements to the "civil society" sphere. Furthermore, the theory praises the novelty of the new movements and their innovative issues in contrast with the "old" movements (Pakulski, 1995, Pasuk, 2002: 2).

Touraine (referred to in Giddens, 1996: 654-6) explains that new social movements aim at specific goals (civil rights, ban on nuclear energy, employment etc) rather than larger social transformation (socialism, a new political system etc). Second, they are not responses to 'chock therapy' but deeply thought systems of operations to overcome their constraints. Third, they influence and are influenced by the context where they are embedded and the different actors.

The twentieth-first century social movements are diverse and somehow reflect post-industrialist identities. They concern aspects that were neglected or overlooked in the past

as gender, power relations, ethnicity, environment, racism and a constant growing bunch of issue-movements or cultural-movements. Accordingly, contemporary social movements are not concerned with struggles over the production and distribution of material goods.

So, how can we define social movements? Tarrow (1998) argues that when group of ordinary people quite regularly joined by "more influential citizens" get together to confront authoritarians groups and elites and, rely upon social networks, cultural identification and symbolism leading to a "sustained interaction with opponents" we have a social movement. Two brief comments are necessary here. First, social movement must have some kind of social capital. Second, social movements must last. Sustainability refers to the capacity of a movement to perpetuate throughout history. Another important definition is proposed by della Porta & Diani. According to them (1996: 16) "we will consider social movements –and, in particular, their political component – as (1) informal networks, based (2) on shared beliefs and solidarity, which mobilize about (3) conflictual issues, through (4) the frequent use of various forms of protest".

2.5 Social movements and NGOs in the Thai context

As Hakkarainen et al. (2003: 13-14) have stated the development of the Thai civil society took place as a response to "governmental policy and market mechanism". The central objective of the Thai state to modernize society and industrialize and diversify the Thai economy led to severe socio-economic transformations in the country. As a result, most of Thai organizations (NGOs) focus on agriculture, natural resources, environment management, health, women and human rights. She further argues that some estimate there are between 10,000 and 20,000 civil society organizations in Thailand.

Civil society in Thailand and even political rights was denied to its citizens for decades. After the 1932 revolution the absolute monarchy country fell under a military dictatorship regime that lasts (with a brief interruption from 1973 to 1976) until 1988. Yet, the democratic period was interrupted in 1991 by a military coup. Hence, two historical moments witnessed important development of Thai civil society.

Previous to the mass demonstrations and strikes in 1973, student movements, professional associations, and farmers groups were formed in an attempt to improve political freedom and fight for social justice (Hakkarainen et al., 2003: 14; Baker & Pasuk, 2005: 190). In 1974 the Peasants Federation of Thailand was formed. Simultaneously, the Communist Party of Thailand was very much active and contributed to improve the political debate in the country. This period of brisk civil society was cut short by the tragic conflicts of October 1976 in Thammasat University.

The other moment of active mobilization by civil society groups was during the Black May of 1992 dragging itself to the explosion of social movements and NGO in 1997. The financial crisis of Southeast Asia, in 1997, created many socio-economic problems. It led Thai people to organize themselves and demand changes and solutions. The social pressure and active political participation of civil society resulted in the approval of the 1997 "People's Constitution". The democratisation of Thai politics opened the way to protest and social mobilizations. In 1978 there were 42 demonstrations and protests marches, in 1990 there were 170 increasing to 988 in 1994 (Praphat cited in Pasuk, 2002: 1). One adding factor is the insertion of Thailand in the globalisation process. The market-oriented economy has put pressure into natural resources and foster social conflicts. Cultural and information globalisation has brought into Thailand's media and social movements discourse issues such as human rights, identity and environmental protection. Thus, globalisation, democratisation and the economic growth have created conditions for the rebirth of a civil society in Thailand (Pasuk, 2002: 8-9).

Thailand is considered a lower-middle income economy (World Bank, 2005) and a newly industrialised economy. It has had a steady and fast industrialisation and modernization processes in the last five decades. This has increased the GNP, reduced poverty and improved people's lives. However, these changes have not reached all the people in the country. Hence, Thai social movements reflect the division of the country into a materialist, class-based rural population and a post-materialist, middle class urban population. Pasuk (2002: 7) argues that "In non-western countries, where the material aspects are still a problem, many social movements are about bread and butter issues, particularly access to resources".

The diversity of social movements and NGOs acting in the country is impressive. For instance one finds post-materialist movements struggling for the right of a woman to abort and to "choose a woman as a lover", to improve women worker's health and safety in work places, for the maintenance of cultural identities and for housing rights in urban areas. The struggle of fisher folks to protect the coastal environment, poor rural communities fighting against the construction of dams and farmers and forest communities fighting for their land and forests are examples of materialist and class-based social movements[4].

This diversity, however, can also be interpreted differently. According to Pinkaew Laungaramsri (2002: 3) Thai civil society can be divided in two groups; a 'city-centre civil society' and a 'grassroots civil society'. A conscious middle class driven by the government represents the city-centre civil society. It pursues a consensus model through notions of good governance and participation. The grassroots civil society represents movements from below; do not always seek for change through institutional politics and are usually viewed as the conflict model.

The mushrooming of NGO and organized groups in the last decades in Thailand has raised suspicion and caution from scholars and politics across the country. Pasuk (2002: 10-11) argues that NGOs play an important role in Thai social movements. She recognises the recent debate on the role of NGOS, especially the critique that they are destroying democracy by moving people's participation away from "official democratic institutions". She furthers explains that Thai NGOs have limited and small international fund. The argument that they would be co-opted and tied to donors or state political ideas is not the case. The success of NGOs in helping social movements in Thailand rely on; a) the efforts and commitment of a number of engaged people, b) national and international networks – bringing expertise, academics and media to social movements and c) NGOs in Thailand have not middle class background but are made of people coming from lower-class families. Finally she alerts us that NGOs do not have the "ability to create movements" but they certainly help to strength them.

Professor Ji Giles (2004)' article 'NGOs: enemies or allies?' has shed much light in the debate on the politics of NGOs, social movements and the left. He assumes that the

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[4] This classification is mine. The data on the diversity of social movements, however, is from Pasuk, 2002: 1.

decision to use a peasant army and the incapacity of the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT) to reinvent itself when facing a growing urban mass led to the 'destruction of the Thai left'. After the Party collapsed in the early 80s and the military took over the power again, many of those members of the party and the student movement started to set up local NGOs or working for international NGOs. Giles is a classical Marxist and believes that social movements, together with NGOs, should support a class struggle and join their forces to found a Socialist-Communist Party in modern Thailand to oppose capitalist parties and the neo-liberal political platform.

For the analysis of Thai social movements and in particular rural social movements his article has put forward important points. First; NGOs issue-led operation led to a fragmentation of social movements, second; most NGOs take for granted that the only poor people, and the majority of those, are the rural Thais, third; class has become something not useful, or even forbidden, when analysing state power and social change, fourth; the non-participation of the social movements/ NGOs in formal politics has led to an unequal power relation in the political sphere. According to Ji Giles this is exemplified by how easily the government repress land occupations, demonstrations and the southern Muslim minority. Fifth; NGOs work finding niches in the world market so that they can help farmers/ producers, but do not question the market capitalism system, and finally there is a patronisation of the relation between NGOs and social movements, with workers, farmers and poor people seen as incapable of organizing themselves and bringing their grievances to the government and NGOs activists operating as 'nannies' as the big brother and 'representing' the masses voice.

During the developmental area after the WWII, supported and led by the USA together with the military power in the country, the Thai countryside did not organize itself neither carried out organized protests or formed movements or organizations. Protests were sparse and small. Yet, the student uprising in the early seventies, the enactment of a new constitution and the re-establishment of the parliament encouraged the organization of rural social movements.

In 1974 peasants from the north and upper central region founded the Peasant Federation of Thailand (PFT). They demanded higher paddy prices, control on land rents, and land to the landless. In June, thousand of peasants marched in Bangkok; this led the government to

approve a rent control Act. The government, however, lacked the institution capability to implement the Act. The movement spread out reaching 49 (out of 76) provinces and had a membership of 1,5million (Baker & Pasuk, 2005: 189-90). The movement did not restrict its activities to the countryside. In May 1975 the PFT decided to form a coalition with the student and workers' movements to lead a struggle for social justice.

The failure of the Thai government to improve agriculture and to invest in the sector led farmers indebted. On the top of the debt problems, old issues such as landlessness, access to natural resources and commodity prices had not yet been properly addressed. In the early 1990s new organisations were formed. The Small Scale Farmers' Assembly of Isan (SSFAI), founded in 1992, leads the struggle in the northeast region, The Northern Farmers Network, formed in 1994, started to address land issues such as protected areas demarcation and community forest management. In 1995, a network of social movements was formed. The Assembly of the Poor led the 99-day protest in Bangkok demanding compensation for communities displaced by the construction of dams, credit for farmers, debt negotiations, land for the landless, investment and innovations in agriculture, food security etc (Ji Giles, 2004; Baker & Pasuk 2005).

The economic crisis of 1997 worsened the situation of many farmers: increased their debt, led to an increase in land prices, decreased the already scarce investments in agriculture, pushed for speculation of land prices and did not help commodity prices. This scenario contributed to the continuation of rural social movements and to their presence in Thai politics.

2.6 The current Thai Globalisers vs. Communitarians debate in light of the Scott-Popkin debate and Paige's contribution.

The moral economy vs. political economy debate can be reinterpreted in the present reality in Thailand. The debate, naturally, has not the same name. My interpretation is that we can reframe the old debate into the globalisers vs. communitarian's debate to better understand the Thai peasant movements in the globalisation and free trade context.

Globalisation will be understood here as economic globalisation; a process of integration of national economies with a global economy, based on principles of increased trade,

foreign investment and migration made possible by improvements in technologies and transport supported by national policies and influenced by global institutions (Aisbett, 2005: 3), and cultural globalisation; a process where certain cultural and moral values (gender equality, environmental consciousness, materialism, consumerism, pop culture, democracy etc) are penetrating national frontiers and shaping societies.

Until the financial crisis of 1997, Thai social movements were struggling to mitigate negative impacts of development projects, industrialization and the insertion of the country's economy into the world market. Farmers groups, fisher folks, women association, indigenous groups were all very much fighting for their share of the development cake. There was neither a great concern about the development project nor an elaborated discourse to replace it or go back to the past. Things changed, however, when the crisis hit Thailand.

GDP had grown nearly 9% from 1990-1995. In the 1996-2000 period GDP grew merely 0.6%. A continuous trend on poverty reduction was also broken in the same period. In 1962/3 Thailand had an incidence of poverty (head-count ratio) of 57% falling remarkably to 11.4% in 1996. After the financial crisis, poverty incidence went up reaching 13% in 1998 and 16.2% in 2000 (Krongkaew & Kakwani, 2003). Owing to a deep dependency of rural areas on urban employment, the crisis and its high level of urban unemployment contributed to sink rural remittances. Moreover a sharp reduction in income was followed by a significant increase in the cost of living (Hewison, 1999: 7).

At the same time that economists, World Bank experts, the Thai bureaucracy and international bodies were trying to find a reasonable explanation for the crisis and also a solution to the problems that emerged, Thai scholars, NGOs and social movements started to elaborate a new approach to development and civil society. These movements, drawing a similar line of thought with the moral economy approach, have been trying to restore a moral economy and a locality that was lost during the periods of economic growth.

As Hewison (1999: 3) describes, globalisation's opponents have been divided into two groups. First those less radical who are proposing mainly a reformist agenda where, for instance, there would be further regulation of foreign capital. They do not propose alternatives to globalisation but 'another' national-driven (as opposing a foreign)

globalisation. Second a group associated with NGOs and civil society that seeks to propose alternatives to neoliberal agendas and objects globalisation.

The "localism discourse" (Pasuk[5] referred to in Hewison, 1999: 10) was born out of the criticism of the neoliberal response of the Thai government to the 1997 crisis and also out of a contestation of the nature of development pursued by the central government (Hewison, 1999: 10). Scholars allied to NGO advocate that Thailand should have not gone so far into the 'traps' of capitalism and 'western' values such as the market, consumerism and industrialization. Thailand should have taken more care of its farmers, its agriculture and its culture (Bello et al., 1998). Nevertheless, things were not all lost. The solution to the problems was a 'turning back move' to the Thai 'village way of life'. The moral, egalitarian and self-reliant village had given space to the threatening urban centres and their immorality, capitalism values, dependency on the market and environmental depletion.

NGOs and rural movements support the localism (communitarians) discourse and advocate a process of decentralization and the empowerment of the villages so that they can lead their path towards sustainable development. They also criticize globalisation and the crescent dependency on external forces and the lost of local and national culture. According to Hewison, localism is characterized by:

> self-sufficiency (production for family and community consumption); self-reliance (villagers, once they are self- sufficient now, can decide their own future and are not longer dependent on the market) the refection of consumerism and industrialism (all brought into Thai communities by capitalism); culture and community (emphasizing the moral values and unity of rural communities); power (privileged urban and industrial settings destroy community culture and harmony); rural primacy (agriculture is still a strong economic sector but does not receive any government support) and nationalism (rejecting foreign ideas and practices) (Hewison, 1999: 10-15)[6].

Hewison (1999: 17-21) further argues that NGO and social movements' resistance to globalisation needs to propose realistic alternatives to globalisation based on sound

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[5] Pasuk, Phongpaichit. (1999) *Developing Social Alternatives: Walking Backwards into a Klong*, paper presented to the Thai Update, Canberra, The Australian National University, 21 April.

[6] See also Rigg & Ritchie, 2002. Especially pages 360-63.

economic and political analysis. He goes on affirming that the localism discourse is populist and that it has received criticism. First, localism discourse bases its discussion of exploitation on a rural-urban dichotomy presenting an anti-urban bias. Second, the concept of community is an outcome of modernity built on romanticized views of the past. Third, its criticism of industrialisation 'forgets' many positive aspects of the latter. Fourth, localism discourse was academically constructed where different scholars selected notions of self-reliance, village life and morality and imposed them to communities. Fifth, the adoption of the localism discourse by state officials should be examined with caution. Sixth, naïve and chauvinist nationalism may divert attention from local exploitation structures to (either existent or inexistent) external linkages with the 'outside enemy'. Finally, the economic viability of the discourse is rather improbable. It seems that there is no way that smallholding agriculture based on family labour can improve living conditions and increase equality.

As seen above, the localism discourse has a tendency to view globalisers as outsiders. Globalisers, however, as Reynolds (2001: 253) explains, may be constituted by Thai businessmen and women who envisioned "the expansion of Thai business into less developed parts of the region (…)" turning "the battlefields of Indochina into marketplaces". This group is also represented by media groups, academic advisors and sympathizers of democracy (ibid: 258).

Globalisers agree with communitarians that the state should be reformed, but they do not advocate a project of decentralization as defended by the latter. They want the state to play a minimum role, to deregulate the market and interfere as little as possible in the private sector. Besides standing for economic openness, globalisers believe that keeping Thailand's market open will help to create a democratic and responsive government (Reynolds, 2001: 258).

Globalisers are also concerned with issues connected to training, education and technology. It was in the mid 1990s that some of its advocates realized that Thailand was falling behind. It had to import advanced technology and it was loosing economic opportunities due to a low level of education and training in English language and to a low research capacity in sciences, technology and social sciences (ibid: 259). This mastering of technology and the edification of a knowledge society is rather different from the ideas

of 'local knowledge', 'local technologies', 'community economics' and others supported by the localism discourse (263-266).

If NGOs and several Thai scholars fear globalisation, the same cannot be said about many ordinary Thai. Rural people in the country have embraced the global and are diversifying their activities. Farm and non-farm activities together with industry and petty trade have helped farmers and rural communities to improve their income and secure better living standards. The"sad fate of agriculture", as argued by the localism discourse, may actually help to alleviate poverty and improve people's lives (Rigg & Nattapoolwat, 2001). If this is so, the new boom of demonstrations, social movements, and petitions to government authorities are forms of 'rebellion' aiming for improvements of these new opportunities brought about by globalisation. And, as argued by Popkin, it can be better articulated because of incentives –economic opportunities, employment –and the presence of committed leadership -in the form of NGOs' activists, specialized media and academics.

The globalisers versus communitarians also represent a struggle of different actors –civil society groups, local Thai government, local communities, foreign companies, and global institutions over the utilisation, control and management of natural resources. This struggle follows the economic, social and political changes that have occurred in the last decades (Buch-Hansen, 2003: 323).

3. THAILAND: A COUNTRY IN TRANSFORMATION

This chapter presents the historical, political and economic backgrounds of Thailand. A brief introduction to Thailand's rich history is followed by selected political and economic events. This information is fundamental to understand the evolution of Thai civil society.

3.1 Brief history

Thailand lies in a central and important geographical position in Southeast Asia. It borders Laos, Cambodia, Myanmar (Burma) and Malaysia. It is also in a strategic point between China and India[7].

Thai people throughout history have been constituted of different ethnical and indigenous groups coming from neighbouring areas. Some of the largest groups were: the people from the now Yunan province of China, Yunan people coming from the northern hills, Mon-Khmer groups coming from areas of modern Laos and Cambodia, the Malay came from the small islands to the coast of the peninsula Thailand and the Chinese traders (Islam & Chowdhury, 1999: 250; Baker & Pasuk, 2005: 4-5).

The language has its origins from the people living south of the Yangzi River (China). Monks coming from Sri Lanka in the thirteenth century brought The Theravada Buddhist, which is the official religion of modern Thailand. The people of the Siam widely and well accepted it. The large area of the Kingdom meant different dynasties and political groups controlling different areas. In the north, Chiang Mai became the capital of the Lanna confederation. By the Chaophraya basin, near the upper coast of the gulf, Ayutthaya was the most powerful and dominant confederation. The Chinese called this region Xian. Later on, when the Portuguese had their contact with Chinese traders they converted into Siam. Siam remained as the name of the Kingdom until 1939 when the name Thailand was created (Baker & Pasuk, 2005).

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[7] See appendix 3.

After the destruction of Ayutthaya (in 1767) the capital was transferred across the river to Bangkok. The new capital, a harbour city, and the increase commerce with the Chinese contributed to expand the Kingdom's economy. Yet, these changes did not occur everywhere. Two different societies coexisted; one of forced and slave-type labour and one of free labour and entrepreneurship led by the Chinese immigrant and pushed by a new market society (Baker & Pasuk, 2005: 43).

The 1855 Bowring Treaty between Thailand and England, together with similar treaties between the Kingdom and other European powers, did not only bring about economic changes but also social and political changes. In 1909, after border disputes with French and British colonies in the region, the Anglo-Siamese Treaty defines Siam's border (Baker & Pasuk, 2005). Thailand is the only country in the region that was not, at least formally, colonized by a western/ European power. Yet, this was only possible after some loss of its sovereignty (The Anglo-Siamese Treaty was secretly resolved between Britain and France) and its openness to external market.

After the 1932 revolution[8], the country's new rulers wanted to move Siam "away from its royalist past". The revolutionaries had divergent opinions on who should lead the country; civil or military groups. The military won and after other more moderate generals, Phibun became Prime Minister in 1938. On 24 June 1939 the first edict changed the name of Siam to Thailand, the land of the Thai people, of the Thai race (Baker & Pasuk, 2005).

During the Second World War Thailand allied to both sides of the war. After the fall of Paris and the Japanese forces occupied French Indochina, Thailand invaded French Cambodia. After some help of Japanese troops, and its landing in Thai soil on 08 December 1941, Thailand marched towards British Burma. Yet, in 1943 the course of war changed and Thailand slowly eased away from Japan. In 1944, an opponent government

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[8] By the beginning of the 20th century, a new Thai 'intelligentsia' educated in European universities, together with urban labourers, junior army officers and business people formed a group of discontents and founded the People's Party. On 24 June 1932 some of the military members of the People's Party, abducted the commander of royal guard and arrested forty members of the royal family, declaring the end of the absolute monarchy. In August the Party promulgated a constitution declaring that all power belonged to the people. After assuming the power, the People's Party fragmented in two factions. Divergences came to and end when Phibun became Prime Minister in December 1938.

group move Phibun away from the government and started the dialogue with the war winners. Thailand paid reparation –in rice –to the British and, forced by the USA, agreed to return its border to their period before the war (ibid: 35-37).

After the WW II, Thailand experimented a period of intensive development policies, influenced and financed by the USA. Economy diversification, roads, railway and port building, water projects and the tourist industry developed the nation and helped to modernize the kingdom (Baker & Pasuk 2005, chapter 6).

Following a short period of democracy during the early 70s, the military took over power again in 1976. The Military governed the country for nearly twenty years and after a military coup in 1991, Anand Panyarachun, a civilian, is nominated Prime Minister.

In 1995, after a strong lobbying by reformist groups, NGO and local grassroots and indigenous groups a Constitution Drafting Assembly is established. In the same year, the national Thai social movement, The Assembly of the Poor is formed. In 1997 the Constitution is approved. In the same year, Thailand witnesses what would be the Asian financial and economic crisis. The IMF steps in and Thailand implements severe structural changes and open even more its economy to international investment. In 1998 the prosperous businessman Thaksin Shinawatra founds the Thai Rak Thai (Thai love Thai) political Party. In 1999 the economy starts showing signs of recovery.

