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The Second and Third Indochina Wars are the subject of important ongoing scholarship, but there has been little research on the lasting impact of wartime violence on local societies and populations, in Vietnam as well as in Laos and Cambodia. Today's Lao, Vietnamese and Cambodian landscapes bear the imprint of competing violent ideologies and their perilous material manifestations. From battlefields and massively bombed terrain to reeducation camps and resettled villages, the past lingers on in the physical environment. The nine essays in this volume discuss post-conflict landscapes as contested spaces imbued with memory-work conveying differing interpretations of the recent past, expressed through material (even, monumental) objects, ritual performances, and oral narratives (or silences).

While Cambodian, Lao and Vietnamese landscapes are filled with tenacious traces of a violent past, creating an unsolicited and malevolent sense of place among their inhabitants, they can in turn be transformed by actions of resilient and resourceful local communities.

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Interactions with a Violent Past

READING POST-CONFLICT LANDSCAPES
IN CAMBODIA, LAOS, AND VIETNAM



Vatthana Pholsena and Oliver Tappe (editors)

32. Author's translation from French.
33. Biersack (1991): 20
34. For Wolf Kansteiner: "[...] we should conceptualize collective memory as the result of the interaction among three types of historical factors: the intellectual and cultural traditions that frame all our representations of the past, the memory-makers who selectively adopt and manipulate these traditions, and the memory-consumers who use, ignore, or transform such artifacts according to their own interests" (Kansteiner 2002: 2).
35. Connerton (1989): 22.
36. Carruthers (1990): 204–5.
37. Mass tourism which, for instance, targets world heritage sites like Angkor Wat in the northwest.
38. United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia from 1992–93.
39. See Saunders (2003).
40. Indeed, the object eventually returns to its place of origin albeit in another form and texture: "the Soviet war matériel such as AK-47 assault rifles, Hind M-24 helicopters, HIP-8 troop carrying helicopters, BMD-2 armoured personnel carriers and a miscellany of rockets, grenades, handguns and aeroplanes" (Saunders 2003: 202) find their way back as illustrated motifs on a locally-woven carpet.
41. Gell (1998): 34.
42. Ingold (2000): 111.
43. Quote from William Faulkner, *Requiem for a Nun* (1951): Act I Scene 3.

CHAPTER 9

Remembering Old Homelands: The Houay Ho Dam, the Resettlement of the Heuny (Nya Heun), Memory, and the Struggle for Places

Ian G. Baird

Introduction

Memory can be linked to landscapes in various ways. People have memories of places they visited as children, and memories of places where certain significant things in their lives occurred. People also have social or group memories (Fukushima 2002; Halbwachs 1992), including those that link particular landscapes with important events that occurred long ago, sometimes even before they were born, thus leading some, such as William Turkel, to characterize certain landscapes as constituting "archives of memory" (Turkel 2007). These latter memories are often generated through stories that people have heard and reheard, and read and reread. This fits well with Bill Cronon's ideas about "telling stories about stories" (Cronon 1992: 1375). People often use geographical features to symbolize particular memories; we can think of these landscapes as "discourse made material" (Dwyer 2004: 422). Indeed, there is considerable interplay between materiality and discourse, with each potentially influencing the other. Memories do significantly affect present-day ideas and actions. They are complex, and just as landscapes change over time, so do memories.

I use the word "places" above to refer to particular landscapes. In human geography, scholars have looked at the concept of place in various ways. The humanist Yi-Fu Tuan describes "places" as spaces that are

endowed with particular meaning to people; as he put it, "'Space' is more abstract than 'place'. What begins as undifferentiated space becomes place as we come to know it better and endow it with value" (Tuan 1977: 6). Places, in this view, are spaces where significant experiences occurred. Similarly, Wolfgang Sachs (1992) considers places to be imbued with experiences, both present and past, while James Duncan defines places as "bounded settings in which social relations and identity are constituted" (Duncan 2000: 582). Places can be thought of as fundamentally constituted through history, and history, in turn, is affected by politics (Gordillo 2002, 2004), and is ultimately influenced by multiple forms of power; as John Allen argues, "[P]ower is *inherently* spatial, and conversely, spatiality is *imbued* with power" (emphasis in original) (Allen 2003: 3). Thus, memory, power, and places are closely linked. Recently, however, some theorists in geography, such as Doreen Massey (2005) and Sallie Marston (2000), have argued that all spaces — not just those we constitute as "places" — are produced through social processes. This view leads to the conclusion that there is no longer a place (or space) for the concept of "place." While I find this argument compelling, it remains possible to argue that the ways we apply meanings to the concepts of place and space — in common usage — are different, and that places are spaces connected with certain types of meanings that are particularly important to us, and are linked to experiences and intimate memories. While places and spaces are both socially constituted, we do not normally use the terms in the same ways.

We typically recognize memories to be particular recollections of events that occurred — and in their purest form, that is what they are. Memories are indeed founded on recollections of the past, but they are far from simple or neutral. In fact, even from the first moment that a memory is constituted, when a person remembers something that happened just moments before, such as having dinner with a friend, memories are always refracted through human thought processes, so that depending on who we are, what we are interested in, and the significance of certain aspects of an event to us, memories manifest themselves in very different and unique ways. While my memory of the dinner might revolve around a particular conversation that is relevant to me, yours could vary significantly, and possibly be focused on a totally different discussion, or it might simply be attentive to the quality of the meal. Therefore, one person's memory of a particular moment or period of time is never the same as someone else's, even if both people have physically experienced the event in seemingly identical ways. Each of us has our own different package of pasts and associated places, and we always construct memories within the context of

other memories, and constitute places in relation to other places.¹ Memories never exist in isolation but are entwined with each other, always in different and frequently surprising ways.

Things become even more complex with the passage of time, as memories shift and morph and variously transform based on different factors. When we ponder something that occurred in the past, and try to remember what happened, it seems as if we are trying to find a particular page in a book, one written when the event first occurred. If only we can recall the page, it would seem possible to fully recreate the moment, in a pure way. The reality, however, is not so simple. Memories never remain untouched by one's disposition, nor are they immune from the influences of politics, including national, ethnic group, community, and even interpersonal politics between two people.² As I have argued elsewhere, our memories of the past are frequently political (Baird and Le Billon 2012). Moreover, Fentress and Wickham's perspective (1992) on the role of politics and struggle in the production of memories and histories makes sense; they indicate how important politics is for refracting visions of history.

Over time, memories become less about revealing the "true facts of what happened" and more about engaging particular performances, ones that are inevitably entangled with worldviews, politics, and a myriad of feelings and relationships. Paul Connerton (1989) thus argued that performance is crucial for sustaining and transforming social memory. Vatthana Pholsena, in recording the histories of ethnic minority revolutionary women in southeastern Laos, wrote, for example, "I am more interested in the witness of these revolutionary fighters for what their stories reveal about their own understanding of historical events" (Pholsena 2008: 460). This does not mean that memories are not useful for reconstructing particular "facts" of what happened, but if we are only looking to recreate the past, we are missing crucial aspects of what memories can offer. Memories, even if presented as being simply recollections of hard facts, can tell us much more. We need to see memories as experiences that are not simply recalled, but are rather produced and reproduced over time, and entwined with agency, so that in the end people are not simply recalling past acts, but are considering past productions and reproductions of the past. Thus, new recollections of the past can be seen as new constructs, as hybrids that combine "facts" with various social, cultural, and political influences that variously affect how we remember things, how we choose to organize our memories, and how we present them to others in varied ways, depending on our audiences. In addition, as Bill Cronon (1992) reminds us, producing memories is as much about forgetting, omitting and erasing than it is about

remembering. Ultimately, as Paul Ricoeur (1986) and Elizabeth Tonkin (1992) astutely point out, narrative accounts of the past can reproduce memories as well as create them, sometimes to achieve new ends not previously conceived.

In addition, the ways people remember landscapes are greatly affected by their previous experiences with those landscapes. For example, if one's profession or livelihood is not greatly dependent on a particular landscape, being displaced from it is likely to foster different and potentially (but not necessarily) less traumatic reactions compared to if one's life was heavily dependent on the landscape that the person is displaced from, and if one's knowledge is tied up and only particularly relevant in the context of the landscape. In such cases, being displaced to a new landscape, and new livelihood circumstances, is likely to lead to more difficulties in adapting. Clearly, such results often lead to particular memories that are linked to landscapes.

So, when we study memories, we should not only do so in the hope of learning about the facts of particular events, but also to better understand the various factors that affect the ways memories are constructed. Certainly, how people typically remember landscapes depends on a whole array of factors. Memories of landscapes that people have left on their own terms are likely to be remembered differently from how landscapes that they have been forced to abandon are recollected. The circumstances of one's departure from a particular landscape, the ability to adapt, to reinvent oneself, to prosper by one's own standards in one's new surroundings, are all crucial for understanding what can be broadly considered to be the politics of memory. Understanding these memories and how they are produced and reproduced is not only useful for considering people's perceptions of the past, but also for recognizing why things are as they are now.³

In this chapter, I present a case study that deals with a particular "package" of memories, and a certain assemblage of conditions and influences, many of which are affected by geography. Because the people who I write about were forcibly dislodged from particular landscapes that they had inhabited for as long as they could remember (again, social memories are crucial for understanding the context), and because they have not been officially allowed to return to those landscapes on a permanent basis, a particular form of nostalgia for the "places" they left has become part of memory. But unlike the type of nostalgia that frequently affected refugees living across oceans from their original homelands, the landscapes that these people have been displaced from are within relatively close

proximity of where they have been resettled. They are too far away to walk back and forth to on a daily basis, but they are close enough that those relocated are still frequently able to access those places. These landscapes are not only a part of a displaced person's memory, they also continue to be part of people's present-day experiences, but the relationship with the land has changed. While those displaced can still go there frequently, even for long periods, they cannot truly return and call the landscape their official home, at least not yet. They are positioned as "partially displaced" from the landscape, precariously situated with insecure and uncertain tenure over land and resources. These experiences ultimately create particular memories related to landscapes, ones that may be less abstract and more material than memories of more distant landscapes, and in this particular case, support particular struggles for the right to permanently return "home."

The Houay Ho Dam

Paksong District, located in Champasak Province, encompasses much of the Bolaven Plateau, a high mountainous area in the south of the Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR or Laos) that straddles the main-stream Mekong River to the west and the Xekong River to the east. Reaching up to over 2,000 meters above sea level, the climate of the plateau is unlike the rest of southern Laos. It receives much more rain (over 4,000 mm annually at some locations), and is subject to a relatively cool climate, with temperatures occasionally reaching below freezing (Phetsavanh 2004; Delang and Toro 2011). The plateau supports a wide variety of plants and wildlife, especially along its steep escarpment.⁴ It is home to two Mon-Khmer language-speaking groups of indigenous peoples who call themselves the Heuny (Nya Heun) and the Jrou (Laven) (Phetsavanh 2004).

Situated 160 kilometers east of Pakse, the capital of Champasak Province, and 30 kilometers northwest of Attapeu town, in southern Laos, the Houay Ho Dam — a concrete-faced and rock-filled 76-meter-high structure with a 980-meter-long concrete-lined waterway that runs into a 104-meter vertical pressure shaft (Baird and Shoemaker 2008; Sparkes 2000; Delang and Toro 2011: 573) — was built at an estimated cost of US\$220–250 million.⁵ The dam's 32.5–37 km² reservoir is located on the Bolaven Plateau in Paksong District, while the powerhouse is situated at the bottom of the Bolaven Plateau, near the Xekong River, in Samakhixay

District, Attapeu Province (Baird and Shoemaker 2008). Houay Ho was the largest dam constructed in southern Laos in the 1990s (Nok 2008: 73; Delang and Toro 2011).