In 2001 Mr Thaksin is elected Prime Minister and his party gets the most seats in the National Parliament. In 2003, the government launches a programme to restrain drug-related crimes and activities. The plan is carried out leading to many killings and national human right groups criticize the government. In early 2004 conflicts start in the largely Muslim south. Throughout the year, attacks and bombs take place widely in the south of the country challenging the central government. In March 2005 Mr Thaksin is re-elected. In July of the same year, the problems in the south intensify. Government responds sending military forces and imposing restrictions to civilians. Again the government is criticised. In April 2006, PM Thaksin Shinawatra steps down after public allegations of corruption and favouritism that divided the nation and brought the people back to the streets (BBC, 2006).

3.2 The 1970s uprising

After the WWII, the USA government supported military dictatorship across the globe to hold back the spread and the threat of communism. Because of Thailand's position in relation to Communist China and Vietnam, and later on due to the Vietnam War, the USA financially and politically promoted the military regime in the country.

In 1957 General Sarit Thanarat seized power by a coup. The militaries became a ruling class. (Baker & Pasuk, 2005:169). Simultaneously, the government organized religion and education to serve the national discipline. Monks and teachers were sent to remote villages and communities to teach Buddhism, national costumes, Central Thai language and discourage communism. However, these measures faced oppositions. In the northeast region of the country, the people spoke a Lao dialect and in the four southernmost provinces the majority of the population followed Islam and spoke a Malay dialect. Teachers led the resistance in the south insisting in teaching in their own dialect and instruct Islam principles. After repression and widespread violence, secret organizations were formed to support socialism and maintain Islam alive (ibid: 172-74).

In the northern hills, hill peoples were forced to shift their opium plantation into new cash crops farms. They were of different ethnic groups, spoke different dialects and followed diverse religious beliefs. Thus, the government sent teachers and monks to convert them into Thai speaking Buddhist citizens. Consequently "In 1967-68, a full-scale Hmong rebellion spread across four provinces of the north. The army reacted by bombing and napalming hill villages" (Baker & Pasuk, 2005: 175).

Resistance was not only fought by several ethnic minorities but also from those considered 'ordinary' Thai people. The Thai left was another important front of discontentment against the central government and national policies. The Communist Party of Thailand (CPT) was founded in December 1942. The party managed to get the Anti-Communist Law in October 1946 revoked and started organizing labour and coordinate rallies and strikes. The CPT was composed by a large number of Chinese people and after some of these returned from China, in 1947, the party adopted a Maoist line of rural-based revolution. They organized the peasantry and had support from an increasing section of the urban class dissatisfied with the military dictatorship. Rebellion started to spread fast in the

peasant society and guerrilla groups clashed with police patrol and army units. "By the mid-1970s, it [the armed forces] estimated there were some 8000 armed guerrillas, 412 villages totally under CPT control, and 6000 villages with a total population of 4 million under some degree of CPT influence" (ibid, 180-4).

In the urban areas students led the resistance. The ideas to develop Thailand and transform it in a super power, led to a substantial increase in the number of secondary and university students; "Tertiary students increased from 18,000 to 1000,000 over 1961-1972" (Baker & Pasuk, 2005: 185). Influenced by worldwide campaigns anti-Vietnam War, by leftist ideologies from abroad and by the struggle taking place in rural areas, the students started attacking US imperialism in Thailand and criticizing the military dictatorship. In 1971 Prime Minister *Thanon Kittikhachon*, revokes the constitution and dissolves the parliament.

On 13 October 1973 half a million people take part in a Bangkok demonstration and also across the country to demand a constitution. On the next morning, the crowds (mainly students) moved to the king's palace and the police opened fired killing 77 and wounding 857 (ibid, 188). The King intervened .The three top generals were sent abroad, and the King nominated a new Prime Minister giving him the task to write down a new constitution and to re-establish the national parliament.

The events contributed to a period of political ebullition in Thailand. The next years witnessed daily street protests, demonstrations by students, peasants and businessmen and strikes by Thai labour groups. It is at this time, that the peasants start to organize themselves. Farmers from the north and upper regions march to Bangkok demanding a price support scheme and the implementation of a rent control Act. They complained of a stagnant commodity price, illegal land transfers and the political alliance of local landed elite and government officials. In 1974 northern farmers founded the Peasants Federation of Thailand (PFT). The federation spread out into 41 provinces and had a membership of 1.5 million. Leaders travelled from village to village educating and discussing farmers' problems and rights. In may 1975 farmers, students and workers unit to fight for social justice.

From 1974 to 1976 a right-wing movement started to react against the growing of social mobilization and the guerrillas' conflict in the rural areas. The main strategy was to avoid urban protesters to ally with guerrilla forces labelling the latter communists. The ISOC (Internal Security Operations Command) of the army and the Interior Ministry started to launch a publicity campaign asking the Thais "Do you love your King? Do you love Thailand? Do you hate communism?" (Baker & Pasuk, 2005: 193).

The Krathing daeng (Red Gaurs) and the Village Scouts Movement joined the campaign. The former was a vigilante movement that recruited vocational students to disperse demonstrations with sticks and bombs. The latter used propaganda and emotive rituals to contract village youths to combat communists. In less than four months, seventeen leaders of the PFT were murdered in 1975 leading to the breakdown of the organization. In 1976 a leader of the Socialist Party was murdered. During elections in April 30 people were killed (Baker and Pasuk, 2005). The repression against rural social movements opted to eliminate as many 'insurgent' leaders as possible. From 1974 to August 1976, 34 PFT leaders were murdered. Chiang Mai lost 13 of its leaders (Seri, 1984: 100).

All this violent persecution of leftists, communists and students was supported by a terrified urban middle class, businessmen, officials and elitist families who tensely watched the rise of communism in Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos. Finally influential monks, politicians and social figures legitimised this brutal oppression. *Phra ittiwuttho*, a pro-government monk, declared in June 1976:

> It is not sinful to kill communists. It is the duty of all Thai…It is like when we kill a fish to make curry to place in the alms bowl for a monk. There is certainly demerit in killing the fish, but when we place it in the alms bowl of a monk, we gain much greater merit. (…) It is legitimate to kill some 50,000 people to secure and ensure the happiness of 42 million Thais" (Somboon[9] quoted in Baker & Pasuk, 2005: 194).

The final conflict only needed a trigger. This came when a newspaper showed photos of Thammasat University students 'disrespecting' a king's image. An army radio station launched a call to kill the students. Border Patrol police together with the Red Gaurs and troops of the Village Scouts started marching towards the university campus. On the 06th

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[9] Somboon Suksamran. (1982) *Buddhism and Politics in Thailand.* Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies.

October 1976 they attacked the university with grenades rockets and even anti-tank missiles. Students who tried to escape were raped, lynched and burned alive. After the events at the University an army faction carried out a coup and took over power (Baker & Pasuk, 2005. 194-5).

Students, farmers and communists flew the cities and joined the armed guerrillas in the bush. Most of these were coordinated and trained by CPT people. The CPT split into two factions divided on the invasion of Cambodia by Vietnam and the response by China. USA money kept coming supporting the military government and the fight against communists. Programmes of rural development, road building, forest destruction and the army offensive contributed to the students' withdraw from the jungles in the 1979-1981 period. The CPT surrenders its armies in the following two years and the conflicts are over (ibid: 195-7).

3.3 The black May 1992

After the happenings of October 1976, the National Security Council, founded during the WWII, and its academic staff declared that Thai society had changed drastically in the last generation and the old triad of nation, religion and the king was no longer 'stimulating' for the new society. (Baker & Pasuk, 2005: 231). Yet, the military still dominated politics and planned a 'democracy from above'.

The military consumed 22 per cent of the national budget in 1985. In the parliament, business politicians, the majority of MPs, wanted to redirect these funds in to economic growth. Supported by discontent MPs, *Chatichai Choonhavan* is elected prime minister in 1988 and started to shift power, positions and ministries from military men to elected politicians. Principles considering communist and ex-communist countries not as enemies but as potential economic partners started guiding foreign relations. Yet, all the transition happened along with corruption and favouritism scandals among politicians. The 'money politics', widely covered by the media, led to a reaction from urban middle classes (Baker & Pasuk, 2005).

Under allegation of 'eating' public money and widespread corruption, on 23 February 1991, a group of five generals seize *Chatichai* and declare a coup. They discharged the

parliament and formed a national council. Government across the world discourage tourists and criticize the return of the military regime in Thailand. Businessmen withdraw their economic support to the military junta and growth rates and stock market index sink.

In the March elections of 1992, General *Suchinda Kraprayun* breaks a promise of never again stepping into politics and aspires to become the prime minister. The Campaign for Popular Democracy (CPD), supported by the re-elected Bangkok mayor Mr. *Chamlong,,* launches several protests across the country. On 17 May 1992 around 200,000 people took the streets of the capital to protest. Armed soldiers are called and violent clashes last for three nights. Soldiers shoot in the crowd whereas protesters burn buses and buildings. *Suchinda* accuse the mobs of attacking the nation, religion and the king. The national and international media show different footage of the conflicts. Then, again, on the 20 May the king convoke *Chamlong* and *Suchinda* to stop the violence. Suchinda's government resigns, a new constitution comes into force, elections are called and a new Cabinet is formed in September. In the Senate elections of 1995 civilians replaced military men and the military's share of national budge fell to 13 per cent in 1996 (Baker & Pasuk, 2005: 240-6).

3.4 The 1997 Constitution

After the events of 1992 Thai society, aided by the international community and international investors, pushed for the elaboration of a more democratic constitution. This move took place hand in hand with the emergence of different Thai social movements (rural and urban), professional associations, urban middle classes, and local intellectuals and business community. Though the motivation of this diversity of group was not the same they all agreed that Thailand needed a functioning and democratic parliament based on a new constitution.

Over the years 1995 and 1996 the constitution draft faced strong opposition from those groups that would be directly affected by it loosing its political control. Police chiefs, army generals, senators, judges and village headmen mobilized themselves trying to block the draft. But, after the 1997 financial crisis, urban middle class and the business class started to blame the crisis on the lack of political reforms and traditionalism. The draft passed on

27 September 1997; the same day the IMF singed an agreement with the Thai government (Baker & Pasuk, 2005: 255).

The 1997 national constitution is usually refer to as the 'People's Constitution' due to its improvement in popular participation, human rights, and democratic decentralization. According to Punyaratabandhu (1998: 165) the constitution was drafted by an elected assembly composed of 99 members from different sectors of society. Its main objective was to impose a halt to money politics in the country. The earlier 270-member appointed Senate shifted to a 200-member elected Senate based on the size of the provinces.

Furthermore, the House of Representatives consists now of five hundred members; four hundred from electoral districts and a hundred from party lists. New bodies were constituted to support the government and democracy such as the Constitution court (acting as a consultancy body on specific parliament bills), the National Human Rights Commission (which has played an important role supporting social movement and minorities), The Office of the Ombudsman and the Election Commission, that function to constantly monitor and evaluate the governance and election processes (Baker & Pasuk, 2005: 253, Punyaratabandhu, 1998: 166, Callahan, 2005: 499).

Though the constitution had brought much improvement to the democratic process in Thailand, it is interesting to notice that a constitutional provision demands that MPs have completed tertiary education and own a bachelor's degree. Hence, excluding 99% of the agrarian electorate (Baker & Pasuk, 2005: 253, Callahan, 2005: 501).

3.5 The end of the Second World War and the economic development of Thailand

The period that started after the World War II marks what many call the second wave of globalisation. This was mainly owing to a strong USA economy driven by the profits of the war production and its minimum damage in American soil (Buch-Hansen, 2002: 5). It is the USA versus The Soviet Union cold war that fostered new ideas of economic development, aid and political alliances.

After a muddle role in the WW II, Thailand allied to the USA in the cold war. In the late 1940s and early 1950s the USA saw the rise of communism in China and in Thailand's neighbouring countries as a threat to the 'free world' and was committed to 'protect' Thailand (Krongkaew & Nakwani, 2003: Baker and Pasuk, 2005).

USA troops started to move to Korea and later on to Vietnam, supported by Thai troops and supplies. Millions of US$ in economic aid and loans reached the Thai government through the hands of the USA government and the World Bank. To avoid communist ideals and aspirations the government encouraged Buddhism reforming and building thousand of temples. Political changes such as the strengthening of the military and anti-communist laws were followed by important economic developments.

Roads were built to fight communist insurgents and guerrilla groups, reaching virtually all villages in the country. Ports and airfields were built or reconstructed. The US air bases helped to expand the tourism industry. Bars, nightclubs, brothels and massage parlours contributed to the presence of 600 thousand tourists already in 1970. New legislation supported foreign investment; the bank system and networks developed considerably and finally crescent urban classes with government policies demanded the substitution of imports by domestic manufacture. Foreign capital allied with domestic capital (owned by few rich families) contributed to a rapid and diverse industrialization that was followed by improvements in services (Baker & Pasuk, 2005).

The beginning of Thailand's modern economic development started with the First National Economic Development Plan of 1961, under the military regime of Field Marshall Sarit Thanarat. The Plan was designed with economic, technical and military help from the USA government and assistance from a team of technical and economic expert of the World Bank, through its World Bank Mission Team (Krongkaew & Nakwani, 2003: 737).

Although very much criticized by many for being unequal, the economic development of Thailand did contribute to alleviate poverty and increase household wealth. From 1962/63 to 2000 the increase of household per capita income, across the five regions of Thailand, was of 8.9%. The incidence of poverty declined from expressive 57% -of total household population – in 1962/3 to 13.0% in 1998. Undeniably, the economic crisis of 1997 hit hard the households in the country and their income, increasing the incidence of poverty to

16.2% in 2000, ending up a steady decline over the last 40 years (Krongkaew & Nakwani, 2003: Table 4: 741 and Table 5: 743).

3.5.1 Agriculture and economic development

Improvements in irrigation systems and the construction of dams opened the doors to the revolution brought about by research being developed on rice technology in the Philippines in the 1960s. New seeds, followed by pesticides and fertilizers were distributed to Thai farmers in the following years. In thirty years, the paddy yield-per-rai doubled in the central plain. Increased exports made Thailand the leading country in rice exports. Poverty incidence declined considerably from 40% of households living under the poverty line in 1962-3 to 12.5% in 1975 (Baker & Pasuk, 2005: 159-162).

The green revolution, and the government's plan to transform Thailand in a major foodstuff exporter country, contributed to the household production's insertion in and the dependency on the market. There were not significant changes in the size of farms. Smallholders did not disappear, but they changed. They now had to rely on loans and credit systems to buy the high-yield seeds, pesticides and fertilizers. Others opted to produce cash crops, since the price in the market was better, for instance, for cassava, tobacco or fruits and vegetables than rice prices. The mechanization of agriculture and an increasing pressure on land and natural resources, led farmers to compete for water, forest, infrastructure and services (Baker & Pasuk, 2005).

3.5.2 The role of agriculture

The Asian continent holds 55% of the world's population. Of this huge number of people, 58% relies on agriculture to survive (Fan & Chan-Kang, 2005: 135). Yet, parts of the continent have undergone a rapid economic growth with some countries diversifying its economy, industrializing and modernizing. Hence, what has happened with agriculture and farmers?

Across the globe the contribution of agriculture to the overall economy has declined and in many countries it has been overtaken by the services an industry sectors. Tables 1 and 2 help us to understand the phenomenon in Thailand.

Table 1

Sectoral share of GDP from 1960 to 2000 (%) (Thailand)

	1960	1970	1980	1990	1995	2000
Agriculture	31.5	27.3	20.2	13.6	10.8	11.4
Industries	19.7	24.0	30.1	37.8	41.7	43.1
Services	48.8	48.7	49.7	48.6	47.5	45.5
GDP	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00

Adapted from Krongkaew & Kakwani, 2003: 738.

Table 2

Sectoral share of employment from 1960 to 2000 (%) (Thailand)

	1960	1970	1980	1990	1995	2000
Agriculture	82.3	79.3	70.8	64.0	52.0	48.8
Industries	4.2	5.9	10.3	14.0	19.7	19.0
Services	13.5	14.9	18.9	22.0	28.2	32.2
GDP	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00

Adapted from Krongkaew & Kakwani, 2003: 739.

Table one shows us the constant decline of the contribution of agriculture to the national GDP in Thailand; from 31.5% in the 1960s to mere 11.4% in 2000. This might be explained by the sharp fall of grains prices in the international market, the modern production elsewhere and the lack of investment in agriculture in the country. According to Ahmad & Somporn (2003: 5) the green revolution elsewhere contributed to the end of Thailand's monopoly in the production of rice in the late 1960s. Problems with water irrigation and water scarcity, together with the exhaustion of arable land and the problems of low profitability of rice contributed to "deintensification of rice" and diversification of agriculture. Nevertheless, the process has not happened evenly across Thailand.

Interestingly, the decline of the contribution of the agricultural sector did not lead to a sharp fall of employment in the sector. Whilst the contribution of agriculture decreased some 63, 8%, the employment in agriculture fell some 40, 7%.

It is clear that the income of those engaged in agriculture must be considerably much less than those engaged in industry or service. This reinforces the common belief that the agricultural sector and farmers were 'exploited' during the early phases of economic development in Thailand (Krongkaew & Kakwani, 2003: 739).

The agricultural sector supported the development of industrialization by supplying cheap and large quantities of food for urban workers, exporting products to create enough foreign exchange to be used for industrial goods, paying taxes (rice used to be one of the most intensely taxed products in the country), supplying cheap labour and also consuming industrial products (ibid: 750). The price of rice at farm gates is the same as it was 20 years ago. This price policy has on one hand turned small-scale farming nearly impossible and, on the other hand, it has supported agribusiness corporations (Leonard & Manahan, 2004: 12).

The development of industrialisation was also followed by constant political will translated in incentives, policies and tax benefits for those investing in the sector. Lack of investments in agriculture accompanied by non-favourable price policies have also contributed to a worsening of the sector performance. Besides, constant fragmentation of land has led to a process of increased number of small-scale farmers and a decrease of farm size. In Thailand, these developments, have contributed to a decline in production growth in agriculture in the last 25 years, as table 03 below shows. From the 1961-1979 period to 1980-2002 period the productivity growth fell close to 50% (from 4, 48% to 2, 22%)[10].

Table 3
Production growth in agriculture

	India (%)	Japan (&)	South Korea (%)	Thailand (%)	China (%)	World (%)
1961-	1.23	3.23	5.3	4.01	4.81	2.75

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[10] My own calculations.

1969						
1970-1979	2.58	1.36	6.68	4.96	3.01	2.49
1980-1989	3.77	0.88	3.27	2.41	5.31	2.4
1990-2002	2.56	-0.88	2.47	2.04	5.43	2.23
1967-2002	2.93	0.58	3.39	3.25	4.57	2.32

Source: FAO, FAOSTAT (July 2003) in Fan & Chan-Kang, 2005:139.

Note: growth rates are exponential growth rates.

Rigg & Nattapoolwat (2001: 947-48) discuss Bello et al. (1998) book reviewing their argument on "the trouble with agriculture". According to this interpretation the book puts forward three explanation of the rural sector's declining. First, agriculture has been neglected in favour of the urban-industrial sector. Second, rural areas have been integrated to the international market by an aggressive commercialisation process and third, the loss of political power of the peasantry in the 1970s. The argument, however, is not free of criticism. According to Rigg & Nattapoolwat (ibid) the argument is based on the rural-urban dichotomy, which does not recognize the interdependence of both dimensions and the infiltration of industrialisation in the countryside. Accordingly, the investment in diversification in rural areas does not, necessarily, harm rural people. There might be no need to 'save agriculture'. The re-structure of the sector may actually benefit rural communities.

The debate on the role of agriculture and its relationship to economic development and poverty reduction is not at all convergent. Although many have argued (Rigg & Nattapoolwat, 2001, Baker & Pasuk 2005) that the industrial sector has actually absorbed rural labour and at times there has been shortage of rural labour, Ahmad & Somporn (2003) argue that the manufacturing sector has not absorbed rural labour at a rapid rate. There has been a huge gap between the contribution of agriculture to GDP and the employment on the sector, translated into a very low labour productivity level. This, consequently, has led to declining farm income and increasing rural/urban disparities (Ahmad & Somporn, 2003: 2-4).

3.6 The Financial crisis of 1997 and its consequences and recovery

The performance of Thai economy in the decade 1985- 1995 has wondered many scholars and economists. The annual GDP growth rate was over the 10% mark (Callahan, 2005: 497, Krongkaew & Kakwani, 2003: 740). GDP per capita increased from US$100 in 1961 to US$2,750 in 1995 (Callahan, 2005:497).

The economic boom of Thailand relied very much on foreign direct investment carried out by American dollars and Japanese Yen. Most of the capital, however, was not used in direct productive investment, but much was used in the stock market, speculation and in the booming real state sector. Investors started to borrow money to buy land, initiate constructions, and industrial and commerce enterprises. Baker & Pasuk (2005: 253) state that; "between 1988 and 1996, the private sector's foreign debt multiplied tenfold".

By 1995 the exports had slowed down, the stock market started loosing its rhythm. In the following year, foreign capital investment decreased and some of it started to leave the country. After a strong attack on the baht (Thai currency) by international speculators, the currency lost half of its value against the US dollar. The private sector that once borrowed was indebted and many firms went bankrupted. Companies stopped paying and banks stopped lending. Consumer consumption dried up and workers were laid off (Baker & Pasuk, 2005: 254-5).

Callahan (2005:498) believes that internal mismanagement, corruption and external pressures were responsible for the economic depression in Thailand [11]. He then goes on to talk about the political outcomes of the crisis. Elsewhere in Asia, according to Callahan, the crisis triggered anti-Western and anti-Chinese feelings translated in mass demonstrations. Curiously, in Thailand many "blamed the crisis on inept and corrupt politicians". This only fostered political mobilization and popular support for a new constitution.