In 1993, the large Korean conglomerate and automobile maker, Daewoo Engineering Co. Ltd., began negotiating with the Government of Laos (GoL) regarding the Houay Ho Dam. A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to investigate the project was signed in March 1993, and in July, the Tasmanian firm, the Hydro-Electric Commission Enterprise Corporation (HECEC), began conducting a feasibility study (Wyatt 2004: 145; International Rivers Network 1999: 41; Hydro-Electric Commission Enterprise Corporation 1993). Just two months later, however, long before the study was completed, a 30-year concession agreement to proceed was signed (Baird and Shoemaker 2008: 349). In November 1994, construction began on the 150 Megawatt (MW) capacity hydropower dam, which was one of the first Build, Own, Operate, and Transfer (BOOT)⁶ projects in Laos (Wyatt 2004; International Rivers Network 1999: 41; Delang and Toro 2011: 573). Daewoo held 60 percent of the shares in the Houay Ho Power Company (HHPC) — created specifically for the project — while Loxley Public Company Ltd., a leading Thai trading firm, and Électricité du Laos (EdL), Laos' state-owned electricity agency, held 20 percent each (International Rivers Network 1999: 41).

The project developed rapidly, even though Daewoo and Loxley had little experience building dams. As a GoL observer from the Ministry of Industry and Handicrafts told Andrew Wyatt years later, “It had a bad smell. We never got to see any studies for the project. I don't think any were done” (Wyatt 2004: 144; Delang and Toro 2011: 574). Apparently the investors were anxious to gain the rights to one of the most profitable hydropower projects in Laos, and the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister in charge of coordinating foreign investment at the time, Khamphouy Keoboulapha — who was said to have had close connections with Thai business interests, including Loxley — signed off on the project without much consultation with the Ministry of Industry and Handicrafts or EdL. Signing without legal representation resulted in the GoL getting an extremely poor deal,⁷ and is rumored to have been part of the reason for Khamphouy Keoboulapha's fall from both the Politburo and Party's Central Committee, the regime's two most powerful political bodies, soon after. In October 1995, a power purchase agreement for selling electricity from the project to Thailand was signed by the Electricity Generating Authority of Thailand (EGAT).⁸ On 1 September 1999, Thailand began

purchasing electricity from the project (International Rivers Network 1999: 3). Electricity sales to Thailand have continued ever since.

A number of observers, including both critics of hydropower dams and some frequently sympathetic to the hydropower industry, have criticized the project (Delang and Toro 2011; Nok 2000, 2008; Baird and Shoemaker 2008; Wyatt 2004; Phetsavanh 2004; Sparkes 2000; International Rivers Network 1999; Halcrow 1998; Dennis 1997). An Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) was conducted by the Swiss consulting firm Electrowatt, but construction began before the study was completed, and the EIA may never have been finalized as it was apparently seen as unnecessary by Daewoo once the concession agreement had been signed, which indicates the very low level of concern they had regarding the project's social and environmental impacts.⁹ The project essentially proceeded without its potential returns, risks, or costs being known (Wyatt 2004). Furthermore, the project agreement did not stipulate any mitigation or compensation,¹⁰ and as a result, Daewoo only made a single US\$230,000 payment for all social and environmental impacts, and left the GoL to take responsibility for any additional impacts (Nok 2008: 73; Delang and Toro 2011: 573). Both the HECEC and Electrowatt studies were of poor quality. Most seriously, the various impacts of the project on the culture and livelihoods of the Heuny people, the main inhabitants of the project area, were largely discounted, overlooked or only superficially addressed (International Rivers Network 1999: 41).

Indicative of how poorly planned the Houay Ho Dam was, the developers built a road right to the edge of the 236-meter escarpment of the Plateau. The original plan was for the road to go down the escarpment to Attapeu town, but when the bulldozers reached the edge of a high cliff, they realized that they would have to abandon part of the road and double back in order to find a more moderately-sloped route down a valley. Daewoo widened 100 kilometers of road, and built at least 38 kilometers of new roads. In some cases, debris from the road-building was needlessly discarded into rivers, causing unnecessary environmental impacts (International Rivers Network 1999: 46). Some local cemeteries, which were located adjacent to the widened roads, were also carelessly bulldozed by road workers,¹¹ causing considerable resentment amongst communities (International Rivers Network 1999: 46–7). Due to poor planning, there have been problems with the tunnel cracking.¹² The reservoir has also been leaking, resulting in considerably less water being available for producing electricity (Baird and Shoemaker 2008: 355; *Khao San Pathet Lao*,

20 February 2002). This has led the owners to look for possible ways to divert more water into the reservoir.

Only one village (Nam Han) was located directly within the project area of the Houay Ho Dam, and another village (Thong Ngao) was situated downstream of the dam, where the river would dry up, thus eliminating fishing opportunities, and leading project planners to recommend its relocation. Latsaxin Village was also slated for resettlement, as it was located near the dirt extraction site for the dam (Baird and Shoemaker 2008: 351). In the end, 2,500 people living in 11 communities were resettled due to the Houay Ho Dam and in anticipation of the construction of the Xepian-Xenamnoy Dam, which was also expected at the time to proceed in the same general area (Nok 2008: 73; Delang and Toro 2011: 574). The idea was to prevent future erosion impacts on both projects (International Rivers Network 1999: 42). The resettlement areas were initially collectively designated as a government "focal site," which typically, in Lao development jargon, represents an area allocated for "developing" resettled ethnic minorities from the uplands (Baird and Shoemaker 2007: 874–5; Baird and Shoemaker 2008: 124–5). This designation was, however, revoked for this particular area in 2000. The villages of Thong Ngao, Nam Han, Nam Tieng and Latsaxin were the first to be relocated, followed by Keokhounmuang, Nam Leng, Nam Kong and Xenamnoy, in 1996–97. Don Khong and Houay Soy were moved in 2000, and Tayeuk Seua in 2003. All of the relocated villages except for one (Don Khong, whose inhabitants are Jrou) were populated by Heuny people. The vast majority of the Heuny were resettled to a location known as "*Ban Chat San Unit #8*," which is near the ethnic Jrou villages of Nam Kong and Nam Tang.

In 1997, Daewoo and Loxley were forced to liquidate some of their assets as a result of the Asian financial crisis. Thus, in 2001, their 80 percent share in the Houay Ho Dam was sold to the Belgian company Tractebel S.A. and its Thai subsidiary MCL for US\$140 million (Tractebel 2001; International Water Power & Dam Construction, 1 October 2001; Nok 2008: 73; Delang and Toro 2011: 575), with the support of Belgium-government-sponsored export credits (Baird 2005: 357). Tractebel has denied responsibility for the problems facing those relocated for the project (Nok 2008: 74), thus leaving a vacuum of accountability, and little recourse for those who have still not been appropriately compensated. Tractebel seems to have thought that they could buy the dam's assets without acquiring the dam's unfulfilled past responsibilities, and so far they have been able to get away with it! There is a strong argument for legal responsibility, as when a company is purchased, all its assets and liabilities,

including unsettled compensation issues, typically come with it. At the very least, there would appear to be a moral obligation for them to carefully consider the resettled people.

Problems with the Resettlement of the Heuny (Nya Heun)

The ethnic Heuny people — commonly referred to as the Nya Heun — are only found on the east side of the Bolaven Plateau in what is presently designated as Paksong District.¹³ They speak their own particular language, which is included within the Western Bahnaric linguistic branch of the Mon-Khmer family. In 2005, the national census indicated that the total Heuny population was just 6,785 (National Statistics Centre 2006: 15). Approximately 40 percent of the global Heuny population was resettled as a result of dam development in the late 1990s (International Rivers Network 1999: 43).¹⁴ In the 1960s and early 1970s, much of the Heuny population aligned themselves with the Royal Lao Government and joined "Special Guerrilla Units" (SGUs) organized, paid for, and directed by the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). The primary job of the Heuny was to conduct covert operations for collecting intelligence about the Ho Chi Minh Trail to the east, and engaging in operations to disrupt the Trail.¹⁵ Despite heavy fighting in the area during the Second Indochina War in Laos (1964–73), very few people fled their homelands, although some did move around on the eastern Bolaven Plateau (International Rivers Network 1999: 42). Prior to being resettled, the Heuny people largely subsisted on swidden agriculture combined with fishing, hunting and the collection of non-timber forest products (NTFPs). Some also had small coffee plantations. They could be characterized as living close to nature, with knowledge intricately linked with the land. As Barbara Wall showed in the only detailed ethnography of the Heuny so far conducted, these people were not nomadic "slash-and-burn cultivators" who damaged primary forest. Instead, they lived in largely fixed settlements near flowing water, where they conducted well-organized swidden agriculture (Wall 1975).

In 1995, when the Xepian-Xenamnoy Hydropower Project began being surveyed by the Korean company Dong Ah Co., consultants hired to investigate found that Heuny agricultural practices did not threaten sustainable forest management, as only one percent of the forest was under agricultural use each year. The population density was low, allowing for long well-over-20-year forest regrowth. The consultants found that with limited exceptions, most of the Heuny families were self-sufficient in rice and other foodstuffs.¹⁶ While not everything was perfect, many Heuny now

reflect on those days nostalgically. A woman from Houay Soy village was quoted as saying, "We want to return to our former village. Over there we have plenty of fruits. The water from the stream is cool and clean, and catching fish is very easy" (Phetsavanh 2004: 10).

The main problem with the resettlement was the lack of available agricultural land, as well as the dearth of forests and streams for fishing, hunting and collecting NTFPs. For example, prior to resettling, people from Xenamnoy Village reported that 60 percent of their animal protein originated from wild fish (Roberts and Baird 1995), but once they arrived in the resettlement area, fish consumption dropped dramatically, affecting nutrition levels (Baird and Shoemaker 2008: 352). Although it was agreed that those resettled would require a minimum of three hectares of agriculture land per household,¹⁷ there was insufficient land, and much of the land allocated was not "empty," as claimed by GoL officials. Instead, most of the land provided to those resettled were the fallow agriculture fields of neighboring ethnic Jrou villages. Therefore, once the Heuny tried to cultivate it, they realized that their neighbors were unwilling to give it up. Soon, less than 20 percent of the allocated land remained available for those resettled to cultivate, thus resulting in chronic food security problems. There is even less land now. There are variations between different resettlements, with some villages having access to only four to five hectares of agricultural land nearby for whole communities.

There were also conflicts with the existing communities in the area over the use of nearby forests and streams, as the historical foraging rights of preexisting communities in the area came under pressure by the resettled people. Thus, resources were rapidly depleted locally due to the influx of so many people accustomed to living off the land in low population densities. The resettlement plan also depended on a strategy to rapidly convert subsistence swidden cultivators into market-oriented cash crop coffee growers. This would have been difficult even under the best of circumstances, but was made even less feasible because the people received inadequate land and training on how to cultivate coffee. Crucially, coffee prices declined rapidly right around the time the Heuny were resettled, reducing incentives for people to cultivate it (Nok 2008: 74).

One of the biggest concerns of the Heuny was territorial, as they had to move west of the Xenamnoy River. Historically, the Heuny had always lived east of the river while the Jrou lived to the west. There was a socially constructed (but not humanly marked) boundary between the two groups.¹⁸ Since they had a history of violent conflict, the Heuny were initially quite anxious about the prospects of moving to Jrou territory.