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[11] The literature affirms that the Asian crisis of 1997 actually started in Thailand with the devaluation of the Thai currency, the baht. I do not intend to cover the crisis here. A thorough coverage and analysis of the crisis can be found elsewhere (Islam & Chowdhury, 1999, Punyaratabandhu, 1998).
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Punyaratabandhu (1998:162) agrees with Callahan and claims that financial mismanagement and "massive bad debts accumulated through overlending on the part of private sector financial institutions" and "excessive borrowing by the private sector" were to be blamed for the economic crisis.

The new government took office in 2001. It led a Keynesian type of economy (investing in infrastructure, supporting rural development and keeping low interest rates) that started to show signs of recovery in 2002 (Baker & Pasuk, 2005: 255). It is important to remember that economic recovery depends very much in the human dimension of confidence. Once confidence is restored, the process has better chances to succeed. The rise of a businessman as the Prime Minister, together with a promise to continue liberal economy practices, brought back foreign investment to the country and has helped Thailand to restructure its economy.

The 1997 economic crisis is the watershed in the public debate on globalisation and its consequences. When searching for explanations for the crisis, some scholars, politicians and academics found the blame in the participation of Thailand in the global economy, the "love affair with globalisation" (Rigg & Nattapoolwat, 2001: 945).

The crisis has prepared the terrain for a fruitful and heat debate among those who want to avoid globalisation, the dependency of the Thai economy on the international market and foreign investment and those who, even after the crisis, do not see the globalisation, free trade or international market as the ones to be blamed, rather, as some studies concluded, they believe that corrupt locals politicians and incompetent bureaucrats were responsible for the crisis. The result of this debate may become the main force guiding the future of Thailand's politics and economy.

4. RESEARCH DESIGN

4.1 Philosophical assumption and epistemological stance adopted

According to Creswell (2003: 6) when one decides for a knowledge claim, one is choosing certain assumptions and beliefs that will show the way on how the researcher learns and what she learns during the inquiry process. I believe the option for a certain philosophical assumptions are fundamental to better understand the research questions and the final discussions of a study.

Social constructivism assumes that individuals are constantly seeking for understanding their environment where they live and work. Experiences have different subjective meanings, and the researcher's role is to understand this complexity of views instead of categorizing all human experiences in few and rigid divisions. The interaction of researcher and informants aims to bring about the reconstruction of meanings and feelings towards a certain situation. Subjective meanings 'are negotiated socially and historically'. It is the interaction of human beings and their processes that play a role in people's lives. Researchers use qualitative methods so that individuals can communicate their views. In addition, they are aware that their experiences and background influence the understanding process of data (ibid: 8-9).

In this study I take a position of a social constructivist. Therefore I acknowledge that the transformations in land issues in northern Thailand, the changes that have taken place in rural communities –economically and culturally –and the reactions of local farmer's groups are very much influenced by the interaction of different social groups and social classes within these communities. I also assume that their patterns of political reaction towards their problems, their denial or acceptance of the globalisation process at the local level are very much connected to their social, historical and economical settings.

I also stand on the grounds of Marx's explanation of social structure and on the importance of the economic sphere, class structure and the role of state institutions over the way people interact and live their lives within societies. Nevertheless, I acknowledge that all

other spheres are important, but as I analyse the transformation in rural communities, much of the changes are connected to the economic growth of the 1960s to mid 1990s period and the economic crisis of 1997. I oppose a exclusive post-Marxist approach to social movements since I do not believe most of rural movements in Northern Thailand are free of material concerns or that they represent the 'originality' of new social movements.

4.2 The qualitative approach of enquiry and the ethnographies and case studies strategies

As Creswell (2003) explains qualitative approaches are useful and should be used when "a concept or phenomenon needs to be understood because little research has been done on it" (22). It is also an exploratory process and aids the researcher when she does not know what variables must be studied, the topic is new, the concept has not been analysed within a certain group and when existing theories no longer apply to a certain group under the study. It usually happens in the natural settings. Qualitative research is flexible, interpretative and holistic and it has an increasing tendency to use participatory methods (181-2).

I have chosen the qualitative approach first, because it does give me the freedom to speak about the relationship among different social phenomenon (land inheritance systems, rural labour migration, rural mobilisation, religion) without having to find strict causal relationships among them as in quantitative research. Yet, as Patton (1992: 490) defends, speculations on causal relationships within qualitative research are acceptable and valid as long as these relationships are defined as speculative and conjecturable. Furthermore, existing theories on modern peasantry have been usually concentrated in the Latin American continent or reserved to 18th century Europe not applying, then, to the studied region.

Anthropologists were the first to carry out ethnographical studies. Based on fieldwork techniques such as participant observation, diary keeping and recording, anthropologists spent months to years with local (usually indigenous) communities. Ethnography is a flexible process, based on observational data and constant responses to the reality in the ground. Case studies strategy allows the researcher to study in depth a project, an event, an

activity, a process, an individual or a group. Time and activity help to limit the case (s) (Creswell, 2003: 13-14).

This study is neither an ethnological study nor a case study. I did not carry out participant observation as such, did not spend much time with the communities and had limited interaction with the farmers. It cannot be a case study because I have not picked a single or a set of events that are limited by time, geographical location or scope of activities. Yet, my study stands near to these strategies. This is so owing to the methods chosen, the flexibility of their use, the constant transformation of my interpretation of reality, the framing of a process and its more or less time (after the WWII period) and geographical (mainly in the northern regions of Thailand) limitations.

This study is an issue-focused research (Laws et al., 2003: 33) that aims to influence policy because it reviews what is already known about the issue, it can direct action for change in broader geographical areas besides the one studied, it brings the voices of less powerful people to be heard by decision-makers and most important it reframes an issue –land and rural transformation in today's Thailand – bringing new ways of seeing it. Thus, it might influence and guide social policymaking and development plans.

4.3 Qualitative research Methods

4.3.1 Literature review/ previous studies analysis

Most of the data used to answer the first two sub-questions [What are the changes on land issues in Thailand after the World War II? and what are the socio-economic, political and cultural implications of these changes for rural/farming communities?] originated from existing literature and previous studies. The study of other authors, government policies, international governmental organisations and government statistics and academic research carried out in the region form the bulk of my data. My decision to widely use this secondary data lies on my perception of the limitations of my primary data to address these questions and the nature of the data needed. Furthermore, I managed to have access to several studies carried out in the same area of which I did my research.

The literature review covers a diversity of theories due to the complexity of the subject studied. The Scott-Popkin together with the class-conflict approached presented by Paige were brought back to the new discourse in place in Thailand between globalisers and communitarians. Furthermore some background on social movements theory and peasant studies were also presented in the theoretical framework chapter.

4.3.2 Carrying out observations

The advantages of observations are: it helps the researcher accessing firsthand experiences; information is recorded as it emerges and it enables analysis of individuals that are not comfortable with interviews or group dynamics. Yet, the method has its limitations: the common understanding of researchers as intrusive and stealing private information and their restricted capacity to carry out meaningful fieldnotes (Creswell, 2003: 186-7). Other setbacks are that observation is unable to assess people's motivations, may lead to over-simplification or misinterpretation of situations and the presence of the observer may disrupt the setting (Laws et al., 2003: 305).

Some of the data that comes from my fieldwork experience was collected through observations. Fieldnotes were taken on individuals' behaviours, comments, discussions, collective actions or events, physical settings and infrastructure. At times I collected data as an observer, and others as a participant. My attempts to participate in their daily activities were hindered by language barriers, the short time I was there 'in the field' and by the common interpretation that I was a guest.

Laws et al. (2003: 304–06) distinguish two types of observations: participant observation and systematic observation. The former is a whole process based on anthropological studies and the most important insight is that you should always consider your role as a researcher and be aware that your behaviour may condition what you observe. Systematic observation "involves observing objects, processes, relationships, or people, and recording these observations" (304). It is also important that the researcher identifies indicators that can be examined by observation.

I used indicators such as: whether the farming household had car/ motorbike or not, whether the houses had infrastructure (tap water, electricity), the type of crops cultivated, whether they use conventional or organic agriculture technique, the distribution of family labour into the economy sectors, whether the children participated in farming and whether they went to school or not, the participation of farmers and power structures present at meetings and the role of NGO activists within the activities of the farmers' movement (NFA).

4.3.3 Individual and group interviews

Where the limitations of observation start is where the strengths of interviews begin. Feelings, perceptions and intentions cannot be observable. It is through interview that researchers can put themselves in the other's position (Patton, 1992: 278). According to Laws, et al. (2003: 286-97) one-to-one interviews allows the researcher to know people's experiences and views of an issue in depth and is a flexible method allowing management of questions and time and, freedom to respondents to quit at any time or choosing not to answer some questions. Semi-structured interviews protocols[12] have questions that might be asked in several ways, admits questions to be left out or added and its analysis are somewhat straightforward.

Interview limitations may compromise the result of the data collected due to three main factors. First, interviewees may filter the reality and provide the researcher a fragmented and polished view of facts. Second, the presence of the researcher may influence the performance of the respondents either inhibiting them or fostering existent power relations. Third, respondents may tell you what they do but this might be different from what they really do.

The sample was purposefully chosen. It is not representative in a statistical sense. The selection of individuals to be interviewed were determined by my access to informants, their positions and role in the processes and events and their ability to illustrate, confront or

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[12] I opted to use from here thereafter the term semi-structured interview protocol because the semi-structured characteristic concerns the document itself (the paper, the protocol) rather than the interview (the process, the action). This is not the term used by Laws 2003, chapter 17. Patton (1992: 283) refers to the document as 'the interview guide'.

support claims found in the literature. In addition to 'sampling of people' (Laws et al., 2003: 358) I had to deal with other sampling issues such as time, location and events. Most of the choices were negotiated with my interpreter and NGO staff that would accompany my field visits and interviews. Furthermore, a total freedom for planning did not take place since I was dependent on my interpreter schedule, transport and my internship timetable. It is this meaningful selection of time, location and events (NFA meetings, area occupied by land occupation movements, community land reform regional seminar, court cases) that can minimize the setbacks of a convenient sample of respondents/ interviewees.

I carried out few interviews with individuals occupying different social roles but, yet, connected to the land issues in the region. The interviews were face-to-face semi-structured interview. At times there was a semi-structured interview protocol and at other only open-ended questions. Other respondents were addressed, during field visits and observation exercises, through 'informal conversational interview' (Patton, 1992: 281).

I also had the opportunity to collect data from a group interview. All the questions were open-ended. Participation, though encouraged, was restricted to some four farmers and one NFA leader. There were around 12 farmers, three NGO activists –one of them being the only woman present –and I.

4.3.4 Document analysis

According to Laws et al. (2003: 302) documentary research should be used when it is one element of a bigger study, there is reliable information on that specific population and to some extent these documents answer –even if not fully –your research question(s). It also prevents the creation of duplicated and unnecessary research and it can increase the authority of the study.

To carry out the analysis proposed in this study, I had to rely on the analytical reading of documents that were related to the land issues presented here. It was during my five-month internship period that I had access to some important documents such as new books, a master's thesis, government policies and acts and NGO internal documents. They are not many, but fulfil the expectations of clarifying and illustrating my arguments and the

answers to the research questions. The documents were codified and later on quoted or integrated into the thesis main body.

According to Evans & Gruba (2004: 91) triangulation is a method used when carrying out research work. It is the adoption of more than one research method or more than one type of data that helps the researcher to answer his research question or to verify his hypothesis. It is important to note that observations along with interviews and document analysis, used in this study, form an effective triangulation technique. Furthermore, they constitute the kinds of data collection that shape qualitative methods (Patton, 1992: 10). By using the three methods together I reduce the negative impacts of the setbacks of each isolated method. For instance, observations may help me to distinguish between what people say they do from what people really do, and to clarify data and events presented in documents. Simultaneously, interviews might help in avoiding over-simplification of observable data.

4.4 The data

The data gathered for this study is composed of two different sets of data; theoretical and empirical. Theoretical data originated from my corpus of literature and aimed for three goals; give the reader a background of the main theories on the subject analysed, introduce Thai history and important elements of its society and answer (even if partially) the research questions. The literature review was based on articles published by Thai and western scholars in important scientific journals such as Asia Pacific Viewpoint, Journal of Asian Economics, Journal of Contemporary Asia, Southeast Asia Research Centre Working Papers, American Anthropologist, Social Forces, Agricultural Economics, papers presented in conferences and related books. I referred to reference lists of journal articles and books and to online versions of scientific journals to access further articles and identify key figures on the subject. I also relied on the help of my supervisors at the University of Jyväskylä and the visiting lecturer Prof. Raul Pertierra.

Empirical data was collected by two main methods; interviews and observations. I carried out six (6) individual interviews and one (1) group interview. I interviewed two NFA leaders, two NGOs activists from the NDF and two university professors. The informants

from the group interview were farmers-members of NFA and residents of Baan Pong Village in Chiang Mai Province[13].

Another set of data was gathered from informal conversational interview and observations carried out during eleven (11) occasions. When I used both methods I made detail and extensive fieldnotes. I made seven (7) field trips to seven different villages in Lamphun and Chiang Mai provinces, one (1) visit to Lamphun Provincial Court, I followed and took part in one (1) demonstration and attended two (2) conference/seminars[14].

What follows in this section concerns the process of collecting and analysing empirical data. At this point, however, a clarification is needed. Through this study, it will be realized that most of the data mentioned here is not original, but it derives from previous studies' findings and theoretical conclusions. Primary data (the data collected through the observations, interviews and documents analysis carried out by me and explained here) has been used to; a) illustrate the current reality and some theoretical assumptions and to crosscheck some of the previous literature's findings; b) test, to some extent, and verify the validity and applicability of some of the theories presented here such as the moral economy, the localism discourse, the approaches to peasants and social movements and c) answer the third element of the research question analysing a specific rural social movement. Primary data is usually reported as short excerpts from interviews or reports of fieldtrips. The findings concerning the last sub-question of this research are presented in an explicative and descriptive manner in chapter seven.

4.4.1 Gaining access and ethical considerations

I chose to carry out the study in Thailand owing to my interest in land-related issues in another country besides Brazil, the need of studies on rural transition in mid-income countries and due to my internship opportunity to carry out data analysis and field research.

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[13] See appendix 1.
[14] See appendix 2.

From July to December 2005 I was an intern with the international NGO Focus on the Global South in its office in Bangkok, within Chulalongkorn University campus. There I was introduced to some workers who had contact with the farmers' group NFA. NFA, however, is an alliance present in the north region of the country. I visited some villagers during a short field trip in August. Afterwards I asked my supervisors to transfer me to the north region since data collection would be easier. Consequently, after two months in Bangkok I was placed in Chiang Mai City where during two months I carried out some office duties with NDF, translations and my research.

Access to informants and villages was mainly possible due to the strong linkages between NDF staff and NFA farmers. Mr. Piak (who, due to his knowledge of English and interest, became my interpreter) is a known and a dear activist of most of NFA leadership. Furthermore, he is extremely welcome and trusted by villagers in the region. This helped me to reduce the distrust from farmers and to 'break the ice' faster. The presence of Piak during the interviews and visit trip made me known for some villagers and NFA leaders. After few weeks people would come and greet me showing some signs of cooperation and trust. Some NFA leaders had been to Brazil during a trip organized by the social movement Brazilian Landless Workers' Movement. (MST) and others had taken part in different seminar in Thailand and in Southeast Asia. All this facilitated the relationship with me (as being a foreigner) and many showed sympathy for the fact that I am Brazilian.

All my informants were briefed of the objective of the interviews and were aware that their information was to be used in my master thesis. Before I sat down with the informant and my interpreter I made it clear that I always obtained informed consent from them. Furthermore, since most of the data from the informal conversation interviews do not represent information that might put informants 'in danger', and the interpreter always accompanied me, informants usually agreed to talk to me and were quite pleasant during the exercise.

All informants' names are fictional, but the professors. When interviewing the two professors I asked for permission to use the data and their personal information. They agreed. I believe, as expected, most of their impressions and insights are public known in Thailand society and it does not come as a surprise. NFA has many leaders, thus the use of some information on titles will not endanger the informants. The data from 'informal

conversational interview' coincided quite often. After I had talked to several people, all their answers started to look the same. This is why, when referring to some informants in the thesis I opted to use the term 'a farmer', 'a leader'. Thus, it makes impossible to identify the informant and still keeps the information valid since it is part of a collective construction and interpretation of the reality.

4.4.2 Analysing and validating the data

To analyse qualitative data is basically to make sense, to interpret and to understand what all the fieldnotes, the interviews and group discussions reports mean. Most of my data was analysed after the process of data collection, the fieldwork period and during the process of writing this thesis. Nevertheless, there was a continuous process of questioning and making an attempt to understand the data as soon as it was collected. I also carried out post interviews and post visits data analysis –usually at night and at home -, followed by written commentaries and questions which were discussed and clarified with my interpreter, the farmers and with some NGO workers. Moreover, I tried to understand the underlying meaning of answers and comments of respondents referring to existing studies on the area and the literature.

To better understand my data I followed the following process; first, I typed and/ or printed my interviews and observations reports, collected documents and academic articles. Then I read all of them, reread some and made notes. After that I started the writing process where the existing literature and some theoretical background were my point of departure. Then when answering my research questions I went through my theoretical and empirical data searching for examples, ideas and statements that would support and challenge my arguments in my analysis. This, however, was only possible after I codified my data based on codes created from the research questions and its subheadings. Finally, all relevant data was selected and used on the analysis chapters.

Validating qualitative data is different from quantitative data analysis process. Different from the latter, the former is not all about reliability –"examining stability or consistency of responses"- and generalizability –"the external validity of applying results to new settings, people, or samples". What is important, then, is whether the final conclusions

correspond to the views of the researcher, the participant or the reader of the final report, study or thesis. On this the literature presents different and at times conflicting and debated terms such as credibility and trustworthiness (Creswell, 2003: 195-7).

As suggested by Laws et al. (2003: chapter 20) when analysing the data I tried to avoid presenting my own judgements in it and generalising my findings or claiming that my data prove something. I have also tried to gain a holistic view of the issues looking for all possible explanations and to refer to other studies' findings that could strength my discussions.

Borrowing Creswell (2003: 195-97) suggestions I have chosen three strategies to better analyse the accuracy of the findings. I used methods triangulation and triangulation of sources comparing and challenging my interview and observation data with existent data from documents and previous studies. The data from respondents were also counter-checked and challenged by successive respondents. I opted to give the reader a long and rich description of Thai history and personal impressions of people's feelings so that he could feel closer to the reality. Finally I made an attempt to clarify to the reader that I, as a researcher, am not free of unintentional bias or preconceptions that might have manifested during the fieldwork and data collection.

4.5 The fieldwork self-reflections and difficulties found

The accuracy of the findings and my interpretations of the data are directly influenced by my historical and socio-cultural background. Unintentionally or intentionally I carried with me pre-conceptions and pre-judgements of all the issues the research dealt with. I am aware of this reality and for a better 'trustworthiness' of the study as a whole the reader must, as well, be conscious of this natural setback of all qualitative and human-being driven research processes.

Working with an interpreter was challenging but rewarding. During all the interviews (but the ones with the university professors) and the field visits I followed my interpreter rather than he followed me. At times I had all the freedom to enquiry and question everything. In other occasions I merely followed him to different appointments. I usually had a previous

knowledge of the situation and the context of the event. I also had a post-event summary and updating with the interpreter. Unfortunately, during the event per se I could follow very little. The interpreter –since he was one influential NGO activist within the farmers' movement –was always taking active part in all the events. At times, I got help from other NGO workers who could communicate in English and explain to me 'what was going on'.

The translation and interpretation of farmers' answers to my questions by the interpreter may not be totally impartial and free of bias. This is to say that at the same time the researcher has his background that influence the whole research process, the interpreter has his own. The fact that the interpreter is an active member of similar farmers' group and has a good relationship with NFA may contribute negatively to the neutrality of the data. I try to overcome this setback insisting on the trustworthiness of the translation and searching for similar studies in the same region done by other scholars. The works of Yuki Myake, Jonathan Rigg, Maniemai Thongyou and Anchalee Singhanetra-Renard were very useful to accomplish this task.

Though I had several opportunities to spend time with farmers, these encounters were not as fruitful as I had expected. First my lack of language skills isolated me from the topics and the action. Second, they usually took part after a full day of work and farmers were not eager to talk about problems, land-related or agricultural-related issues, but they wanted to have a good free time with their friends. Third, even though, some of them would be eager to talk about the issues of this study, I had to rely on the eagerness and promptness of my translator to work extra hours. This, however, does not invalidate my data originated from the interviews. When bearing in mind the setbacks I encountered during my fieldwork, my difficulties with the language and culture, the data can still be very useful and effective to answer my research questions. It illustrates personal experiences and views of different actors within the processes of rural and land structure transformation in northern Thailand.

Facilitating the group interview, the participation of all and the commitment to the exercise (though I had some previous experience) were challenging tasks. First, there was no prior preparation for the activity since the opportunity to talk to the group happened suddenly, the existent questions were prepared for one-to-one interview, there was (understandable) lack of participation due to the non-appropriateness of time and place and finally it was gender-exclusive. Nevertheless, important data was collected such as useful comments and

testimonials. The experience was in itself an interesting opportunity to get insights into power and gender relations structures of the farmers' movement and of rural Thailand.