Villagers bitterly complained about this issue when I visited Xenamnoy and Latsaxin villages in 1995 to conduct the fisheries EIA for the dam. The Heuny believed that the spirits would become angry due to displacement if they moved west of the Xenamnoy, and that this anger could cause serious illnesses or death to the people. This further added anxiety to the resettlement process.

Officials promised the resettled people three years of rice rations, for adapting to their new surroundings and circumstances. However, only a small amount was delivered, causing considerable resentment. According to John Dennis, who visited the resettlement area in September 1997, "[I]f our informant is accurate, this situation is a human rights emergency which requires immediate attention at a high level in Vientiane" (Dennis 1997: 14–5). But little was done, and by February 1998, the situation had deteriorated. Many complained of hunger and food shortages. Some were forced to borrow from moneylenders in the Paksong District center to buy rice (International Rivers Network 1999: 45). While the Daewoo project manager apparently expressed concern about too many people being resettled, no actions were taken by the company or government officials (Dennis 1997). The situation has worsened in recent years, as there is less land available for cultivation than ever, not only because the original inhabitants have taken land back, but also due to various economic land concessions for agriculture which have moved into the area. For example, there are various Vietnamese coffee concessions, and relatives of a senior Lao politician are investing in a cattle ranch.

Gaining access to good water sources is another serious problem. When reminiscing about their old villages, the Heuny quickly point out that they always had access to high-quality flowing stream-water. The resettlement villages are, however, located away from good water sources. Initially, some deep bore-hole wells were drilled in the resettlement villages, but the quality of water available from most was poor. In some cases, well water, when used to water vegetables, was found to kill the plants (I observed this in the late 1990s). Later, Tractebel installed new water systems after they were embarrassed in 2004 by a Belgian NGO, which challenged them regarding the continuing resettlement problems. The NGO argued that Tractebel should take responsibility for these problems, since they purchased the dam using Belgium export credits, and thus were responsible for following the environmental and social responsibility guidelines of the Overseas Economic Cooperation and Development Organization (OECD) (Baird 2005: 357; Baird and Shoemaker 2008: 356; Delang and Toro 2011: 575). Still, the wells constructed by Tractebel were of

poor quality, and most have now broken down. According to a man from Tayeuk Seua Village, "When we lived in our former village, we never faced shortages of water because our village was located near a stream with clean water, and catching fish was very easy. In the resettlement village, we face many difficulties" (Phetsavanh 2004: 7). More recently, a man living in the resettlement area reported to me that, "Now we have to dig shallow wells at the edge of a natural pond in order to obtain water, and the water is not good quality."

Those who live in the resettlement areas have had to increasingly rely on selling their labor. It is now typical for some members of almost every family to work as day laborers picking coffee or cutting grass and weeding for non-Heuny people in neighboring villages or coffee plantation companies. The wages they receive are low and variable, often the equivalent of less than one dollar per day, depending on the work, season, and who is hiring, but it is necessary for them to take such work as in the resettlement areas they have so few independent options for making money or producing their own food. Still, there are sufficient day-labor opportunities to have prevented significant out-migration of Heuny people from Paksong District. Yet some are only able to generate enough income as wage-laborers to buy rice to subsist on a day-to-day basis, thus putting many in precarious situations.

The poverty that people in the resettlement areas have experienced appears to be the main reason why those resettled have reported an increase in petty crime in their communities since being moved (Phetsavanh 2004: 6). Delang and Toro (2011) have characterized the area as facing more poverty problems than anywhere else on the Bolaven Plateau. Poverty, in turn, has impacted on community solidarity, leading people to mentally construct the resettlement villages as "difficult places," as "places of poverty" (*bone thouk nyak* in Lao). In addition, the Heuny report that due to various factors, including increased poverty and the need to work as daily wage-laborers, as well as a general fragmenting of communities, there are less traditional rituals in the resettlement area than there were before the people were resettled (Phetsavanh 2004). This is largely because people cannot afford to buy the items (pigs, chickens, rice, rice beer, etc.) required for rituals, and also because they have to go to work as wage laborers more frequently, thus leaving them with less time to prepare for and conduct rituals. For the Heuny, who are explicitly Animist (they believe that illnesses and bad fortune are frequently caused by spirits), this symbolizes community disintegration, as the main times when community

members gather in large groups are when rituals are organized. This change is something that the Heuny generally lament.

One of the most disappointing aspects of the resettlement of the Heuny is that despite being resettled as a result of hydropower development for export, well over a decade after the dam started exporting electricity to Thailand, the people living in the resettlement areas still do not have access to electricity. Many Heuny feel abandoned by the State. For example, in February 2003, an old Heuny man from Tayeuk Seua Village was quoted as saying, "I'd rather return to my former village because here nothing has improved. The officials have never visited us. They treat us like people who do not have any relatives" (Phetsavanh 2004: 8). Echoing the above comment, another resettled Heuny woman told Phetsavanh, that, "I miss my former village and I want to return to it because I used to live there for a long time. I've left behind the trees that I used to collect fruits from every year. I miss them a lot. Whenever I think of them I cry a great deal. Here in the resettlement village, we cannot eat any fruits because they are stolen before they are ripe" (Phetsavanh 2004: 6). One can see how people are becoming nostalgic for certain places and the trees that mark them; places that are materially significant for their livelihoods.

Abandoning Resettlement Areas

My relatives and I don't want to live in the resettlement village but we were forced to and we could not protest. We miss our native lands where we used to live for hundreds of years, our crops, vegetables and our happy lives.