5. THE LAND QUESTION IN THAILAND AFTER THE WWII

To better understand the changes on land issues, and to be able to draw a comparative line, one must first look at the former patterns. In Thailand, as elsewhere in Asia, the land frontier expanded faster than the population growth. This smallholder peasant society, up to the industrialization process beginning in the 1960s, constituted nearly 80 per cent of the country's population (Baker & Pasuk, 2005: chapter 4).

The first Land Code in Thailand, introduced by King Rama V (*Chulalongkorn)* in 1901, granted full property rights based on survey and title deeds (Miyake, 2003: 11). The 1901 Code also established the Department of Lands (DOL) (Burns, 2004:2). This fostered a tendency to landlordism, which was protested against by settlers who ignored the recent land law and had occupancy/ usufruct rights. King Chulalongkorn puts an end to the conflicts and to the landed nobility when he authorizes government officials to allocate land (closed to canal projects) to peasant families.

Peasant colonization increased in the late 1880s when individuals were escaping from labour bondage. Instead of being granted property titles, these new settlers –moving away from the canal areas –were encouraged to *jap jong*: "stake a claim to empty land, and gain a certificate of occupancy right as long as they brought the land into cultivation" (Baker & Pasuk, 2005: 84). Hence, one could trace the idea of use rights back to the time of *jap jong*.

Yuuki Miyake (2003: 6-13) puts forward a similar explanation for communal rights in Northern Thailand. According to her, villagers would clean unused land and from the moment they started using it they acquired usufruct rights. These rights were recognised by the community and they would be valid as long as the villagers continued to use the land. Land transfers were based on matrilineal regimes where land would be inherited from mothers to daughters whilst mobile properties (cows, bulls, tools and money) would be inherited by sons. Men after marring would join the wife and live in her parent's household (Singhanetra-Renard, 1999: 70).

New railway expansion (to the north, east and northeast regions) in the 1900-1930s period contributed to a new expansion of the land frontier. Landlords started to control the areas around the railway pushing the small peasants further north, everywhere in the middle

plateau and to the hills north of Chiang Mai region. This contributed to the new political organisation of peasants in small villages. Once smallholder peasants decided to settle down in certain areas they built religious temples. The religiosity of the villagers contributed to a strong sense of community and unity. Rice was the main crop. Trade was limited and villagers were, relatively, self-independent. Productivity was low but, since land was not a problem at that time, yield per person was the highest in the Asian region. Production was family-based and exchanging labour was common during harvesting and house building activities. There was no strong gender division of labour; women and men worked the land equally (Baker & Pasuk, 2005: 85-6).

5.1 Changes on land tenure systems, use and ownership of land

5.1.1Land expansion and land fragmentation

The free expansion of the land frontier could no longer happen without constraints and possible conflicts during the mid and late twentieth century due to population growth and its concentration in rural areas. In 1975 Thailand had 41.3 million habitants jumping to 61.6 million in 2001. Urban population was still low, 15.1% in 1975 and 20% in 2001 and this does not tend to change drastically in the coming years. Finally, total fertility rate per woman was very high amounting to 5.0 children per woman in 1975[15].

Different waves of settlement took place in the 1950s to 1970s period. These new settlements were composed of different kin and regional groups with little in common among themselves. They were no longer self-reliant and agricultural production depended heavily on insecticides, fertilizers and a good access to markets. Local elites were formed around owners of means of transport, local traders and moneylenders. Political positions (for instance the head of the village: the Kamnan) were important to maintain power relations unequal and to support illegal logging activities, land grabbing and unfavourable trade practices with local producers (Baker & Pasuk, 2005: 158-9).

The green revolution did not break the smallholder society apart. According to Baker & *Pasuk* (2005: 159-162) technological advancements reached the small farmers as much as

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[15] UNDP, Human Development Report 2003, Table 05: Demographic trends, pp.250-53.

the large ones. Yet, facing constant pressure on land, the farm size reduced from an average of 25 *rai* to 19 *rai*[16]. The possible negative consequences of this process were minimized by technology and the possibility of renting land. Small farmers did not stop to exist but now they had become market-oriented farmers and dependent on the market, rented land and wage labour.

The increase diminishment of farm size has been accompanied by a new system of land inheritance. Nowadays, sons and daughters equally inherit land. Each child gets an equal share of the land. If the land inherited, however, is smaller than an optimal size, the siblings farm the area together and share the harvest. Another custom that has taken place is sui. Myake (2003: 7) explains the sui as a system where brother and sister trade land among themselves so that they can keep a minimum size to cover production costs. I believe this system has evolved as such owing to the new opportunities generated by modernization and new employment opportunities in off-farm activities. It is similar to a market-led land reform or negotiated land reform principle. Here the willing-seller (a brother who is moving to an urban centre to work as construction worker) is selling his land to a willing-buyer (a sister who opts to stay and cultivate the land together with her husband and children).

5.1.2 Land market

The promotion of commercial tourism has strongly influenced the land structure and the economy of village communities in northern Thailand. This is true especially for those villages near to Chiang Mai City. Chiang Mai Province is know as the 'rose of the north' and has been promoted as a place to be in contact with nature, to carry out radical sports, to taste the exotic northern cosine and to enjoy the company of the friendly Thai hill tribe people and of the Thai women[17]. This policy was followed by widening and modernisation of major roads, increase in the numbers of shops, restaurants, hotels, guesthouses, service facilities and entertainment establishments to care for the new tourists (Singhanetra-Renard, 1999: 76-7).

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[16] Conversions: 1 rai = 0.16 hectare, 1 hectare = 6.26 rai. (Myake, 2003: xiii). One hectare is a unit of surface that equals 10,000 square metres.

[17] The sex-industry is an important component of the Thai tourism economy. Chiang Mai concentrates a large number of massage houses, karaoke clubs and brothels.

All this pressure for the establishment of new infrastructure and tourist attractions helped to enhance the value of land. Since the village studied by Singhanetra-Renard (1999) had a privileged location at the foot of the Doi Suthep sacred mountain, the housing estate market was eager to purchase land as well. Villagers started to sell their rice fields to local elites, companies from Bangkok and land developers. The process started in the mid 1980s and by 1993 the last rice field was sold. When, suddenly, their inadequate land plot value increased considerably, they sold it. By that time, mid and late 1980s, most of the villagers were already working in the cities and used the money to guarantee education for their children and to acquire luxuries to improve their lives. After two generations of land transfer, land size was not enough to guarantee self-sufficient agriculture anymore (78).

Rigg & Ritchie (2002: 364-5) seem to assent to Singhanetra-Renard's argument. They affirm that house stating had increased land prizes sharply around Bangkok and Chiang Mai. Farmers could not refuse the offers and they either bought new agricultural land in more peripheral areas or stayed and found non-farm work. They continue explaining that many villagers perceive the decline of occupation in agriculture as something positive. In the same way many see agriculture as economically not sound (due to very low returns) and as an activity of low status.

At times land sales from small farmers to larger groups or to companies do not happen fairly. For instance, in the east region of Thailand a paper mill company has purchased land on the surroundings of a local community and now it "almost completely encircle the village" transforming the villagers livelihoods. The villagers argue that access to irrigation water and road were, occasionally, blocked by the company operations. According to them the presence of the company and a high level of indebtedness fostered the sale of land in the region (Barney, 2004: 329-331). Barney further maintains that, in the region a sound land ownership facilitated land commercialisation.

According to one representative of the National Human Rights Commission there have been cases of illegal transfer of communal land from village headmen to individuals or external groups. He explains that the 1997 Constitution delegates great amount of decision-power to the local people when concerning the management of their communal land. Village headmen usually have the final word, but all decisions concerning land transfers

have to be decided based on consensus after consultation with villagers[18]. Yet in some cases headmen give consent without public consultation. Thus, he is violating the constitution. This is a case where communal land, sold away by the village headman, can be claimed back (Field trip 10, appendix 2).

5.1.3 Commodity shifts

Longan is a small juicy and sweet fruit that is mainly growing in Northern Thailand in the Lamphun Province. It is consumed nationally but it is also exported to a growing international market such as China and Japan. In this province land was scarce in the mid 1980s and new villages were set up between rice fields and other villages. In the same period The Bank for Agriculture and Agricultural Cooperatives (BAAC) promoted the shift from rice fields and vegetables gardens to Longan fruit orchards. The fruit orchards demand a rather small number of workers and use a large area previously used to grow rice. The process, which is totally finished today, left many farmers who rented land or worked as wage labourer unemployed and lacking access to food security (Myake, 2003: 91-94) .

Pulp and Paper companies have moved to developing countries searching for large areas where eucalyptus trees can be planted. When the RFD (Royal Forest Department) in the 1981 started a program to give temporary usufruct rights to those communities living in already 'degraded' forest reserve, these communities saw a constant expansion of eucalyptus plantations on a contradictory move of the RFD in an attempt to reforest these areas. Hence, communities have fought against displacement and eviction caused, directly or indirectly, by the introduction in the country of the tree plantations. Yet, once protest emerged against large-scale concessions to plantations groups in Thailand, mill companies had to rely on "contract eucalyptus farming arrangements". In this scheme, small-scale farmers use their land to plant eucalyptus and then sell their logs to the nearby woodchip, pulp and paper producer (Barney, 2004).

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[18] Any public land –communal land – which a company or an individual has an interest in purchasing, has to be announced to the villagers (by posters, banners, radio etc) at least thirty days before the decision day. During this time villagers should come together and say if they oppose it or not. If they don't oppose it, it is understood that the transaction can be concluded. (This information was gathered from talks with my interpreter and co-workers at Focus on the Global South).

From 1994 to the financial crisis period of 1997 the Royal Forest Department and the BAAC supported this shift through free supply of seeds, fertilisers and soft loans. A rough estimative puts the total number of eucalyptus farmers in Thailand in 30,000. Due to removal of government supports, excessive supply and a need for cash during the crisis the price of log fell dramatically. This was followed by a process of 'disenchantment' leading many farmers in *Khon Kaen* Province (in the Northeast region) to shift from eucalyptus to other cash crops (ibid: 331).

Thai farmers, responding to a high demand of protein-rich fodder for European livestock, started to shift their paddy fields into cassava during the 1970s and 1980s. Political disputes, however, led the European Union to impose trade barriers on the Thai cassava. Then new shifts occurred during the 1980s when farmers started to export commodities such as frozen shrimps and vegetables (Buch-Hansen, 2003: 328).

5.1.4 Land and the environment

The management of logging concessions and the extract of forest products have been under the responsibility of the RFD. Poor institutional capacity, bad management practices, institutional setbacks accompanied by population growth and agricultural expansion have caused forest degradation, important loss of biodiversity and inadequate watersheds (Neef et al., 2003: 334).

Rigg & Ritchie (2002: 364-5) explain that the construction of huge ring roads, and the acquisition of land plots near main roads have displaced rice fields in the Chiang Mai City region. Roads have disrupted the "natural flow of water across the fields in the rainy season" contributing to the high incidence of flooding in the remaining fields. The expansion of the housing estate market and the relocation of industries to rural areas have altered patters of drainage and "increased the discharge of effluent into water courses", which are used to irrigate the fields and by the fishponds. Furthermore, idle land, purchased for speculative reasons, can facilitate the reproduction of pests.

As Neef et al. (2003) discuss, rural poverty is constantly pushing agriculture onto marginal and forestland (329). Forest degradation is still at high levels, "shortening of fallow periods

has depleted soil fertility and degraded natural resources" and the forest-to-people ratio in Thailand has reached a critical level with a predictable worse figure in the future (330).

The shortening of fallow period as well the increased use of water and irrigation schemes is directly linked to the shifts of crops and the intensification of agricultural activities. Areas where there was a single crop a year have had two to three crops yearly, have used more chemical products and increased the consumption of water. The relocation of industries to rural communities and also the emergence of new agricultural enterprises have contributed to environmental degradation in Thailand.

As Mr. Piak reveals, in 2002 Baan Pong Village faced a serious environmental threat. A building company proposed the village a plan to extract sand from the bottom of the river, which would be used in construction sites. Using an environmental discourse the village managed to convince the company to give up its original plan. Today (as for the second semester of 2005) the new threat is the expansion of chicken farms in the region. Charoen Pokphand (C.P.) is the biggest food manufacturer company in Thailand producing and selling vegetables, chicken, shrimps, grains and managing supermarkets and convenience shops. In the region, C.P. keeps several chicken farms and has proposed the village to host the construction of two more factories. After a meeting with the village representatives, the people couldn't come to a final decision. One of the main arguments against it is the bad smell, the increase in the quantity of flies and the water pollution caused by the factories (Field trip 4, appendix 2).

Mr. Kop, one of the leaders of the NFA in Baan Pong village is also a volunteer with the Department of Land Development under the Ministry of Agriculture. He has a task of – through banners and meetings with farmers – publicizing and explaining the use of natural compost, organic vegetables farming and sustainable techniques. However, as he explains it, in his own plot he uses chemical fertilizer, which is sprayed over the products. Chemical products guarantee one to two more harvests during the year. It seems clear that without economic incentives or a very clear discourse of the dangers of chemical products to the consumer and farmers' health, sustainable and environmentally friend agricultural techniques will not take place (Field trip 4, appendix 2).

5.2 Government policies on Land

5.2.1 The Land Code of 1954

Contrary to communal land use, individual land ownership ideas were slowly being introduced into the kingdom. According to Myake (2003: 11-12)[19], following diverse sources, the 1954 Land code distinguished three different pattern of land holding plus one more document. The Form Reporting Land Occupation (SK1) indicated that the land claimer had used the land prior to 1954 but did not possess any other land document. Pre-emptive certificate (or NS2) allowed temporary use of the land, Certificate of Utilization (or NS3) indicated that land had being put to use and finally the Land Title Deed (or NS4) that gave full right ownership to the user. The code imposed a 180-day period so that all land dwellers could register their land. Those who failed would be considered as occupying 'unoccupied land'. The first document farmers received was the SK1 which was revoked in 1967 since did not give any rights to farmers. In 1978 the government started to map some of the land using aerial photographs. Based on the photographs new land documents (NS3 K) were issued. The NS3 K, however, had the same legal status as the previous NS3.

This effort to legalize land ownership did not happen without criticism and faults. The survey capacity of the government was weak, farmers kept their SK1 for years even after it had been invalidated and there was a lack of coordination among different ministries and departments responsible to carry out the 1954 Land Code (Myake, 2003: 18-19).

As had happened in the early expansion phase, in the beginning of the 20th century, the government did not expand land-titling program to new comers neither to those who had lived in their land for many decades. Very few of them had full titles but had an occupancy certificate. In 1964 the government, concerned with the forest destruction, started to map areas that would be forbidden for human settlement and approved the National Forest Reserve Act. Following this new resolution, millions of Thai farmers and forest dwellers became illegal tenants, squatters who would have to move away from these areas (Baker & Pasuk, 2005: 159).

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[19] See also Giné, X. (2005) and Neef, et al. (2003).

5.2.2 The 1975 Agricultural Land Reform Act

The enactment of the Land Reform Act was, to some extent, consequence of the political effervescence of the early 1970s period and the pressure exercised by farmers' organisation. The act follows the Land Rent Control Act of 1974.

The main objective of the Act was to allocate land (either State Land or land purchased or expropriated from private owners who do not themselves cultivated it) to farmers who owned no land or had too small plots to guarantee their survival and to farmers' institutions "on a hire-purchase, leasehold or usufruct basis" (Section 4). The document notes that the main reason for the promulgation of the Act was that farmers were facing loss of land ownership rights and an increase in tenancy. There were soil degradation and low agricultural yield. Finally this structure held farmers back in unprivileged and marginalized positions causing political and social unrest in the country (Satutum, 1994).

Thailand's government land reform aims to guarantee land ownership to those living in public land, revert the process of land loss, and secure fair leasing agreements between tenants and lenders. Besides these structural changes, it aims to reform the production structure reaching optimal farm size, stopping land fragmentation and improving production. The supporting services structure reforms seek to assure the access and the existence of these services (socio-economic infrastructure like hospitals, roads, schools, training etc) reducing poverty and improving people's lives (Chirapanda, 2000: 12).

The Act established the Agricultural Land Reform Office (ALRO) under the tutelage of the Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives, the Agricultural Land Reform Fund and Provincial Land Reform Office. The last, were to be established following the designation of a Land Reform Area in a given province. A Land Reform Area designation ought to be followed by the setting up of a Provincial Land Reform Committee as well.

The number of landless farmers, farmers with very small plots and the number of farmers who rented land were criteria to define a land reform area. The ALRO had power to revoke *domaine public* and national reserved forest status of any given land that had become Land Reform Area. The Act also established the ceiling for land holding in 50 Rai (8 ha) but also introduced many exceptions to this rule. According to Section 39, land

acquired through the agricultural land reform could not be divided and could not be transferred to others than statutory heirs, a farmer institution or the ALRO (Satutum, 1994).

5.2.3 The 1984 Land Titling Program

In 1982 population in Thailand had grown considerably and the economy was keeping a high level of growth placing huge pressures on land resources. Studies from the National Social and Economic Development Plan (NSEDP, 1981-1985) estimated that 49% of 23.7 million ha of agricultural land did not have title deeds and that 21% of the area was illegally occupied forest land. The Department of Lands (DOL), then, started to design a 20-year program to issue titles to all eligible landholders. The plan was divided in five-year phases. The government of Thailand obtained support from the World Bank and the Australian Government to carry out the first phase of the program that started in late 1984. The financial support from the World Bank was used; a) to improve the capacity of the DOL to survey and map land, b) to build up systematic registration procedures, c) in the construction of new branch provincial land offices, d) in IT planning, e) in human resources management and to improve service delivery capacity (Burns, 2004).

The central objectives of the program were to award title deeds (NS4) to eligible landowners with preliminary documents such as NS2 or NS1 or to those without any documentation at all and to convert existing Certificate of Utilization (NS3 or NSK3) into full ownership documents (NS4) (Giné, 2005: 6).

Systematic registration could not take place in land reform areas or forestland and uncertain forest boundaries areas. All full ownership documents issued by LTP had to be located in non-forest areas. Field activity aiming to carry out registration was beforehand communicated to Province, District and sub-District Land Offices. Most of the systematic registrations were undertaken with the presence of the Village Head and the landholder. No documents were issued over a disputed plot. By the end of September 2001 the Land Titling Program (LTP) had issued 8.51 million titles over about 4.87 million ha (Burns, 2004; Giné, 2005: 6).

What are the benefits, if any, of the LTP? For the World Bank and government personal the program had increased the value of titled land; farmers with titled land had more and cheaper access to institutional credit; land transactions increased; farm inputs such as seeds and chemical fertilizers increased for titled land and productivity grew in titled land (Burns, 2004). For many NGO activists, grassroots groups and scholars, the LTP did not recognize communal land and common property resources; it increased landlessness and helped to concentrate land into the hands of the wealthy (Neef et al., 2003: 333).

The land title allocation schemes did not cover areas that were declared forest reserves. Yet, as argued by Neef et al. (ibid) most of land acquisition took place within these areas. The program did not deal with sensitive land and forest tenure systems. That is to say that the program, though it covered a large area, left out many families and it did not make an attempt to regularize land ownership or to solve land disputes in those areas considered forest reserves.

5.2.4 Today's land reform situation and Land Policies

The 1954 Land Code and the Land Reform Act are still in effect today. Presently Land is classified either into private land or public or government land. National parks, forests and land reform areas are all covered by government land classification (Giné, 2005: 4).

Development economics have always defended secure land tenure systems and strict property rights over land. Once this is assured to farmers they have better chances to succeed and improve land productivity. This is so owing to the freedom to use the land as collateral for accessing credit that, supposedly, is used to improve agricultural production and to acquire new technologies. Furthermore land property rights allow farmers to improve the allocation of resources and trade their land. Nonetheless, as Fan & Chan-Kang (2005: 143) explain, grassroots groups, farmers' association, NGOs activists and scholars have argued that individual property rights may facilitate the concentration of land ownership leading to landlessness and (because farmers lack a social safety net in urban areas), consequently, to poverty.

Land reform in Thailand had achieved very little redistribution of land or any attempt to correct land concentration or speculation. As shown in table 4, the mass of land allocated under the government reform comes from public land; basically, legalizing squatters who live in encroached forests or in reserved areas (Guiné, 2005: 10).

Table 4

Land Reform Areas and Beneficiaries: 1975-2003

Public Land				Private Land		
	A. Decl	A. Alloc	N. Benef	A. Decl	A. Alloc	N. Benef
North	2,364.8	845.8	377,250	26.6	25.5	8,400
North East	4,553.3	2,054.4	794,581	1.9	1.4	756
Central	1,423.7	491.2	150,156	48.9	47.2	20,148
South	1,219.3	377.2	157,019	0.3	0.2	107
Whole Kingdom	9,561.1	3,768.6	1,479,006	77.6	74.3	29,411

Source: Based on Guiné, 2005 page 31. Original data from ALRO and Xavier Guiné calculations.

Note: Area Declared (A. Decl) is total area declared as Reform Area in 1,000 hectares. Area Allocated (A. Alloc) is actual land allocated to date in 1,000 hectares. Number of Beneficiaries (N. Benef) are individuals.

According to Guiné (2005: 26), some of the government land policies have awarded partial rights to landholders. These policies, instead of bringing benefits to farmers, may increase land insecurity distorting land markets. RFD and ALRO allocated land must allow landholders to lease their land.

Other signs that the government land reform programme has not been effective to distribute land productively and reduce poverty are the quantity of land which lies wasted – some 3,200,000 hectares –and the number of landless or nearly landless farming families – around 1,5 million (Leonard & Manahan, 2004: 4).

The government carried out some land distribution in Phae Tai Village in Lamphun Province. According to Mr Piak, the government program failed to achieve its goals and improve farmers' situation in the area. This is so due to the very small size of the plot awarded per family (around 3 rais or half a hectare) and to the poor quality of soil. Beneficiary families tried to cultivate and invest in the land for two years, but in the end the farmers sold the land (Field trip 1, appendix 2).

Another example of the inefficiency of the land reform program has taken place in Baan Pong Ru Village in Lamphun Province. As one local NFA leader explains, some plots close to the village were defined as Land Reform Areas by the ALRO. Through a process of corruption and favouritism the land was transferred to 'the rich people'. The incapacity of the government office to fulfil its promise and to advance land redistribution among the needed, together with the fact that the land was laying wasted and suffering constant fires, encouraged local farmers to occupy the land and use it (Field trip 7, appendix 2).

5.3 Land Conflicts

Most of the recent land conflicts in Northern Thailand are connected to landlessness and the presence of idle land. A straightforward and short explanation of the process starts with the Land Titling program of 1985. After that many farmers ended up selling their land or losing it to banks after not paying their loans. Then, business elite from urban areas and large farmers acquired these lands either to invest in tourism or, most of the time, for speculative reasons. As the economy boomed in the 1986-1996 decade more money was lend to these enterprisers and more land was used as collateral. When the economic crisis hit the country in 1997, many business people went bankrupt. Banks and credit companies expropriated most of these lands, used as collateral. Thus, farmers, coming back from the cities where the economy crisis left millions unemployed, faced a situation of unemployment, food insecurity and lack of land. Yet, land scarcity was not a problem. There was plenty of idle and abandoned land everywhere in the region. Then it is in the aftermath of the 1997 economic crisis that land occupations increased, farmers' organisations started to be formed and the conflicts intensified.

According to Leonard & Narintakkrakul Na Ayutthaya[20] (referred to by Neef et al., 2003) the Lamphun Province was one of the most important places where the land-titling program took place. During the first years of 1990 vast areas were titled and transferred to individuals. Most of this land was communal land and during the process communities were not informed. The new landowners started to fence their property which was left idle up to today, either due to the economic crisis or because the land has been purchased for speculative reasons. Local farmers started to occupy land in late 1997 and converted idle land into fruit orchards. Since 2002 some of the land occupation movement's leaders have been arrested and one activist was shot dead. Police repression has also led to the destruction of crops and some infrastructure built within the occupied areas.

Myake (2003) studied some of these areas that were occupied by NFA in *Lamphun* Province. According to her (54-66) there were different cases of land contestation in the region; a) contest for the use rights of vacant land, b) contest for the unfair and illegal selling of communal land, c) contest for the *de facto* rights against the *de jure* rights and finally d) contest for land reform plots. Different contestation has led to different patterns of conflicts. These conflicts may have different opponent groups, level of violence and confrontation and different tactics. Yet, they all share the idea that there had been some injustices and lack of cultural and political competence from the government to carry out the Land Titling program and the Agricultural Land Reform Program as well.

A local power imbalance is an important element that has contributed to land conflicts in the region. When communal land was sold and villagers were socially convinced to sell their land, two central figures played a fundamental role: the village headmen and the *Kammans* (the head of the sub-district). Functioning as mediators during the land transfers, these men exercised their power based on knowledge, access to market and outside-the-village communities and authority to their own benefit. They quite often transferred communal land (without villagers knowledge) and pocketed the profit of it and sold national reserved forest in the same way. They would, as well, cheat villagers by buying land under the market prices and selling it on large profits to outsiders. By the time ordinary farmers had access to proper information on land value, government rules and

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[20] Leonard, R, K. Narintakrakul Na Ayuttaya. (2002) 'Taking land from the poor, giving land to the rich', *Watershed*, 8 (2), 14-25.

programs, technologies and procedures it was too late. Most of the land was already gone (Myake, 2003: 77-81). This has led to the fragmentation of village unity and distrust among villagers.

According to some authors (Anan Ganjanapan, 2000; Neef et al, 2003; Interview 4), most of the conflicts in modern rural Thailand are over natural resources. Government policies may also foster conflict through lack of planning and consultation. Since mid 1970s the Thai government has sought a strong policy to tackle down opium cultivation at the highland tribes. One option given to those villagers was the growing of vegetables. Vegetables are very profitable since they can be harvested around 4 times per year. However, vegetables crop require a large area of land and use large quantities of water. Moreover, to guarantee the three-four yearly harvests the farmers need to use chemical fertilizers. Once the lowland people use the same water that comes from the watershed uphill, the conflict is unavoidable. Lowland people complain against the pollution of the water and the land grabbing carried out by hill tribes.

5.4 Farmers' problems

5.4.1 Landlessness

Of Thailand's 5.5 million farm households, one third lacks enough land to guarantee their livelihoods. In the northern region, the size of family owned land is enough to guarantee food security for only 50% of the families. Half a million families are declared landless[21].

As noticed by some scholars (Miyake, 2003; Ritchie, 1996[22]) there has been in the last 10-20 years a transition from small-scale farmers to wage labourers. This economic shift has held landlessness as the responsible factor. Without land and income from agriculture, these individuals are forced into an informal market, usually, characterised by low and unstable wage labour.

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[21]Land Institute Foundation, 2000, Complete report of the project to study land holdings, land utilisation, economic mechanisms and laws for optimally efficient land use. Bangkok, National Research Office, referred to in Neef et al, 2003: 331.

[22] Ritchie, M A. (1996) *From Peasant Farmers to Construction Workers: The Breaking Down of the Boundaries Between Agrarian and Urban Life in Northern Thailand, 1974-199.* Ph.D. dissertation, University of California at Berkeley.

Landlessness is always referred to when farmers are to justify the land occupations. As explained by Mr Daeng, the process of landlessness around Baan Pong Village goes back some 25 years. The men and women who are now occupying idle land used to live with their parents in their lands. They used to raise cattle, plant rice and beans. In 1982 production was very low as well as the price of commodities. Without a chance of making a profit and without support from the government, most of the farmers decided to sell their land. Families kept living in the village and found jobs in nearby shops, construction sites or within intensive agriculture companies. After the 1997 financial crisis, many farmers found themselves unemployed and getting poorer. Since most of them did not have any land and were witnessing a large quantity of land being left idle, they decided to 'use it productively' (Interview 2, appendix 1).

Myake (2003: 77-81) draws an interesting argument on the consequences of the LTP of 1984. She argues that some villagers, who had just sold their land or used it as collateral to get loans, ended up investing the capital in non-agricultural related activities. Farmers either arranged overseas jobs or purchased a car and entered into the taxi business. Some of these investments did not bring the expected financial benefits and, as a result, led to the non-payment of loans and to further loss of land.

This very fact may justify the theory that farmers are rational actors and used the opportunity open to them to improve their income. Contrary to the idea of farmers being rational and conscious actors, localism discourse supporters believe that farmers were fooled and convinced to sell their land –sometimes by force –to city elites. Yet, farmers' groups and grassroots organisations seldom ask farmers the reasons that led them to sell their lands. In the same way it is important to ask whether these families are coping well without land and engaged in other economic activities but agriculture or they are landless and poor (landlessness does not always mean poverty).

The landless farmer, who now relies on the market to access foodstuff such as rice, vegetables and meet, is a vulnerable individual. The insecurity of the informal market and various non-farm activities may give farmers many opportunities but, at the same time, might contribute to their poverty at certain periods. The low income has direct impacts on the capacity of saving of these new wage labourers. No savings imply that, once they face

a situation of unemployment or extra expenditure, they have to cut expenses from somewhere, this, as a result, contributes to food insecurity, decline on health standards and at times the withdrawal of children from schools.

The large number of government acts, policies and programs to improve the land question in Thailand (and their lack of coordination) makes difficult to correctly assess the number of landless families in the country. For instance, as Prof. Praphat Pintoptaeng presumes: "According to the latest data I know there are approximately 1.5 million households landless or nearly-landless –those who hold land from 1-5 rai in size. Most of these families have access to land. The access, however, is unsafe and illegal. They usually occupy forests which is forbidden by the government" (Interview 3, appendix 1). Naturally, there is always a risk that government officials and civil society organisations are not using the same data.

5.4.2 Indebtedness

For most of the farmers in the northern regions of Thailand, their debt problems initiated during the mid 1980s when BAAC encouraged the shift and the increase in production. Money, through loans, was made available so that farmers could buy fertilizers, pesticides and machines to use in the new longan fruit orchards. The benefits were not harvest by all. Those with poor harvest, had to borrow more money next year and in the following year. Once indebted, even when the production was high, constant declining on the commodity prices and increase of expenditures let these small-scale farmers into a snowball-like debt chain.

As Mr. Piak has explained debt is not only a 'privilege' of farmers but also "the whole society stands upon a complicated net of borrowing and lending money". After farming families have borrowed and invested money, if the commodity price is low or the harvest is low (or both at the same time), producers cannot pay their debt and end up borrowing from a second source to pay the first, then from a third to pay the first and the second and successively. Government initiatives, even involuntarily, contributes to the situation by offering new loans and credit lines without strict control on the use of it. It is worth to quote in full Piak's perception of the debt net:

The complicated net is at risk of rupturing if one of the links is interrupted or cut off. And this could happen, for example, if farmers lose their land used as collateral on loans given away by the BAAC (Bank of Agriculture and Agricultural Cooperatives). The bank usually, however, does not take the land away from the farmers since it depends on the farmers' income [used to pay the loans]. Thus, the bank negotiates the debt and expands the time for payment. Once more the net is expanded and gets more complicated (Interview 5, appendix 1).

The constant use of agricultural chemicals has made the trees dependent on them. Some of the farmers I talked to in Lamphun Province[23] -and also following data from Myake (2003) –argued that the trees no longer bear fruits without fertilizers. This has increased farmers' dependence and investments on inputs, and for many meaning new loans. Finally, one can find the explanation of the declining prices on the supply and demand theory. The shift towards longan trees was nearly carried out by all farmers in the region. Every year there has been a large supply and an inelastic demand. It is true, however, that the demand has increased with the introduction of the production into the Chinese market. But, if this fact is followed by an increase in the number of new producers, price will be constantly low. It is here (in what I would call an imperfection of the market), that the farmers are demanding the intervention of the government in setting a minimum policy price both for fruits and grains. For instance, the government has kept the same price for rice in Thailand for more than twenty years (Leonard & Manahan, 2004: 12).

When looking at farmers' debt, one must go beyond the economic dimension. NGOs activists and farmers' group spokespersons have a simplistic view of it and also blame 'the market' 'the banks' or 'the government' for their debt. For instance Myake (2003: 116) argues that banks, seeking to make profit, loan money to the villages 'too easily' and 'this has resulted in the increase of non-profitable loans'. As far as I understand, it takes two parts to take part in a loan transaction. The bank lends money 'too easily' but farmers are also 'borrowing too easily'. Few carry out a reflexive rational analysis of the reasons for debt.

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[23] See appendix 2 for list of villages visited.

The modern Thai rural people (either farmer or engaged in non-farm activities) are rational actors, and following Popkins' (1980) ideas, they are also part of a political economy system. When an individual purchase goods and increase its expenses at a certain time when savings could happen, he does it consciously and aware of the consequences. He might, though, not want to believe in them. When Myake (2003: 101) interviewed a woman in 2002 over her temporary profit coming from a three-day labour in a fruit orchard, the interviewee stated that this money was seen as a kind of bonus. She was highly indebted from the purchase of a "Karaoke machine and some other electric appliances". She further stated that she bought them "because they were very popular in Thailand and most of her friends had them".

6. SOCIO-ECONOMIC, POLITICAL AND CULTURAL IMPLICATIONS FOR RURAL/FARMING COMMUNITIES

The second dimension of the research question of this study tries to analyse some further implications and consequences of the transformations that have taken place in Thailand after the II WW, especially those concerning the land question. One, however, must be aware that the socio-economic, political and cultural changes that occurred in the countryside in Thailand are of a sort of mutual adding factors relationship rather than clear causal relationships. It is difficult and perhaps wrong to affirm here what would be the direct implications and economic modifications caused by the changes seen in the previous analysis. Yet, this section tries out an attempt to look deeper into these changes, especially these concerning the economy of this rural society, the emergence of new social classes and some cultural changes.

6.1 Labour migration

Labour patterns of mobility are usually closely connected to economic activities. People migrate and commute in order to find employment or to improve their living standards. Migration in Thailand is not a new phenomenon but it was intensified after the WW II period. The development of industries and the services sector were fundamental to absorb surplus labour. Fan and Chan-Kang (2005: 144) note that in countries like Thailand, Japan and South Korea, during the period of economic boom, rural-urban migration brought about positive changes. The new migrant was able to find employment and improve his life, and for those who stayed in the countryside the land-to-labour ratio improved raising land productivity and farmers income.

Migratory movements, in the northern regions of Thailand, in the mid 1990s, were made easier since most households owned motorbikes, pick up trucks or even cars. Transport facilities were spread and mini buses would reach anywhere around urban centres[24].

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[24] This is so for the households that Singhanetra-Renard studied in Mae Sa Village in Chiang Mai Province in the early 1990s. Yet from my observations and visits I believe this can be seen as a generalization for the northern regions of the country.

In Mae Sa village, located some 13 km from Chiang Mai City, all the working population, but few local shopkeepers, travel to work. Their occupation varies from caddies and hotel staff in nearby tourist facilities, to service, factory work and construction sites employees in and nearby Chiang Mai City. "From being a centre of economic activity in the 1970s the village has now become a dormitory area" (Singhanetra-Renard, 1999: 81).

Analysing "gendered migrant social capital", Curran, et al. (2005: 231) notice that young migrant women would generally travel in groups when applying for factory jobs or when going to work in construction sites. They also argue that the gender aspect of migration may influence "the way care is provided to the elderly or children, or the redistribution of wealth (…) or investments (…)" (226-227). As shown before, land inheritance systems in Thailand usually privileges women. If they migrate, however, parents may shift preferences and transfer land to sons. If men migrate, households may abandon the cultivation of upland agricultural plots that often demand male labour.

Socio-economic changes are complex processes and causal relationships are not easily determined. For instance, on one hand the shifts in the national economy and government policies had influenced land use patterns and agricultural development, which, in turn had influenced labour migration. On the other hand, processes of labour migration and new rural non-farm economy have furthered impacted land use patterns, land inheritance systems and land policies. Both set of transformations are happening simultaneously and mutually influencing one another.

Rigg & Nattapoolwat (2001: 950) argue, for instance, that decision making in agricultural (whether to sell land or not, to shift commodities, to go 'global') has been strongly influenced by labour competition between agricultural and non-farm sectors in the 1970s–mid 1980s period. They affirm that the absorption of labour by non-farm sectors and the household decision to keep children longer at school helped farmers to shift from rice production to fruit orchards.

Rural-urban migration is not a process without problems and challenges. As the Thai economy shifts to a more modernized and highly technological production, there is a constant need for educated and technical labour. Primary and secondary education is not a

main concern, but soon, the new comers will have difficulties to find employment without a better education and further technical training.

6.2 New farming and non-farm activities

In some regions of Thailand small-scale farmers have given up their paddy fields and opted to work outside the agricultural sector or to adopt completely new systems of agriculture or other activities that are connected to land.

Already in the early 1980s, following the changes on land pattern, many villagers engaged in off-farm activities. According to Anan Ganjanapan (referred to in Myake, 2003: 96) people in San Pong Village in Chiang Mai Province were engaged in a large number of activities such as; house construction, woodcarving, and bamboo weaving for hats, knitting and shop keeping. He also argues that they would rarely return to agricultural work after being engaged in these activities.

Increasing production of traditional crops (in Thailand rice) may contribute negatively to the product price. Oversupply together with subsidies being practiced in developed countries force down the international prices of commodities such as rice, wheat, cotton etc. A solution to small-scale farmers might be to diversify their farming activities. During my visits to the villages I encountered several farmers who have opted to plant vegetables and fruits and had plans to cultivate flowers and initiate shrimp farmers. All of these products have better market prices than cash crops.

Several of the processes of land transformation and government policies on rice price and incentives have helped to push rural communities into the global agro-food system. This system, in the Tambon Thung Sadok sub-district, located some 25 km south from the northern Chiang Mai City, is represented by the production of fruits and vegetables, canning and the contract farming of rice. Contract farming of rice represents some 10% of all Riceland in the region that is used to produce a Japanese variety of rice (Rigg & Nattapoolwat, 2001: 950).

During my interview with Mr. Piak, he explained to me the main idea of contract farming. According to him, in simple terms, it happens when a farmer, or a group of farmers agree to produce exclusively to a certain buyer. Usually a family buys the seed, the machinery and the chemicals from large companies and has, in turn, secured a stable and regular market. The problem with this scheme is that farmers tend to get poorer slowly but surely since the price paid for the production has a tendency to decline harvest by harvest (Interview 5, appendix 1).

Processes of non-farm activities identified in modern Thailand may constitute what Start (2001: 1-2) describes as rural non-farm economy (RNFE). RNFE occupies a position somewhere between urban employment and smallholder agriculture. A diversification of livelihoods by rural people can connote two different processes. Either RNFE is a positive change showing that a "diversifying economy is a growing economy" and that it is a process of adaptation which guarantee savings for rural people or, contrastingly, it is a process of coping activities to minimize the distress caused by the decline of the smallholder agricultural sector.

When other initiatives for rural economic growth fail – investments in agriculture, exploitation of natural resources, use of skilled and/or cheap labour – rural people may be pushed into coping mechanisms and engage on RNFE. An increasing RNFE, however, does not always represent a positive development since more people engaged in RNFE may not represent higher output share (Start, 2001: 3-4). Although non-farm economic activities may represent, in the short term, some security and income, it can, in the longer term, increase vulnerability. This is so due to the accumulative vulnerability and risks involved in the new activities and also due to the reduction of time and resources invested in agriculture (7).

The diversification of rural economy is often translated into a multiplicity of livelihood activities. Part-time farming will be complemented by part-time employment either in rural settings or urban labour market or by part-time self-employment or in the informal sector (Start, 2001: 4).

Sub-contracting industries are spreading fast across developing countries due to its labour flexibility, low investment levels and high mobility possibilities. All this seeks to guarantee

competitiveness in the global market and capital returns to the companies. According to Maniemai, based on a Thailand Development Research Institute study, sub-contracting is:

> an industrial enterprise whereby one enterprise (the contractor) hires another enterprise (the sub-contractor) to produce parts, components, sub-assemblies or assemblies, the product which is marketed by the contractor. Sub-contracting can be done at different stages in the production process, such as in the processing, transformation or finishing of materials and parts (…). Sub-contracting can also be classified according to the type of sub-contractor. The sub-contractor could be a factory, villagers, or individuals who do the work at home (Maniemai, 2003: 6).

Maniemai (2003) analyses the fishnet sub-contracting industry in the north-eastern province of Khon Kaen. Looking at different processes she explains that home-based workers have an informal but strong relationship with their agents (the link between workers and the factory). Agents are usually their relatives and workers deal only with one agent. The majority of the sub-contractors are married women in the age group of 21-50 years old. They own small plots of paddy fields, more than 50% rely chiefly from the income generated from the work on fishnets and half of the home-based workers get no cash from agricultural activities.

Why many villagers engaged in sub-contracting activities? What are the benefits of home-based fishnet sub-contracting industries? Firstly, households usually own very small plots of land from which agricultural production is only enough for consumption. Secondly, usually no income is generated from agriculture or, if it is so, it is not sufficient to cover "household costs, the education of children, and even agricultural inputs". Investments are low and training –usually received from relatives or neighbours –is easy to acquire. Thirdly, home-based workers can stay at home and take care of their children and have a regular income (Maniemai, 2003: 12-13).

Studying villages within the Tambon Thung Sadok sub district, Rigg & Nattapoolwat (2001) come to similar conclusions. In the area 56% of the households are considered agricultural and 22% classified as labouring work in agriculture. Yet, 46.1% of households rely chiefly on non-farm income. It is the capacity of households to balance income generation activities between farm and non-farm sectors that guarantee a reasonable economic security. It is common to find families where its members are working in

different sectors of the economy and on different physical spaces. (948). Canning factory and artificial flower-making constitute the most important non-farm opportunities in the area, together with occupations in the transport and construction sector in Chiang Mai City and in factories near Lamphun area (951-2).

As Myake (2003: 101-105) explains, needlework has been an important income generation activity for landless women in the northern *Lamphun* Province. Similar to sub-contracting schemes, women usually receive 'raw' materials from middlepersons and are expected to make mats, shirts and trousers or to embroider dresses and shirts that are sold in shops or by street vendors in Chiang Mai City. Women either use manual work or sewing machines. There is no clear average age for this women's group. They might be young teenagers or 60-year-old ladies.

This example helps us to bring the 1997 economic crisis back to the analysis of the changes in employment and economic activities of rural people. It is the pushing factors such as urban unemployment, declining wages and insecurity that contributed to a higher number of people involved in RNFE. Non-farm economy, however, was also followed by a crescent interest in land and agriculture as millions of Thai lost their (all but weak) economic security during the crisis.