— A villager from Thong Ngao village¹⁹

As a result of the serious land and resource problems facing the resettled Heuny, many have become nostalgic for their old homelands, located just over a day's walk from the resettlement sites (actually, about 17–19 hours' walking, or six to seven hours by bicycle). Soon after being resettled, many began looking for ways to leave the resettlement areas and return to their old villages, but the GoL refused to allow them to move. As time passed, and conditions continued to deteriorate, more and more families began subverting government rules to return to their homelands. The first excuse used was that they wanted to return to their old swidden fallows or small coffee plantations to obtain stockpiles of rice that had been stored in barns. They also argued that they needed to return to collect

vegetables and coffee beans still growing in their old fields. These people frequently requested permission from authorities to make the trip, but often would not return for two or three months, after which time they would stay for a few days before going to their former homes again, claiming that they had eaten all the rice they had brought with them and needed to return for more. Over time, once people realized that they had fewer and fewer options in the resettlement areas, and that they could subvert official directives for them to remain in the resettlement areas by claiming to return to their old fields on a temporary basis, more and more people left, and those who left spent less and less time in the resettlement areas. After a few years, some families had in reality abandoned the resettlement sites, although they were still officially residents there. One only had to walk through the resettlement areas to see that many of the houses were deteriorating, and had not been inhabited for a long time. As Phetsavanh reported, “[t]he people do not listen to government authorities anymore. They were told that in the resettlement villages they would be provided with all the facilities needed, but so far nothing has happened, which has made the people unhappy” (Phetsavanh 2004: 11). There are certainly some differences between what older and younger people want, with the latter desiring modernity more than the former, but these differences may be less pronounced than in some other cases when indigenous peoples have been resettled, as younger people are still interacting with the old village spaces on a regular basis, and thus have more chances to generate new memories through engaging in real work characteristic of the ways things were done in the distant past, such as conducting swidden agriculture near their old villages. It is not just about the older people remembering these more traditional activities, while the younger people have not seen them in practice, as is the case for some Brao people living outside Virachey National Park in northeastern Cambodia (Baird 2009a).

The Heuny have also left the resettlement villages in order to avoid conflicts with neighboring communities and their own people over the small amount of land available for agriculture. As one man told me, “We never had any land shortages when we lived in our old territories. There were never any land shortages. Only since we have come to the resettlement villages have we had to deal with land disputes.” According to Phetsavanh, there are now more disputes over land belonging to the neighboring villages, because there are no clear boundaries like there were in the Heuny’s previous village areas (Phetsavanh 2004: 10). In 2003, about 50 percent of the people in the main resettlement were spending significant amounts of time near their original villages (Phetsavanh 2004: 6). Then, in

2006, it was estimated that 70 percent of the resettled families were living away from the resettlement areas, and in 2010 approximately 80 percent of the population had essentially returned to their old areas.²⁰ In 2011, a Heuny man living in one of the resettlement villages told me that if the government allowed people to live where they wanted, virtually nobody would remain, mainly because of the lack of agricultural and foraging land, but also due to the poor quality of water sources.

While the villagers have managed to partially subvert government plans, in ways reminiscent of the type of indirect resistance that James Scott describes in his well-known book, *Weapons of the Weak* (1985), this has not been under ideal circumstances, and has frequently come at a heavy cost. For example, many children have moved from the resettlement area with their parents and are now unable to attend school. Moreover, not all children living away from the resettlement sites are being vaccinated. Families have also sometimes been split up, with some staying in the resettlement areas and others returning to their old homelands. Conducting communal village business has become difficult as most of the official residents of the villages are not in residence in reality.

After a number of years of living precariously, spending most of their time near their old villages, but still officially living in resettlement villages, in 2008 a group of over 50 Heuny families submitted a document to the subdistrict government asking for permission to establish an official village near their former communities. The subdistrict chief, despite himself being Heuny, did not respond favorably. Instead, he prepared a document that fully rejected the request. He strongly told those proposing the “new village” that they should never consider this option again. When local people pointed out that there was insufficient land near the resettlement communities for them to make a living there, the subdistrict chief was unable to suggest any solutions. Still, the people had to be particularly careful in voicing their objections, as many were previously CIA SGU soldiers, making them vulnerable to accusations of being “against government policy,” a label with potentially serious repercussions in the Lao context. Even if government officials did not mention the previous affiliations of many of the Heuny, recognition of past affiliations held by many Heuny were enough to significantly reduce their confidence. Indeed, very few Heuny were allied with the Pathet Lao. People still have memories of the years immediately following the communist take-over of the country, when former soldiers were sent for “reeducation,” or “*samana*” in Lao. People feared accusations of being aligned with anti-government insurgent groups, or of at least providing them with food. Although past political alliances

are not spoken of as much now as they were earlier, people are still aware of what side of the conflict others were on, and these “political memories” continue to influence development outcomes (Baird and Le Billon 2012).

The Return of the Xepian-Xenamnoy Hydropower Project

The Xepian-Xenamnoy Hydropower Project, which the Korean company Dong Ah started hastily developing in the 1990s after a MoU for constructing the project was signed with the GoL in February 1994 (International Rivers Network 1999), was discontinued entirely once the Asian financial crisis hit, and before substantial construction on the dam had begun.²¹ However, the project is now being revived by new investors, including the Korean companies, SK Engineering and Construction and Korea Western Power, and the Thai company, Ratchaburi. The Project Development Agreement for the 390 MW capacity dam was completed in 2008, at which time it was expected to be producing power by 2015 (Nok 2008: 75). In particular, Xepian-Xenamnoy is seen as being potentially useful for supplying some of the massive amount of electricity that would be required for a planned large-scale bauxite mine and aluminum smelter project, which is being touted by the Australian mining company Ord River Resources and its Chinese partner, China Nonferrous Metals. They claim that the project has the potential to be developed into a “world class aluminum industry” (Vaughn 2006; Riseborough 2006), even though the aluminum industry is well-known for causing serious negative environmental and social impacts (International Rivers Network 2005). This particular development would cause many environmental and livelihood problems in the Paksong area and the Xekong River Basin more generally (Nok 2008; Baird and Shoemaker 2008; Delang and Toro 2011).