Unskilled factory work is also an important source of income for many rural dwellers in Lamphun Province. The region has an extensive industrial park with several electronic devices and food processing factories. Recruitment usually gives preference to young female workers. Although there is a certain security of employment, lack of education and skills contribute to low wages and a stagnation of salaries in the long term (Field trips; Myake, 2003).

From Start's (2001) discussion of RNFE, I would argue that the diversification of rural economy in some of the villages in Lamphun and Chiang Mai Provinces are more likely to be coping mechanisms. During a group interview in Baan Pong Village I asked the farmers if they could rely solely on the income from farming to survive and, if yes, whether they would give up other non-farm activities or not to which they replied:

If we had more support, credit and infrastructure and didn't have to pay debts we could be self-sufficient with farming activities. Most of us have a second occupation –we are carpenters, wageworkers or we own small food shops – that is essentially to pay the debts we have (Interview 5, appendix 1).

6.3 The birth of new social classes

In Thailand, the opening of the rice production to the international market, as well the increase production in fruits, shrimps, textiles and cash crops, has increased the contact between villagers and outsiders. Farmers are no longer only producers and no longer produce to themselves. They engage in different socio-economic relationships where they play different roles at different times and places. Hour they are producers, hour they are consumers, middlemen, investors etc. All this net of new alliances and relations has contributed to an increase on the difference of economic power within rural communities. Obviously, those alliances and new opportunities do not extend to all farmers or villagers. Thus, some are benefiting and moving on, whilst others lag behind, at times, falling into a debt and poverty trap. Accordingly, it is not difficult to imagine the emergence of different social classes filling the spaces created by those new socio-economic relationships. It is the material gains originated from these new alliances that mainly, but not exclusively, constitute the new rural social classes.

Government policies and development plans have great influence in the structure of societies into social classes. Buch-Hansen (2003: 328-29) explains that the insertion of agricultural production into the global economy has given modern technology an important role to play. Yet it does not reach all farmers in Thailand. The government and the bureaucracy are pursuing two 'socio-political tendencies in agricultural development': the 'upper economy' and the 'lower economy'. The former pursues short-term efficiency, uses modern technology and is represented by the export-oriented conventional sector. The 'lower economy' seeks long-term agricultural sustainability and is represented by traditional small-scale agriculture. The Democrat Party backs up this official split of agriculture since the 2001 election. The government will not give up its agribusiness export-oriented ideals but will pursue, as well, a self-sufficient lower economy. He further adds that neoliberal economics promotes division of labour.

The division of the agriculture economy into 'lower economy' and 'upper economy' contributes to the emergence of new classes. The 'upper economy' demands educated, technical and well-prepared labour. It pays higher salaries and further integrates the agricultural production into the global market. The 'lower economy' keeps the traditional Thai farmer in rural areas, does not foster improvements in education, health or infrastructure and, to some extent, marginalizes those who are supposed to follow traditional small-scale production. Material welfare, then, is not equally shared and the development of the 'upper economy' creates larger inequalities in rural areas. This new farmer has a completely different life style of the traditional one and is not interested in rural politics or the localism discourse. Thus, transition from moral to political economy does not fully take place and, it encourages rural groups to take different stands on the globalisers versus communitarian's debate.

Maniemai (2003: 15) notes that a new social group has emerged composed by those families involved in the fishnet industry in northeast Thailand. These families have a more constant source of income and have used this money to buy new consumer goods such as electrical utensils and furniture. Payment is usually done in instalments that further the dependency of these rural people on the sub-contracting industry. This group participates less in social and economic activities of the village and usually, instead of giving time and labour, they contribute with money. They have also organised different social happenings that other families (due to economic reasons) cannot participate. Finally new ties with agents and middlemen isolate them even further from other households and social classes within the villages.

The appearance of new social classes is accompanied by different indicators of social status within rural communities. Rigg & Nattapoolwat (2001: 952-54) argue that the idea of land ownership as an indicator of wealth and class no longer holds true. Not all landless families are poor. Differently, landless people can be found across different wealth-based social classes. Rather than land, education seems the most important socio-economic tool to improve one's life and to ascend to higher social classes. Uneducated people are marginalized both culturally and economically.

Socio-economic classes in rural communities, as shown here, are many. Not only economic classes but social status groups are also important, once even though some group

of people share the same relationship with the means of production and have a similar stake in market relationships they might have different political orientations, stronger kinship links or parallel economic interests. All this does not impede, however, that several classes co-exist at the same time in modern Thailand without representing a class struggle or a revolution as predicted by Karl Marx.

6.4 The shift from moral to political economy

6.4.1 Thai as farmers and the rural in Thailand: a traditional view

The concept of Thai people as villagers, dependent on rice agriculture and nature goes back to the Inscription nº 01 of 1292. It states: "in the time of King Ramkhamhaeng, this land of Sukhotai is thriving. In the water there is fish, in the fields there is rice" (cited in Rigg & Ritcchie, 2002: 360).

According to Rigg & Ritchie (2002), the inscription is considered by some the first constitution of Thailand and also the first piece of literature. Furthermore, it has helped, and it still does, to build the Thai nationhood and the idea of what is to be Thai. They further state that several scholars and policy makes in Thailand see the past as one of a happy village life, where people were equals, lived in peace, practiced subsistence agriculture, traded the minimum necessary, were self-sufficient and life as a hole was better than it is today. This idea (and the rebirth of the localism and the 'village way of life' which boomed after the financial crisis of 1997, when everyone was seeking for answers and solutions to the problems) however, has been criticized by writers who point out that the majority of the people was only part of a mass of ignorant, subaltern, loyal and exploited peasants.

Moreover, westerns and Thai scholars have questioned the basic assumption that Thai farmers were until the 1980s engaged in subsistence economy. Rigg & Nattapoolwat (2001: 949) argue that Thai farmers have engaged in the commercialisation of agricultural production since the 19th century and that the construction of the railway linking Chiang Mai and Bangkok in 1922 only accelerated the process. In addition, others maintain that the whole farmer economy was market oriented.

According to Mormont[25] (quoted in Rigg & Ritchie, 2002: 360) "The concept of rural evolved by distinguishing the rural and the agricultural and by defining the rural in relation to the social and cultural context created by industrial development". Obviously, the communities of centuries ago were rural without being 'named' rural. It is only after the industrial revolution, the urbanisation process and the cultural transformation called 'modernity' that the rural can be distinguished from this new locality.

The political and socio-economic changes of the past 40 decades have contributed to the difficulty of defining farming households, and the rural in Thailand. Furthermore, these transformations have occurred nearly everywhere in the Asian continent, in Latin America and some countries in Africa.

Besides our mental drawing of the rural Thailand as being cultivated land where farming households live a peaceful and tranquil life, the rural is also composed by values, morals and a shared interpretation of what means to be rural. Rigg and Ritchie quote a textile factory worker who affirms that:

> People in the city and people in the village aren't the same. (…) In the city people don't know each other. (…) In the village I know everyone. We grow up together; we're all relatives and friends together. I know where they come from, their background. I can trust them (Rigg & Ritchie, 2002: 363).

They additionally explain that the idea of farmers as the backbone of Thai society, the good qualities of the village "way of life" and farming has constituted the main discourse of Thai society reflected in government policies, newspapers, schoolbooks and recently NGOs work and discourse.

6.4.2 Culture beyond economy, economy beyond culture: sociocultural changes in the new rural in Thailand

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[25] Mormont, M. (1990) Who is rural? or, how to be rural: towards a sociology of the rural. In Marsden, T, Lowe, P, Whatmore, S (Eds.), *Rural Restructuring: Global Processes and their Responses*. London: David Futon.

The Thai scholar Singhanetra-Renard (1999) conducted a study of population mobility and the changes that have happened in the village community of Mae Sa in Chiang Mai Province. Her study compares patterns of population mobility in two periods 1976-77 and 1995-1996. Labour migration was common in the first phase and moves were based on economic reasons; to earn more money, to reach bigger markets, to trade etc. There were occasionally religious and entertainment (visits to brothels) trips. Yet, these patterns did not disrupt village life and its cohesion.

After comparing both periods' patterns of mobility she describes the main social consequences of the change of Mae Sa community from a traditional agricultural village to a wageworkers community. First, since there are no more food crops, the community has lost its food security. Second, nearby tourist attractions and housing estates have limited and even blocked villagers' access to fields that could be used for agriculture. Third, communal activities and social life has declined considerably since villagers are no longer sharing the same space and time within the village. Fourth, socialisation of teenagers have been moved away from parents and given to the urban environment. Gambling, drinking, going out and sexual activities are the new ways of socialization for this youngsters and have helped them to break free from the "village life and their social-cultural roots". HIV/AIDS cases, in this context, have increased remarkably, and Chiang Mai city has seven times more cases than the national average (Singhanetra-Renard, 1999: 79-80).

Rather different from the typical isolated village of the moral economy and of the traditional village defended by some Thai scholars and NGO activists, rurality in Thailand is a complex phenomenon. According to Buch-Hansen (2003: 328) changes in agriculture and labour patterns have contributed to the integration of rural areas into the urban economy. Contract farming, dependency on credit and services and the engagement of farmers on non-farm activities have fostered the integration process and contributed to keep people in rural areas even thought they no longer are seen as involved in agricultural labour.

Tung Yao Village is a small village in Lamphun Province in northern Thailand. The village spreads out across several kilometres of paddy fields, houses and roads. The villagers have not sold their lands, are mainly involved in agriculture and are well off. Most of them have large houses, cars and/or motorbikes and full access to electricity,

running water and paved roads. What contributes to the wealth of the villagers is a combination of agriculture and non-farm activities, of agricultural production to the market and to self-consumption and a compromise to social unity. Rice production is market-oriented but local producers avoid the middlemen bringing their own rice directly to the final buyer. Vegetable gardens are mainly cultivated for self-consumption and the surplus is brought to the market. Through a partnership with the government's Ministry of Environment –Department of Energy Promotion, the villagers have implemented a new technology that uses pig manure to generate energy (gas). Villagers who are not engaged in agriculture have found employment in nearby factories completing a complex but safer livelihood system (Field trip 5, appendix 2).

Different economic activities can lead to different impacts on social structures and social and economic organisation within rural communities. Maniemai (2003: 14) argues that the fishnet sub-contracting industry became the most important source of income for rural families. Where the industry is present there has been a low level of out-migration for work. Nearly 80% of the families involved in the sub-contracting affirm that no one in the family migrates or has migrated from the village. Families have opted to change rice-farming methods using less labour inputs and less investment. Thus, allowing more time and more capital to be invested in the net industry. This method shifting is accompanied by a lower productivity and by the hiring of wageworkers to work on the fields. Men are more active in housework and in agricultural activities since women contribute less to the latter. Women have become, in some households, the breadwinner. A new social group has emerged composed by those families involved in the fishnet industry; they are better off than others and participate less in the religious and social life of the village.

The preference given to education, rather than to farming, has also contributed to gender transformation in Thailand. Factory work placements are usually offered to 18-30 year old women, with lower or upper secondary school. These jobs have given financial freedom to these women and have helped them to become 'modern'. This process usually means to buy motorcycles, and home appliances (Rigg & Nattapoolwat, 2001: 954).

During my time in Chiang Mai city I encountered a typical situation that illustrates these transformations. Lamphun area has several factories that mainly employ women. Every working day, around 5 pm, the roads were replete with motorbikes with two to four women

coming back from the factories. They were always very young and wore factory uniforms, naturally not changing it before going home. Perhaps, the uniform has become a symbol of social status and economic power. Furthermore, having a motorbike free the women from the male dependency and give them the same mobility possibilities to work and to participate in the social life of the community.

If fishnet sub-contracting industries and sub-contracting needlework keep rural dwellers in rural communities and move women away from agriculture, economic activities such as construction and transport have opposite implications. Facing unemployment and a low income from agriculture many Thai rural men migrate to urban centres and find jobs either as construction workers or as taxi drivers and motorcycle-taxi motorcyclists. In the absence of men women in rural communities are pushed back into the field and are the main responsible to continue cultivating paddy fields.

When I interviewed Prof Anan Ganjanapan, I asked him what he thought about the immersion of a capitalist way of life inside hill tribe people community and about the recent socio-economic transformations that have taken place in the last decades. As he explains, many have come down to towns, found jobs and their children undertake regular school education. Not everyone, however, can afford to 'come down' to the city.

> Hill tribe people and also farmers need social, economic and cultural capital to live in the new urban environment. They usually do not have any cash, do not know anybody to help them in the beginning, do not have any professional skills and many do not speak central Thai language. (…) They cannot move all at once and they really don't have the ability to do it. But, again, if they had the opportunity I think they would all move (Interview 4, appendix 1).

What Ganjanapan has witnessed is a socio-economic process of change. Indigenous tribes, lowland farmers and other groups in Thailand are all undertaking profound transformation. As he presented it very clear, the capacity to adapt to a new reality and to benefit from it is not accessible to everyone. Nevertheless, people perceive 'the new' as something better; otherwise there would be a negative flow of people and reverse migration from hills and rural areas to city areas.

Interestingly, the arguments used by Prof. Anan Ganjanapan resemble those of political economy supporters and also moderate localists. Hill tribe people and farmers are not fighting or struggling to remain in the past and within the 'traditional village way of life'. Rather than that, they act rationally seeking for economic and social improvements. Contrary to this perception, Prof Praphat Pintoptaeng, at Chulalongkorn University in Bangkok argues that:

> Most of the [government] projects aim to bring people and forest dwellers from the uplands to the lower lands. But this is not and easy shift. Those people have cultural ties, history and traditions that are very much connected with their living environment. They have never lived in the lower lands. Hence, people are fighting for the right of remaining in the forests and not being evicted and replaced elsewhere. We have to care for the cultural dimensions (Interview 3, appendix 1).

His assertion uses some of the ideas defended by the localism discourse such as the importance of cultural dimensions and the right to 'remain in the forests'. Although there is no mention about a moral economy, I would say Prof Pintoptaeng is not a strong supporter of the political economy.

As a final illustration of all the changes I have been discussing here I would like to refer to an informal conversational interview that I had with Tui. Tui is in his mid 20s and work for NDF in Chiang Mai City. He is from a small rural village some 60 km from NDF office. He has a brother who works at a food-processing factory. According to Tui, people who work in factories start to have very different life styles from those who are engaged in agriculture. He goes on saying that his brother earns much more than he does but also spends more. Young people who work in factories are in a constant battle to keep up with their friends. They drink, go out and consume more. When means are not sufficient to cover the expenses, some start gambling. As Tui explains, young Thai people usually bet in football or Thai Boxing matches in a hope to obtain some profit. Education is also very much praised and if you have had many years of education "you are not supposed to work in the field". Money is destroying family relationships in Thailand, which is, according to Tui, the base of Thai society. "People work and work and work. They don't care for their children. I know of families who are selling their daughters to be prostitutes in Chiang Mai City or Bangkok" (Interview 6, appendix 1).

I want to conclude this session saying that different actors perceive the changes presented in this chapter and also in the previous one in various manners. It is undeniable, however, that land-related issues and economic rural transformation have caused enormous impacts in rural communities in the last three-four decades in Thailand. It is the fair assessment of the degree of this transformation, its impacts and the solutions to its problems that might unify dissident voices and contribute to the future of Thai society.

7. RURAL SOCIAL MOVEMENTS RESPONSE AND INFLUENTIAL FACTORS ON FORMS OF PROTEST

The changes that have taken place in the land tenure systems, land ownership and government policies have directly affect rural communities. As with all changes, these brought negative and positive impacts. Consequently, rural organized groups started to respond to these changes and to search for actions to minimize negative consequences. This chapter looks closer at the analysis of the Northern Farmers Alliance (NFA) response, and it explores some influential factors that have shaped NFA's forms of protest.

7.1 The Northern Farmers Alliance -NFA

NFA area of action coincides with the late PFT that officially ended its activities in 1976, after the Thammasat Massacre. Many of the members of the PFT, however, joined the CPT until the communist party was dissolved in 1981. During and after the financial/ economic crisis of 1997, many of these farmers gathered together to study the possibility of re-establishing the movement or a similar organization. Realizing that most of the grievances of the 1970s were still not addressed, and the farmers were facing similar problems, the Northern Farmers Alliance was founded in August 1998.

Lowland small-scale farmers involved in commercial farming are the bulk of NFA members. The alliance is composed of some five thousand farmers from the four Northern provinces of Chiang Mai, Lampang, Chiang Rai and Lamphun[26]. From 1998 until now, the network has enlarged from 110 to 568 communities.

7.1.1 Resources

NFA has strong links with several other civil society groups. This networking capacity contributes to the constitution of an expressive social and human capital. NGOs staff, lawyers from the Lawyers' Association of Thailand and officials from the National Human Rights Commission have contributed remarkably to build a political consciousness of NFA

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[26] See appendix 4.

leaders. They have shared information, created channels of communication and presented and studied Thai law with the villagers. Many of the problems of NFA are brought to law courts. Thus, consequently, NFA members must acquire knowledge of the acts, decrees and laws concerning agricultural policies, land reform and the judicial system. It is through the law that many groups in occupied areas try to legitimise and justify their actions.

Other sources of social capital are NDF and scholars. The Northern Development Foundation -NDF (one of the supportive NGOs) is composed of a vibrant young staff. These men and women participate actively in all NFA events such as meetings, protests, rallies, court audiences, negotiations and cultural festivals. Moreover, NGOs in Chiang Mai have their own publications that often cover farmers' issues. Scholars from Chiang Mai University and Chulalongkorn University write extensively on the farmers' issues and their organization. The same can be said about local and international students who opt to carry out their master's and PHD research with these groups in the North or Northeast regions of Thailand.

Each member of NFA pays a monthly membership fee. Occasionally, the alliance applies for external funds for events, seminar and other happenings. The funding for a meeting on Land Issues, in 17-19 November 2005, came from OXFAM UK. NFA, through its partner NGO, NDF, sent a proposal and a budget that was approved by the local OXFAM office. Recently, funds are also collected through the profits originated from collective farming in communal plots within land occupied areas, under the People's Land Reform initiative. Furthermore, land transactions involve a fee to be paid to the land committees and NFA.

7.1.2 Grievances, principles and strategies

According to Mr. Dam, the alliance's role is "to act on the behalf of the farmers on land issues. Our main objectives are to solve farmers' problems, which are;
 a) Poor access to land;
 b) High farmers debt;
 c) Low commodity prices;
 d) Poor management of water and watersheds;

e) The non-compliance and disrespect towards the right to the forest as a means of livelihood and

f) Government developmental projects, such as dams, which are badly planned and without impact assessment studies" (Interview 1, appendix 1).

Trying to address these problems, NFA has opted for the following principles and strategies:

a) NFA should be independent from political parties;

b) It promotes capacity-building activities for its members enabling them to better understand their problems and to analyse structural problems;

c) NFA promotes the exchange of information and experience among members of the network and

d) It coordinates farmers into a collaboration process with NGOs and government officials. (Leonard, 2005).

NFA leadership is conscious of the interrelationship between external factors, their own problems and the national political and socio-economic situation. Showing a holistic approach to their problems, Mr. Dam answered my question on how to 'improve farmers' conscious about their own problems':

> I think that the macro structure makes the situation difficult to be understood by the farmers. Populist government policies –for instance the easy access to loans during years prior to elections –capitalism and agricultural policies are not very easily seen by the farmers as connected to their daily problems. In our opinion (NFA) the problems are strongly related and connected to the big picture and we want the farmers to understand this. The NFA committee has just recently initiated 'political schools. The main objective is to make the farmers aware of their own problems and try to understand them. The project is carried out in partnership with local NGOs and academic (Interview 1, appendix 1).

The alliance has used the support of media to speak up their problems to other sectors of Thai society. For Mr. Dam media is not exclusively radio, TV and newspaper, but any communication channel, which their voices can be heard. Accordingly, they have programmes in community radios, use some print media from NGOs news agency, and organize seminars and public forums.

7.1.3 Challenges

Mr. Dam believes that "farmers don't have a complete understanding of their situation. They don't have a full consciousness to understand their own problems". The challenge of NFA is to help the farmers to think seriously about politics and their (lack) of political power. He further adds that NFA is still a weak movement when comes to this challenge (Interview 1, appendix 1).

The shift from moral to political economy does not take place exclusively in the individual level. Collectively, people change and opt for a different set of actions, beliefs and views. Myake (2003: 182) describes few cases of conflicts among communities where NFA is active. When facing the threat of arrests from the police and eviction many villagers sought help from neighbour villages. Support has not always been achieved. She argues that reciprocity and solidarity are broken rather easily and, if not built since the beginning of the land-related actions, are difficult to build up.

Dispute over bordering land has also contributed negatively to the success of NFA. In a dispute over a communal land plot between two villages that, in the past, were part of one, one village stop the other from becoming a member of NFA. Interestingly, the village that was backed up by NFA and its network claimed the unused land and occupied it. As Myake (2003) has stated, sometimes villagers and NFA members are not free from committing the same acts of exclusion and power dominance, as the ones they suffer, when their interests are challenged.

Gender conflicts have emerged and strengthened on communities where male farmers have joined the activities of NFA or other land-related organisation. Women explain that men usually join meetings and events that last until late in the evening. These happenings are always accompanied by alcohol. These new opportunities for the establishment of a drinking culture and the solidification of a 'boys' club' have contributed to a reduction of men's contribution in the fields and an increase in the women's workload. Single women in the movement face further difficulties. Due to the same reasons above, they cannot establish a network of friendship and support. Some have tried to take part in meetings, but they feel uncomfortable and uneasy with the ongoing drinking. All in all, women also

believe that their relationship with their male partners have deteriorated since they joined the land movement (Myake, 2003: 184-185).

The new generation in Thailand does not seem very interested in agriculture and the high status of 'being a farmer' is more part of history. Rigg & Nattaloopwat (2001: 953) found that from 38 students of a local school only one wanted to be a farmer. National figures show that 40% of vocational students attending the Vocational Education Department's Agriculture for Life project quit. Students use the programme as an intermediate phase until they can find other kind of further education (954). Young people are looking way beyond the village for job opportunities and future careers. This is due to the general perception –and fact –that farming is poorly paid and has a reverse wage prospective of increase in the long term. Furthermore, education has helped to foster class mobility, moving many poor rural families upwards. Educated people have better chances to get better-paid and stable jobs.

The participation of the youth in rural social movements would, consequently, be at very low levels with few youngsters taking part in meetings, discussions, actions and agricultural activities. Noticing that, after I had visited few villages, I could rarely find young people in the fields or taking part in the meetings or demonstrations, I put forward my feeling to Mr. Dam, to which he replied:

> To get young people to participate in the struggle and to engage in social movements are very difficult things. They are usually concerned about school and work. In my opinion this is one of the biggest problems of NFA. I also see the city as a threat (Interview 1, appendix 1).

The youth is pursuing further education completing high secondary education or even university degree. People at the age range of 18-28 are offered several opportunities in public services, commerce, tourism and factory work. Although their job security and benefits may not be significantly stable, they are not concerned with land neither intend to go back to the villages. They believe in better opportunities in the long run and have culturally and emotionally dissociated themselves from 'the rural'.

7.1.4 Tactics and Actions

The repertoire of action of NFA is mainly composed by petitions; marches, demonstrations and more recently land occupations. These forms of contentious politics are usually directed to government officials and government institutions.

According to Myake (2003: 151-2) in 1995 a group of landless farmers joined a march promoted by NFN (Northern Farmers Network) and marched from Chiang Mai University to a central point in Lamphun City (some 50 km) demanding some land. They did not accomplish more than the setting up of a joint committee to look at the farmers' grievances[27]. In 1997 other villagers from Lamphun Province joined the 99-day-demonstration in Bangkok organized by the Assembly of the Poor. In January 2001, NFA together with villagers from different districts in the region joined forces and promoted a demonstration in front of the Lamphun Provincial Hall. They demanded political action on problems such as access to land, water, low price of agricultural goods and the management of community forests. The government initiated a joint committee formed by government officials from the Province, the Department of Land and the Department of Forestry together with villagers, academics and NFA leaders. The task of the committee was to initiate an investigation on land ownership documents in the region and a way to resolve land contestation problems.

Her study goes on describing a one-month demonstration that took place in front of the Chiang Mai Provincial Hall in March 2002. This was a rather large demonstration with lowland farmers and highland farmers united and amounting to some four thousand demonstrators in peak days. NFA, NFN and NGO activists helped to coordinate all the activity. On April the Cabinet Resolution set up a joint committee under the name of Deputy Prime Minister the main goal was to "consider the allocation of land to the 23 areas –this indicated the same villages and groups on the list of the NFA –as pilot projects" (Myake, 2003: 153) for the land reform program. Other goals were to deliberate on the consequences of selling land to foreigners and to study the implementation of a progressive land tax. But in her study progress had not been achieved until May 2003 (152-3). In 2004

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[27] Joint committees are the most common political answer of the Thai government to organized popular protest. Yet, from the setting up of joint committees to its real utility and impact there is a huge distance that has not yet been accomplished.

another joint committee was established to analyse the (same) proposal of a land reform pilot project on the occupied areas. After one year, the farmers had nothing but empty promises

On the 07th of October 2005, a group of NFA and village leaders handed a petition to the government asking for the implementation of the land reform pilot project. On the 24th October approximately 50 village representatives and NFA members got together in Doi Lung Tham Village to discuss the possibility of a demonstration against the inactivity and lack of responsiveness of the government to farmers' grievances. After an entire day of deliberation they agreed to organize a demonstration in front of the Lamphun Provincial House on the 31st of the same month (Field trip 8, appendix 2).

The demonstration took place on 31st of October 2005. At 08:00 am near 1000 villagers from 18 villages from Lamphun, Lampang, Chiang Mai and Chiang Rai Provinces had already camped on the grass field in front of the Lamphun Provincial House demanding government action. At 10:00 am some leaders were invited for a meeting with provincial government authorities. Outside, large speakers and a small stage were used to play protest songs, give speeches and announcements. At 12:00 am the group announced the results of the meeting. According to what was announced, one official showed a letter signed by the Prime Minister arguing that nothing could be done in relation to the 07/10/2005 petition. The central government, out of 211 joint committees, had cancelled 49 on the 10th of May 2005, including the Joint Committee for Agrarian Reform and others dealing with fish folks, dam construction and slum problems. For the surprise of all, this was the first time that the central government made its 6-month old decision public. The letter further recommended that all farmers' grievances in the region should be addressed to one of the vice-prime deputies in Bangkok. At 03:00 pm the provincial governor compromised to set up a working group meeting to prepare a document to be handed by him to the central government in Bangkok. The meeting was arranged for 20-25 of November and the farmers finished the protest in the following day. By the time I left Thailand, mid December 2005, no meeting had happened or nothing else was heard from the government (Field trip 9, appendix 2).

NFA organised a Land Meeting on 17-19 November 2005 in Baan Pong Village. The conference brought together different civil society groups to deliberate about land

problems and the challenges on land ownership and land use in Thailand. ALRO and DOL and Human Rights National Commission representatives joined farmers' groups coming from the four regions of Thailand. According to Mr. Piak and some NDF activists, the meeting succeeded to improve cooperation and the exchange of information among the participants. NFA has also stated that it will support the government recent efforts to review the Land Tax Act, the Rental of Paddy Land Act and the creation of the Land and Property Tax Act (Field trip 11, appendix 2).

Demonstrations and petitions, however, are not free of criticism. During the meeting in Doi Lung Tham Village, some leaders argued that villagers were getting tired and bored with demonstrations. There have been too many in a very short period of time. Besides, when villagers are involved in demonstrations they invest time that, otherwise, would be used in the fields. They also insisted that even petitions are repetitive and that they already had sent 5 petitions by October 2005. The attendance in the demonstration on the 31st of October supports this claim. The demonstration had approximately 1000 participants, way too far from the expected 3000 participants agreed during the meeting one week before.

7.1.4.1 Land occupation

There is no mention of land occupation as a chosen tactic in the beginning of NFA's history. This can be explained by the fact that when such occupations took place they were, firstly, carried out by independent groups of discontent farmers and without any previous concept of an organized movement or a symbolic act. As Myake (2003: 140-150) states, farmers started to claim and occupy land in Lamphun Province because they felt that their livelihoods were being disturbed. Land occupations were initiated in 1997 and 1998.

Two years later, however, the action realized by the NFA members in Rai Dong village was intentionally and premeditated. It was during and internal meeting of the alliance in 2000, whilst discussing farmers problems that the topic of land reform and unused land came to the fore. Prior to the occupation, an NGO activist organized a study tour bringing some of the villagers into contact with other villagers who had carried out occupations. In the meantime, villagers in Rai Dong Village set up a 'land committee' and started cleaning and occupying the chosen plot on November the 09th of 2000 (Myake, 2003: 142-44). As Mr. Dam explains, it is only in the year 2000 that NFA, together with partner NGOs,

started to organize the occupations and to negotiate with the government (Interview 1, appendix 1).

The word spread fast and other villagers became interested in NFA recent actions and how the villagers were utilizing the land. Hence, Baan Pong Ru villagers exchanged ideas and experiences with Rai Dong villagers and also decided to occupy abandoned land. They first tried to localize the landowner, and then they started enquiring on the need of land in the village, followed by the making of a list with the households in most need of land. In January 2002 about 150 villagers took part in the action.

The disappointment with the government's land reform programs and its administrative ALRO's failure to carry out a pro-poor reform have encouraged villagers to occupy some of the Land Reform Area (LRA) and other unoccupied private and public idle land. According to Mr. Wan, a leader at Pong Ru Village (Myake, 2003: 128) it is wrong to have so many unused and empty plots while people have no land to cultivate and, at times, no land to live at all. He also argues that leasing land to foreigners, instead of distributing it to villagers, is not right.

In October 2005 I came back to Baan Pong Village and carried out a group interview with villagers who had taken part in NFA organized land occupations. I questioned them why land was important. They all agreed that "land is important for the future. We are fighting for land for our children. It is important because of the population growth and land is a limited asset, a limited resource" (Interview 7, appendix 1). Farmers acknowledge that most of their children, at some time of their lives, migrate to urban areas or even overseas to look for jobs and new experiences. Yet, they will come back. It is a common belief that parents should try to guarantee some land for those young people who today help their parents with incomes from factory, construction or overseas work.

In addition, the recent jobs in industries and services, created by the economic growth, are reserved for the young generation leaving no opportunity for those in their 40s/ 50s but to engage in agricultural activities. Adults in their 50s are looking for better ways to improve their income, secure employment and guarantee some land for their children. The access to land, facilitated by the organized land occupation movement may help to guarantee the minimum of food security and income for some individuals and families.

7.2 People's Land Reform/ Community land reform

7.2.1 Introduction

People's land reform is the name of the land reform carried out by organised farmers groups who, after deciding to occupy idle land areas, create institutional mechanisms to manage and cultivate these areas. These initiatives are usually independent of government consent or support.

My data shows that the Northern Development Foundation activists and NFA leaders agree on certain core ideas concerning land occupations. Accordingly, people have the right to access land that lies wasted. Land should be used productively and if it is not being used, productive groups should have access to it. Land occupation is not the fist choice but it is a response to the government's inability to carry out a comprehensive land reform and resolve land disputes. Land occupied should be put into use in a sustainable manner and social support for land occupation must be sought. Land occupation helps poor families and landless farmers to regain social dignity, food security and improved income.

NFA leadership and members try to avoid the word 'occupy'. Most of the farmers do not use this terms. According to Mr. Dam "in Thai society it is unacceptable to occupy the land which belongs to someone else, so we use the discourse that there is idle land; we are poor; we go and use it. We have the right to use the natural resources and the land" (Interview 1, appendix 1).

7.2.2 Land management

After idle land is occupied, claimed by villagers and put into use, the 'land committee' of the Village (usually under the supervision and support of NFA) deliberates on different issues such as; the distribution of land, rules of transferability, use, access to market, organization of households, continuation of actions and the linkages with other similar groups in the region.

My data shows that villagers in Baan Pong Village, as well as in Rai Dong Village (Myake, 2003), have opted for more traditional and communal form of land management of occupied areas. In the areas there are no individual property rights documents as such. After the land is occupied, it is divided in individual (household) plots. Those families acquire individual use rights over the plot meaning that they only 'have' land if they cultivate it. The land, however, is still 'owned' by the community or by a group. The Land Committee of the village issues 'Communal Title Deeds' which mimic the official documents showing a map where the individual plot is located and the name of the official user. Land transfers are also not an individual decision. Trading land by oneself is prohibited. The selling and buying of land is not forbidden totally but it should happen only under specific conditions and rules; the seller must need a good reason to sell the land (usually connected to health, death or economic setbacks); the buyer should come from the village and all transactions should go through the supervision and approval of the committee. All this is done to avoid the sale of land to outsiders and to individuals without an interest to use the land for agricultural purposes.

To avoid turning land into a commodity the Rai Dong Village Land Committee came up with an elaborate system of land value. The plot, of 1.25 rai (one quarter of an hectare), was assessed in 15.00 baht[28] (June 2003). Once land was allowed to be sold, the seller would receive 4.000 baht, 1.000 would be deposited in the Land Bank and the remaining 11.000 baht would be directed to the Land Committee fund, for its activities. This structure was understood to make land transfer not attractive and to encourage farmers to cultivate their lands productively (Myake, 2003: 192).

Many farmers did not start immediately to cultivate their land and others, after nearly two years, have not yet started to use it productively because they lacked capital. Hence a Land Bank committee was set up and started to collect 20 baht a month per family so that a fund could be established. In this way, the community avoid dependence on outside capitals and contribute to the principle of self-sufficient community economy.

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[28] Conversions: 1 US$ = 37,6 THB (Thai Baht), 1 THB = 0,027 US$. Currency exchange rate in 07 May 2006. Source: http://www.x-rates.com/calculator.html (07/ 05/ 2006).

7.2.3 Crops and agricultural methods

NFA, grassroots groups and community forest organisations in the region has struggled to adopt and promote sustainable and eco-friendly methods of agriculture, irrigation and the use of natural composts as pesticides and fertilizers. Yet, the bulk of farmers still opt to use more conventional and hazardous methods and to cultivate cash crops or fruits that have a better chance to hit the market. NFA and the land committees in various villages are involved in this struggle, but the examples that follow are limited to few farmers in selected villages.

In Baan Pong Village farmers started a new project of using pig manure as natural compost. The idea came from other areas that had used the compost successfully. Some of the farmers use, and sell a natural fertilizer made locally from rice husk. The husk is burnt slowly and then added to the soil to improve its quality and productivity. Organic pesticides are composed from natural compost made of fermented citric fruits and water (Field trip 4, appendix 2).

Intercropping, used when cultivating Langon, is widespread in Lamphun Province. When the trees are young (in the first three years) the soil is shared with the plantation of long beans. The beans can be harvested at least twice a year and while the tree cannot guarantee any return the practice continues. However, once the tree is big enough and the production of langon intensifies the long beans are no longer cultivated.

In Rai Dong Village and others, farmers are planting 'economic trees' –longan and mango trees –aiming to make a profit. Few of them opted to plant vegetables that are both sold in the market and use for self-consumption. Some alternate fruits and vegetables in the same plot. Recently, following initiatives by local and national university projects and local organisations, farmers have engaged into organic combined farming. Yet this is limited to those farmers who are not indebted since organic farming, at the present stage, does not generate any income.

7.2.4 The present reality

In 2005 there were 27 zones of occupied land. When I visited some of the areas and carried out my research, some of the NFA leaders reported to me that some seven different groups of villagers had given up the occupations and left their claimed land. At the moment much of the NFA occupied land belong to banks or financial institutions that received the land as collateral for loans. For instance the land under the community land reform, in Baan Pong Village and Tha Gaw Meuang Village, both in Lamphun Province, belongs to the Bangkok Capital Alliance CO.

I would like to conclude this section reflecting on the meaning of the community land reform and some characteristics of NFA for the globalisers versus communitarian's debate. As observed by Riigg & Richie (2002: 13) among the localists (communitarians) there is a moderate group. Contrary to orthodox followers of the localism discourse, this group call for "a greater consideration of local resources" and refer to the local not only as the village but also the district, province and even the nation. They do not totally refuse the idea of a market economy but they call for a more moral system to replace the amoral capitalist system.

The Northern Farmers Alliance, as far as I perceive it, can be regarded as a moderate localist. It is clear that when enumerating their goals and tactics the alliance does not seek to walk backwards and re-establish a self-reliant rural village where production aims only for household consumption. They propose modifications in the present market economy from which they can also benefit from the national economic growth and from the country's wealth.

7.3 Factors influencing farmers' and NFA members' decision to engage in land occupations and other forms of protest

A large amount of social movements and peasants' politics studies have made enormous effort to understand the reasons for rural community engagement in politics, civil society groups and protest (e.g. Wolf, 1977; Seri, 1984; Scott, 1985; Paige, 1983). Hereafter I present some of my findings to the research question 'what factors influence farmers' decision to engage in land occupations and other forms of protest?'. The analysis is based on the NFA reality and could, speculatively, be generalized to most of the northern region of Thailand.

7.3.1 Culture and group cohesion

Cultural similarity and cultural values are believed to hold together members of diverse social movements. The importance of culture, however, varies according to the issues being contested. To fight for land reform, commodity prices and access to natural resources, individuals should share at least some common understanding of what is needed and how they can improve their lives.

Physical proximity contributes to higher levels of cultural identity among people. According to one farmer in Baan Pong Village, NFA is strong because "we are all from the same village. That makes it easier to share ideas to fight". Several farmers also perceive that the movement in this village is strong. They believe in it and rely on it. I asked them why some groups had given up land occupations in other villages. They argued that "the movement in other areas is not strong. There people come from various villages and the communication process is more difficult. People are also scared" (Interview 7, appendix 1). In Doi Noi Village, farmers have started to communally farm the occupied land and recently refused a proposal to engage in contract farming. Consequently, the company who owns the land is suing the farmers. And yet, they show no fear or any signs of leaving the occupied land (Field trip 3, appendix 2).

The presence of material and moral support of NFA is a contributing factor to the permanence of families in the occupied land. The ideological and physical proximity of individuals contribute to their common understanding of reality. Finally, as a unified group, these farmers have a strong sense of belonging that helps them to face the challenges of land occupations and non-violent civil disobedience.

7.3.2 Economic (in) security

The fact that economic growth absorbs some of the working force released by agricultural development (the green revolution, new alternatives, intercropping, etc) has impacts beyond the economic sphere. It is a rational decision not to engage in risky and 'illegal' land squatter activities if one has a choice of finding jobs and generate some income.

Hence, those who have a certain level of economic security usually do not support the occupations and, if they do take part, they are the first ones to give up when resistance by government and local elites take place. Others who have nothing but agriculture see the occupation as the only viable economic option. They do not have other source of income and their food security and incomes rely on their agricultural production.

On the outskirts of the city of Lamphun and in San Sai district in Chiang Mai Province, many food-processing factories employ hundreds (at times thousands) of young villagers. These young people enjoy a year-round job with a certain level of employment security. The benefits of a factory work (comparing to the physical-demanding agricultural work, its low capital income and its low social status) contribute to the unwillingness of Thai rural young generation to engage into rural activities and farming work. It is even less probable that these youngsters would find time, energy and enthusiasm to participate in land occupation actions.

In Baan Pong Village some of the farmers are also carpenters and in Baan Pong Ru Village some farmers gave up farming to start small-scale charcoal kilns. In both cases these individuals have some income stability (and probably better wages than neighbouring farmers) and little economic motivation to engage in land occupations.

Why, then, would a farmer join a revolutionary organisation? Scott (1977: 239) refutes Migdal's argument that peasants join movements only if these address concrete material problems of the peasantry and, even better, if they can improve or guarantee the existence of material benefits such as protection, lower rents, access and control over land. If they do behave in this manner, Scott believes they are just as amoral and benefit-seeking actors as the classic bourgeoisie. He believes that commitment to 'the revolution' may also originate from indignation, a thirst for justice and the righting of wrongs. I will, shortly, illustrate that both cases take place in modern Thailand.

The NFA group at Baan Pong Village seems to be involved in the movement because, among other factors, the occupation of land has brought them material benefits. More than that: capital. According to one of the farmers, "The movement [land occupation] brings results. We can improve our income" They seem to have a strong sense of belonging and participation but it is still to be seen, whether this feeling would still take place if the land

would be claimed back by its owner and they would have to re-start the process again loosing their benefits and most probably getting into capital losses (Interview 7, appendix 1).

The NFA group at Pong Ru has few participants who do not depend on the movement political voice, its occupied land, or its financial help. I talked to one leader who owns few charcoal ovens. He is not landless neither suffer from the low prices of the commodities in question (rice, longan and other, fruits) but he has engaged in the movement and has joined NFA because he believes in social justice and he does not want to see his peers poor and abandoned (Field trip 7, appendix 2).

Start (2001: 5) states that the presence of urban and non-farming characteristics in rural livelihoods are not something of surprise. Nevertheless, the permanence of marginal peasant agriculture is of relevant interest. Some of the economic arguments for its constancy are; a) when farmers are involved in agriculture and non-farming activities risk is spread between the sectors, b) subsistence agriculture protects rural people from economic shocks and discontinuities, c) living in the countryside is cheaper and enable better conditions to care for children and for the sick, d) households may use community resources and finally e) returns from agriculture may come from very low inputs level. Consequently, and certainly, for those landless, without economic security or a strong participation in the rural non-farm economy, agriculture remains the preferred economic option. Furthermore, land and socio-economic support may be guaranteed by participation in land occupations.

7.3.3 Religion

How is Buddhism connected with peasants and justice struggles? Believes originated from the religion say that this life is very much determined by how people deal with suffering and difficulties. Bearing hardship, oppression and injustices are forms to evolve and contribute to a better next life. Accordingly, some see oppressors (in our case landlords, government officials, and local elites) as mentors in teaching and guiding people, through suffering, to an enlightened life (Seri, 1984: 96). Although this stands true for the majority of the Buddhists, religions, everywhere in the world, are loosen up and become more

flexible. Moreover, it is the same Buddhist thought that teaches us to contest and question the claimed world truths. Nothing is absolute and all things are conditioned, relative and to a certain degree dependent.

Buddhism, to some extent, contributes to a pattern of farmer's struggle, which tends to be peaceful and individual. Each farmer has his individual path towards 'freedom'. This argument relies on my interpretation of two Buddhist principles. First, there is no superior or metaphysical being leading you to 'paradise'. You and you yourself is responsible for your enlightenment. As Buddha taught: "Dwell making yourselves your island (support), making yourselves your refuge, and not anyone else as your refuge" (Rahula, 2005: 60). Second, the Right Action principle "aims at promoting moral, honourable and peaceful conduct" (ibid: 47). Peaceful conduct and non-violent thoughts are part of the non-confrontation principle of Buddhism.