There is, however, more to the development of the bauxite mine than meets the eye. Here we see how memories of landscapes are important. When the Heuny were initially resettled from their homelands in the late 1990s, government officials told them that their relocation had been justified on environmental grounds. The plan was to designate their homelands as a protected area. This fit with new protected areas on the Bolaven Plateau proposed by the US-based Wildlife Conservation Society (Wildlife Conservation Society 1995). The Heuny are not only upset about being moved, but are annoyed that the government has added insult to injury by lying to them (at least that is how many perceive it). Rather than turning the area into a protected area, the Heuny noticed changes in the landscape.

They started finding large craters in the ground, at different locations. These craters were dug as part of the mine-surveying process; they are test holes. These scars on the landscape have been troubling for many Heuny, especially the elders, who do not like the idea that their homelands are being dug up without their knowledge, let alone their permission. They feel doubly betrayed by the government, as they now realize that their former territories are slated to become the center of a large open-pit bauxite mining operation that would cover a wide area and alter the landscape in ways that would make the test holes seem insignificant in comparison (Nok 2008: 75).

In addition, Houay Chote and Nong Phanouane — the two villages in the area that managed to avoid resettlement in the late 1990s through continually arguing that they were already doing well where they were, that they had contributed strongly to the revolution, and that there was not enough space or resources for those who have already been resettled, let alone them as well — would need to be resettled for the project, along with another two villages previously not slated for relocation. They have all been told that each family will receive US\$5,500 in compensation for losses (Nok 2008: 75), but the people remain disappointed, as they believed that they had finally succeeded in avoiding resettlement after resisting for over a decade. They were particularly happy when, in May 2005, GoL officials informed them that they would not be resettled after all (Baird and Shoemaker 2008: 361), since at the time plans to build the Xepian-Xenamnoy Dam remained uncertain. Now it seems likely that they will have to move after all.

Continuing Attachments to the Land

The Heuny have indicated particular interest in the landscapes that were previously theirs. For example, there is a sacred forest near the Champasak-Attapeu provincial border in Paksong District where people from the Heuny ethnic group conduct important community Animist rituals each year.²² While only covering four hectares, this place is located at the base of a mountain, near a waterfall. Even though the Heuny have been resettled from their original lands, they have not abandoned this sacred place. Therefore, when rumors started emerging about how the forest in the area might be damaged if the government proceeded with a plan to develop a large irrigation project in the area, elders expressed concern, at least to the sub-district chief. It is unclear, however, when and if the project will actually

materialize, and since nothing has occurred so far, serious protests have yet to erupt. But even the initial concern shown indicates the continued attachment many Heuny have to their old homelands.

One of the most powerful indicators that the Heuny are still strongly attached to their old landscapes is that people from the various resettled villages, which have all maintained their village names from before they were resettled — itself a significant indicator of their attitude to resettlement — are not just returning anywhere east of the Xenamnoy River. They are almost all going back to the same village territories where they previously resided. For example, the people from Xenamnoy Village are returning to their old territory, as are those from Nam Kong, and so on. Even though nobody officially has rights to their old lands, the different communities continue to informally recognize village territories and associated boundaries that existed prior to their resettlement. It is also significant that former village cemeteries, which each community maintained in their old village territories before resettlement, are still being looked after despite the villages having been dismantled years ago. As one man told me in 2011, “If people are in their old villages when they die, they are buried in their old cemeteries, which are maintained as in the past.”

Since there is little land for developing coffee in the resettlement areas, and much of the land available is not particularly good for coffee cultivation anyway, many Heuny have planted coffee in their old homelands. While some Heuny had small coffee gardens before being resettled, these plantations have been expanded, and many have started new ones. Often they plant rice together with coffee seedlings in the first year, and then allow the coffee to dominate in subsequent years, with rice no longer being cultivated. Therefore, apart from cultivating swidden fields with subsistence crops, the investment in long-term perennial crops clearly indicates that many Heuny believe that they will continue to have access to their old homelands long into the future, even if the GoL does not allow them to officially live there “permanently.” In addition, people’s knowledge of the soil conditions of their old lands continues to influence their agricultural decisions. People are not just cultivating swiddens and coffee randomly. For example, one man from Xenamnoy Village informed me, in 2011, that, “The land in our area is generally suitable for swidden agriculture, so that is what people from my village mainly do there. There is only a small amount of land suitable for coffee. However, the land of Houay Soy and Nam Leng is very good for coffee, so they grow more. People from Xenamnoy also move toward these territories to plant new coffee.”

The Heuny have built small houses on their previous homelands. More permanent and slightly larger houses have been constructed near more permanent coffee plantations, while temporary houses, designed for people to live in only during single rainy seasons, are built on swidden fields. There are no villages left in the old homeland of the Heuny, but there are various houses distributed throughout the landscape, with most people locating themselves according to former patterns, and on their own community territories. The coffee plantations have, in recent years, been quite profitable, as coffee prices are much higher now than they were in the late 1990s. Thus, many Heuny families have generated significant income from coffee, which has further contributed to people becoming attached to their old homelands. This income has also allowed for the purchase of motorcycles. In the late 1990s, the Heuny had very few motorcycles, but now they have many. Part of the reason is an influx of relatively cheap Chinese motorcycles, which have made it feasible for even poor families to pool money to purchase them. Crucially, changes in modes of transportation have significantly reduced the travel time and effort required to move between the resettlement villages and the old homelands, since the Heuny can now travel the more-than-40-kilometer journey in only about three hours in the dry season and about four hours during the rainy season. In essence, the purchasing of motorcycles and improvements of roads in the area have resulted in what David Harvey (1989) has called time-space compression.²³ This has effectively made the resettlement villages closer to the old villages, and actually encouraged Heuny people to return to their old homelands, as it is no longer as arduous a journey as in the past.