This scenario draws a picture where landless and near landless farmers feel that occupying land, confronting absentee landlords and authorities are against their religious beliefs[29]. In addition, government authorities may justify its repression and policies based on religious concepts. According to Mr. Dam:

> One of the main principles of Buddhism says that people are not supposed to steal property that belongs to other people and also not to use violence. I think for the government it is very convenient to hide behind Buddhism. The government uses a 'Buddhist' discourse saying that invading and using someone's land is wrong and should be condemned by the society. People should respect the ownership of land. In my opinion many farmers, as reflected by capitalist ideals, see land as a capital as something economically valuable. But I think land should be used to produce food for the world (Interview 1, appendix 1).

The individual level of commitment to religious precepts is an important factor determining forms of protest in rural Thailand. The more 'religious' the person is, the more he follows the non-confrontation principle of Buddhism, the less participation in land occupation and civil disobedience acts is expected. The official religion 'atmosphere' may

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[29] The relationship between religion, conflict and social change is often very sensitive. Religion is highly subjective and involves a personal variable level of faith and engagement. For this reason –and owing to the fact that I did not address religious questions in a significant manner –I opted to generalize and only use wider known concepts of Buddhism. This is not an attempt to analyse in depth the relationship between religion and social justice struggle. Rather, it is a recognition of the role of religion in patterns of farmers' struggles, actions and beliefs.

also influence farmers' decision, as happened in 1976. On one hand Buddhist monks may oppose NFA actions, on the other hand, however, using principles of merit making they may support these actions if they contribute to alleviate poverty and help others.

7.3.4 Links/ external alliances

> The poor peasant or the landless labourer, who depends on a landlord for the largest part of his livelihood, or the totality of it, has no tactical power[30]: he is completely within the power domain of his employer, without sufficient resources of his own to serve him as resources in the power struggle. Poor peasants, and landless labourers, therefore, are unlikely to pursuer the course of rebellion, unless they are able to rely on some external power to challenge the power which constrains them (Shanin, 1976:268).

A great number of farmers under the NFA Tutelage have been influenced by what Prof. Praphat Pintoptaeng calls "political entrepreneurs". These are young activists, and NGOs staff who, guided by a sense of justice and equality, help to increase farmer's awareness of their rights bringing them together and publicizing their grievances. According to Pintoptaeng, "people know what they are facing but very often they do not articulate themselves. Thus, they need leadership and facilitators to bring these people together and publicize their grievances" (Interview 3, appendix 1).

Mr Daeng, one of NFA leaders in Baan Pong Village affirms that:

> I am forty years old. By the first time I know my rights, the law and the constitution. I learnt all this with the movement and also with NGOs. NFA is important because it is spreading information and training everyone. Now I know about the unfulfilled government promises and its obligation towards agrarian reform (Interview 2, appendix 1).

Farmers, as shown above, still depend on the presence of external alliances to carry out their struggle and publicize their grievances. Allies are usually politically-motivated individuals (political entrepreneurs, religious leaders, academics etc) and other groups

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[30] Adams, R. (1966) 'Power and power domains', *America Latina*, year 9: 3-21. "Power refers to an actual physical control that one party may have with respect to another. (…) Power is usually exercised, therefore, through the common recognition by two parties of the tactical control each has, and through rational decision by one to do what the other wants. Each estimates his own tactical control, compares it to the other, and decides he may or may not be superior" (3-4).

(NGOs, professional groups). To conclude: the recent alliances with groups such as the Thai Lawyers' Association the National Human Rights Commission and NDF contribute positively to the engagement of families in land occupations. The strengthening of links among different villages is also important. Nevertheless, these inter-villages alliances are still in an initial phase and need more encouragement from NFA leadership.

7.3.5 Criminalisation of farmers and repression

On 23rd April 2002 a government resolution allowed the arrest of villagers who had joined the demonstrations for land reform and land occupation activities. During the next three months 33 villagers were arrested and further 77 people were threatened and their names headed a police 'black list'. When police officers carried out 'visits' to the occupied areas they burnt fruit trees, farmers' hut, 'resting houses' and destroyed plantations The villagers were bailed out few months later, after NGO staffs, lawyers and academics intervened (Myake, 2003:157-59).

Three years later many farmers are still facing trial and running the risk to spend one year in prison accused of trespassing and using land that they do not own. In Doi Noi Village an agricultural company has sued 15 villagers, and in Si Tia village 11 villagers are facing trial. In Baan Pong Ru Village 4 villagers have been arrested and after paying bail were released, leading most families to withdraw from occupied areas.

According to Mr. Piak, violent repression and the threat of arresting farmers contribute to the withdrawal from some occupied areas and to the weakening of the movement translated in less active participation in demonstrations and meetings. "In 2002, 110 people were arrested and then bailed out. People were afraid of protesting again and they also felt as wrongdoers since Buddhism condemn the use of someone else's property" (Interview 5, appendix 1).

7.3.6 Social Constraints

According to Mr. Lek, one of the NFA leaders in Baan Pong Ru Village, 150 families occupied idle land in 2002 and started planting vegetables and longan trees. Following a

series of repressive actions against farmers in the same year, the police arrested four villagers and the number of families on the land decreased to 85. Recently very few families still farm this area. I questioned my interviewee why so many families gave up the occupied lands. Was it only due to the arrests? He told me that inside the movement there were some provincial officers who threatened and demoralized the villagers forcing them to give up the occupations. Furthermore, some of the families who occupied the area have relatives who work with the government in the district level (Field trip 7, appendix 2).

Farmers who occupy land might be branded as dishonest, lawbreakers and criminals. This categorization leads to a negative attitude from other villagers damaging the social status and morality of these farmers. Moreover, the fear of not being employed by other villagers (who may own large farms, construction firms, shops etc), being socially isolated and losing social safety-networks contribute to the lack of commitment and participation in land occupations.

When I talked to Mr. Piak I questioned him on the difficulties to engage people in demonstrations and to protest. He told me that in 2002 The Prime Minister was in power for only one year and had a lot of public support. It was not advisable to protest against him and his politics at that time. To protest against the politics of Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra, when you come from the countryside, has been always a bit difficult. His populist-like programs of money transfer to village councils and easy access to loans have caught the support of millions of rural dwellers. Nevertheless, the Prime Minister has had strong opposition from urban-based groups. If NFA starts to raise its voice against the government policies its members may have to face social isolation and distrust from their local communities that still believe in populist promises and short-term benefits.

During my visit to the Baan Pong Village, I asked Mr. Daeng what a group should do if they wanted to join the organization or carry out land occupation. He told me that usually the groups come to see the leaders and ask for advice and also share experiences. At times –once they hear that there is a group about to act –they go there and try to organize and counsel the movement. But it also happens that some groups do not want to network or to share experiences. They like to act alone. I questioned the reason for such decision. The main reason is the power relations within the village. According to Daeng, in such situations the land occupied belongs to a powerful person in the village, usually the village

chief. In this way, all the negotiation is done at the local level and among themselves exclusively. It is a fact that a village chief happens to own a large quantity of land (Field trip 4, appendix 2). This social arrangement guarantees some food and economic security for the farmers and also political and economic stability for the village headman. In creating a dependency relationship both groups end up in a win-win situation. Thus, any outsider presence is seen as a threat to the status quo and the social structure.

The constitution of a number of social classes, new occupation and socio-economic relationships within rural communities has impacts in the performance and in the patterns of forms of protest. Contrary to the localism discourse supporters, the 'enemy' of villagers might not be 'out there' in offices in Bangkok, Washington or Brussels. The complex links between urban and rural in Thailand, between wageworkers and employers, between landowners and farmers have created a new network of social relationships inside rural communities. There is no physical or cultural huge differences between oppressor and oppressed. On the contrary, both groups may not even consider themselves enemies. It is more probable that the groups acknowledge their inequalities, some level of exploitation and abuse. But this mutual socio-economic dependence leads to a fear of rebellious behaviour, social unrest and, its most probable consequence, unemployment. All this hinders the *'esprit de corps'* of local social movements, contributing negatively to group consciousness and to the sense of belonging.

8. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The first paragraphs of this chapter present a summary of important findings. This is followed by a theoretical discussion exploring the research findings in the light of the theory presented in chapter two. Then it presents some reflections on the limitations of this study and suggests further research. Finally, the last paragraphs of this chapter present some conclusions.

The influence of USA in the politics and economy of Thailand, during the WWII and in the following two-three decades, have contributed to the design of government policies on land. The 1954 Land Code introduced documents legalizing land dwellers and giving out different ownership documents. After social pressure and political unrest in the mid 1970s the government initiated an Agricultural Land Reform program in 1975 followed by a Land Titling Program in 1984.

Population growth and the permanence of Thais in rural areas exercised great pressure on land. Logging concessions, an increase number of landless farmers and the persecution of communist guerrillas contributed to a process of land expansion (and, consequently land degradation) into forest areas, coastal areas and highlands. Economic growth reshaped rural communities. Government policies, the development of a tourism industry and the relocation of industries to the countryside contributed to an increase process of land transfer from faming families to urban-based groups, tourism enterprises, real estate developers and local elites. Government initiatives supporting the adoption of new crops and the development of tourism caused profound changes in the northern region, such as an increase number of indebted and landless farmers.

The transformations on land tenure systems and land ownership reflected directly in the new economic structure of rural communities. Labour migration patterns, the insertion of a rural non-farm economy and new farming activities, and the permanence of a smallholding mode of production (all happening simultaneously) have contributed to a process of class diversification and multiplicity of livelihoods within the communities. New cultural habits such as consumerism, visits to brothels, drinking and the use of motorbikes have influenced gender relationships and increased the 'generation gap' in rural localities.

Rural social movements have also evolved and reinvented themselves in this new socio-economic, political and cultural reality of rural communities. Alliances and grassroots groups have been formed to struggle for their right for a better life and to share the benefits of decades of economic growth in Thailand. On one hand, factors as religion, economic security, crminalisation of farmers and social demoralisation contribute to the non-participation of farmers in organized movements. On the other hand, changes in religious beliefs, strong and steady contact with 'external' groups, well-built group cohesion, higher levels of education and economic instability have fostered the participation of rural people into forms of protest such as land occupation and demonstrations.

The moral economy is no longer applicable in most rural communities in Thailand. The ideas of James Scott (1977, 1985) no longer hold true in modern capitalist societies. Rural villages are no longer self-reliant, the patron-client relationships have nearly disappeared and mutual-help rarely take place. Furthermore, improvements on roads and transport in the country together with new waves of labour migration have contributed to shorten the geographical and moral distance between the urban and the rural. The political economy approach's assumptions that peasants are rational actors; they avoid collective enterprises due to free riders and they embrace new opportunities are more likely to be true in today's modern Thai society. Nevertheless, these assumptions have not all materialised everywhere in the country but they still coexist and dispute with the moral economy in a society where capitalist and subsistence agriculture go together side by side.

Paige's (1983) class-struggle approach to peasant revolution argues that conflicts emerge among groups with different relations to the factors of production in agriculture. Popkin (1980), Hewison (2001) and Bowie (1998) recognize the existence of class differentiations and stratification within villages. Moreover, this class structure influences patterns of religious, economic and political practices. Economic growth, government policies, the diversification of rural economy and cultural transformations have contributed to the birth of new social classes within rural communities. Those socio-economic changes have led to new socio-economic relationships that form the bases where the classes stand on.

There is not, however, a polarisation of social classes but, instead, a multiplicity reflected in a complex network of social relationships. It is this very diversification of social classes

that shapes rural politics and social conflicts. Social classes, however, are present within households and among people of the same kin group. Thus, high levels of class-based social unrest, and class clashes are not likely to happen. Furthermore, this mutual socio-economic dependence among classes leads to a weak '*esprit de corps'* of local social movements.

The fear of another economic crisis, the lack of economic independence and nationalist ideas have given space to a localism discourse that praises the moral economy and a turning back in time. Globalisers and moderate communitarians argue that a return to something that may have not existed is improbable. Moreover, the localism discourse is still to prove that its socio-economic bases can guarantee economic growth, an improvement in people's lives and poverty reduction.

The political opportunity approach to social movements seems applicable within Thai civil society history. It is during moments of political suppression and openness (1973, 1976, 1992, 1997) that social movements, students' and farmers' groups come forth. Furthermore, moments of extreme violence (mid 1970s) and of popularity of politicians (as the Prime Minister enjoyed after the 2001 elections) have constrained social movements' struggle. In modern Thailand, 'new social movements' and 'materialist and class-based' social movements coexist side by side. Perhaps, reflecting the ongoing process of rural transition and unequal economic development.

Finally, this study found that the current localism discourse used by academics and some NGOs is not always backed up by rural dwellers. The diversification of the economy and, to some, the giving up of agriculture has contributed to their economic stability and social status. Capitalist mode of production and cultural values of modernity have penetrated villages and rural communities deeply and permanently. A call to return to the golden age of the traditional Thai village is not economically and culturally sustainable. Yet, some civil society groups use a 'localism discourse' to demand a 'globalisers' goal, making the study of agrarian transformation in Thailand interesting and challenging.

When reflecting on the limitations of my research I would like to comment on three aspects of it. First, I acknowledge my limited experience on carrying out significant fieldnotes from observation exercises. When analysing my data, I concluded that some part

of it was not useful to answer the research questions and did not have a clear purpose. Second, although I believe my research managed to fulfil its aims, the research aim could have been narrowed. This would have contributed to a clearer research analysis and a smoother thesis. Third, due to the difficulties encountered in the field (especially language and cultural barriers), the data collected did not cover extensively the research questions. Nevertheless, the scope of the literature chosen and its relevance compensated this setback of my methodology.

This research is part of an academic effort to understand and conceptualise rural social movements and farmers' politics in today's world. After analysing existing literature, carrying out my research and reflecting on its findings, many questions came to the surface. For the purpose of answering some of these questions further research is needed. I would like to propose some directions, which these researches could follow. First, a similar research could be carried out from the perspective of feminist sociology or gender studies. It is of extreme importance to analyse the changes presented here through the lens of women as well as of men. Furthermore, research on women's participation in rural politics in Southeast Asia would also be relevant. Second, future studies could address the (non) participation of the youth in rural politics. Of special importance is the assessment of the socialisation process that takes place in urban settings and its relationship to the moral and values of rural villages. Finally, studies on rural sociology in Thailand could identify the genuine motivations behind NGO activists and academics to support the localism discourse, and the impacts of the adoption of it (the localism discourse) for rural communities.

Rather than asking how many farmers are landless or trying to find 'scapegoats' to be blamed, this research goes beyond this simplistic approach. In asking what had actually led farmers to sell their land and what was the historical context at that time, it reveals and argues that farmers were not always victims but often made rational decisions. A constant decline of commodity prices, a suddenly valorisation of land prices and the opportunity to find employment elsewhere contributed to the sales of land. Nevertheless, this research shows that civil society groups still insist on the naivety of farmers, the 'perversity' of the ones who bought land and on the (always) illegal land transactions.

The slow pace of rural transition that characterised European history did not happen in Southeast Asian countries. The transformations have been fast and incomplete. As this study shows capitalist mode of production and its social organisation has deeply penetrated in rural communities in Thailand. In modern Thailand technology and knowledge are new differentiation factors. This research supports the argument that landownership may no longer be a symbol of wealth or social status. Nevertheless it sustains the idea that the rural non-farm economy, rather than showing a 'diversifying economy', shows a situation where rural households are struggling to cope with larger process of socio-economic and political changes.

This study suggests that rural people in Thailand are organising themselves and striving to cope with processes of rural transition. Rural social movements have constituted important alliances with urban-based groups, other local groups, NGO's activists and academics. Different theoretical debates and civil society discourses have helped these groups to gain wider support from Thai society. Nevertheless, political mobilization and the involvement of the youth in organised movements are the main challenges of these groups. Besides internal challenges, rural social movements as the Northern Farmers Alliance need to deal with government manoeuvres to resist policy and social change. The central government has initiated a game of centralizing and decentralizing decision-making bodies that deal with land issues. After the government receives a series of petitions and witness demonstrations it promises to establish several 'committees' and 'working groups' or 'special meetings' to address farmers grievances. Yet, after the turmoil nothing concrete happens and the institution or department responsible changes. In this process time goes by and people's movement are not able to identify, negotiate and held government officials responsible.

The findings of the survey on the factors influencing forms of protest support and contribute to the international civil society groups' fight against criminalisation of farmers and rural violence. As elsewhere, in Thailand there has been an increasing level of land conflicts in rural areas and a tendency of government and society to regard farmers as criminals.

To conclude, the world still has nearly 3,3 billion people living in rural areas and to some extent depending on household labour in agricultural activities on rented or owned land.

Alternatively, they are wageworkers in agricultural enterprises, contract-farming workers, or engaged in recent rural-based industries. Globalisation, modernisation and an ever-growing international trade have transformed peasant societies and their cultural and economic structures. The peasant as defined by Marx and as an isolated class (or semi-class) does not exist anymore in Thailand. Peasant individuals have, however, not disappeared but changed. Perhaps, it is this difficulty to define the 'new peasant' or the 'proletarianised rural worker' in the 'new village' that has forced scholars to step back. New approaches to understand this new reality are needed. Theories that acknowledge the transformations and look for answers that can solve striking problems of rural communities in developing countries such as disempowerment, poverty, socio-economic insecurity and inequality are to be built.

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APPENDIX 1

List of Interviews

(1) Mr. Dam, member of NFA leadership, NDF (Northern Development Foundation) Office, Chiang Mai City, 25/August/2005.

(2) Mr Daeng, member of NFA leadership, Baan Pong Village, 22/August/ 2005.

(3) Prof. Praphat Pintoptaeng, Chulalongkorn University –Department of Political Science, Bangkok, 28/ September/ 2005.

(4) Prof. Anan Ganjanapan, Chiang Mai University, Faculty of Social Science, Chiang Mai City, 24/ August/ 2005.

(5) Mr. Piak, member of the secretary group of NPF and NDF activist, NDF (Northern Development Foundation) Office, Chiang Mai City, 26/ August/ 2005.

(6) Tui, NDF staff, Baan Pong Village –Land Conference, 18/ November/ 2005.

(7) Farmers-NFA members at Baan Pong Village, 26/October/2005, group interview, around 12 male participants.

APPENDIX 2

Field Trip Table

Trip Number	Place	Date	Interviewee, respondents, lecturer/ speaker, person (s) or event observed.	Method used	Additional Information
1.	Phae Tai Village, Lamphun Province	20/ August / 2005	Mr. Piak (interpreter) and Western volunteer at NDF Linda.	Recognition walk/ drive, observation and informal conversational interview.	Year of land occupation: 1997. The area had had experience with land reform.
2.	Tha Gaw Meuang Village, Lamphun Province	20/ August/ 2005	The village Land Committee (formed by mid-age men).	Recognition walk, observation and informal conversational interview.	
3.	Doi Noi Village, Chiang Mai Province	20/ August/ 2005	Mr. Piak and Linda.	Observation. Informal conversational interview.	The lowland farmers have experienced land conflicts with highland tribes.
.4.	Baan Pong Village, San Sai District, Chiang Mai Province.	22/ August/ 2005	Mr. Daeng & his wife, Mr. Kop, Mr. Piak.	Semi-structured Interview. Informal conversational interview.	
5.	Tung Yao Village, Lamphun Province	25/ August/ 2005	Mr. Piak and Linda.	Observation.	Visit not related to land occupation, but aimed to get to know a women's group which is leading a 'Forest Community'
6.	Lamphun Provincial Court	11/ October/ 2005	Court session. A case of landowners against farmers who occupied idle	Observation. Following of the event with help from interpreter	

			land.	Piak.	
7.	Baan Pong Ru Village, Pa Sang District, Lamphun Province.	22/ October/ 2005	NFA leader Mr. Lek.	Observation, informal conversational interview.	Occupied land was originally a 'land reform area' but it was given to 'the rich'.
8.	Doi Lung Tham Village, Ban Hontt District, Lamphun Province	24/October/ 2005	Representatives of 18 villages. Approximately 50 participants, from which only 5 were women.	Observation. Following of the event with help from interpreter Mr. Piak.	NFA meeting on the demonstration for the creation of the Joint Committee on the Pilot Project for Agrarian Reform.
9.	Lamphun Provincial Hall	31/ October/ 2005	Near 1000 villagers.	Observation. Informal conversational interview.	Demonstration requiring government action on the pilot project and public response to petitions.
10.	Chulalongkorn University	29/ September/ 2005	Villagers from Songkhla Province and Prachuapkhirikhan Province, representatives of Human Rights National Commission and the Thai Lawyers' Association and academics.	Observation. Following of the event with help from interpreter (Focus on the Global South co-worker).	Meeting to discuss the impacts of some development programmes and the resistance being carried out by the communities.
11.	Baan Pong Village, San Sai District, Chiang Mai Province.	17-19/ November / 2005.	Several farmers, Mr Piak, Linda, Mr. Daeng, NDF staff.	Observation. Informal conversational interview.	Land Conference. Groups from the 4 regions of Thailand discussed the land problems communities were facing.

APPENDIX 3

Map of Thailand with major cities and neighbouring countries.

APPENDIX 4

Map of Thailand's northern region. NFA is present in Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai, Lampang and Lamphun provinces.

Source: http://www.trekthailand.net/p1/index.html (9 May 2006).

Note: the northern region is officially composed by 17 provinces: the 15 showing in this map and Nakhon Sawan andUthai Thani provinces.