Subdistrict government officials living in the resettlement area have also become increasingly concerned about the number of people going back to their old lands. They clearly fear that district and provincial officials may become angry with them for not being able to keep the people from leaving the resettlement areas, and causing the district and province to acknowledge that the resettlement program, which was once the flagship focal site of the province, has been an utter failure. Furthermore, they are losing control of the population as more and more people refuse to stay in the resettlement areas. This is threatening the authority that has been put in them by the State. As a response, since 2009, these officials have begun trying to reinvigorate their faltering control over the people and space by insisting that every villager be present in their official villages on the 15th day of each month, at which time a sort of “roll call” is performed as a way of both reminding the Heuny in their political jurisdiction that these

officials are still able to wield some power, and also to protect themselves from criticism from government officials higher up. At least they can claim that they are trying to keep the people in the resettlement villages, as they can say that everyone is present in the resettlement villages at least once a month, although they are certainly aware that the whole exercise has more symbolic value than actually serving to keep people in the resettlement villages, or increase their attachment to them. While this is an attempt to control the Heuny population, the fact that the people are still able to return to their old villages demonstrates a certain level of compromise that allows both the interests of the government and the people to be partially met. Officials can do little more, as they have little to offer them in the resettlement sites.

Therefore, people drive their bicycles and motorcycles, or sometimes their tractors (*lot toke toke* in Lao) so that they are present on the 15th of each month, and then soon after they return to their old territories until the next month. They cannot stay in the resettlement villages for long, as the original houses built for them when they were first resettled have largely deteriorated. Termites have eaten much of them, and most are no longer habitable, even if the people wanted to live in them.

While not exactly the same as during the French colonial period, the GoL is nonetheless continuing to administer the Heuny primarily through using Heuny local officials, as the French did through the *Nai Kong* system, when *Nai Kong* were selected by the French to be leaders of particular ethnic groups or groups of villages, especially with regard to acting as their representatives when dealing with the French administration. But Heuny officials, as part of the government, are also involved in influencing and interpreting government policies. This has resulted in Heuny villagers frequently engaging in verbal disputes with local officials from their own ethnic group, rather than government officials from other ethnic backgrounds. Thus, much of the jostling going on is actually between Heuny and other Heuny, with people from other ethnic groups higher up in government hearing little if anything about what is happening.

Conclusion

Ultimately, this chapter has been about what Porteous and Smith call “domicide,” or the destruction of home (Porteous and Smith 2001). In this case, it is the landscapes that are particularly important, rather than the houses themselves. As with Porteous and Smith, I have examined “how

and why powerful people destroy the homes of the less powerful, which happen to be in the way of corporate, political, or bureaucratic projects” (Porteous and Smith 2001: ix). I concur that there has been insufficient attention paid to the impacts of destroying homes, or removing people from landscapes endowed with meaning. My emphasis, however, has not only been on the destruction of homelands, but also on the human agency of a particular social group of people who have become the victims of what can appropriately be called “attempted domicide.” It has only been attempted because those targeted have used memory as one tool for remaining attached to their homelands, and ultimately subverting state efforts to commit domicide against them.

In the case of the Heuny, the strategy for doing this has focused on removing people from their homelands by physically resettling them, and dismantling their previous houses and villages, and subsequently trying to prohibit them from returning to their homelands. Certainly officials who desire change recognize that memory is a significant obstacle for them in successfully reorganizing the people. This is one of the reasons that positive memories about the pre-1975 period, such as those related to interactions between Heuny and American aid workers, or being able to conduct swidden agriculture without as many constrictions, are discouraged, so as to eventually lead to those experiences being forgotten and memories being replaced with new ones of positive aspects of the post-1975 political system. For example, the people are now said to be “independent,” whereas they are characterized as having been under American imperialism (a point that some would dispute) prior to 1975.

In any case, the Heuny have managed to maintain close links to their homelands through reproducing memories of the past, as well as deepening their material connections to the landscape through various practices, including conducting swidden agriculture, developing coffee plantations, maintaining cemeteries, and continuing to recognize sacred places and previously defined village territorial boundaries. As Halbwachs (1992) has indicated, maintaining physical relations with landscapes is crucial for the ways we construct and reconstruct landscape memories, or what can be called “memoryscapes.” Even if their original houses and villages are no longer intact, Heuny connections to their homelands have remained strong, and have seemingly strengthened over time, despite government efforts to prevent this from happening. These present-day material links to the landscape and the agency acquired through memory are both important for understanding these particular attachments to places.

Memories are crucial, as their maintenance through the production and reproduction of particular discourses have allowed the Heuny to compare the past with the present, and to see their old homelands as places of relative prosperity, as places without land conflicts and disputes, as places where people are free to do as they please, and as places where the Heuny can look at landscapes and call them their own. Memories are helping to empower the Heuny with visions for the future that link them to particular places viewed as homelands. The GoL has made sure that the original houses and villages of the Heuny have been destroyed, but they have been unable, at least so far, to destroy the memoryscapes that constitute the true “homes” of the people.

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Notes

1. See Baird (2009b).
2. For examples related to Laos, see Baird (2007); Pholsena (2003, 2004, 2006, 2008); and Evans (1998).
3. See, for example, Pholsena (2008).
4. Wildlife Conservation Society (1995).
5. US\$50 million was financed through equity and the rest of the financing came from a variety of international banks and financial institutions (Sparkes 2000).
6. BOOT projects involve private investment in infrastructure, in this case a hydropower dam. The investor has the ability to sell electricity for a specified period, maybe 25 or 30 years. The infrastructure is then handed over to the government. These types of projects are also sometimes referred to as Built Operate and Transfer (BOT) projects.
7. The concession agreement was not transparent, and as already mentioned above, the contract was not favorable to the GoL, since few taxes and royalties were required, even though the GoL had to make US\$1.8 million annual payments in interest beginning in 2000 when it took out a US\$10 million

- equity loan for the project from Daewoo, at nine percent interest (Nok 2008). The GoL was also not scheduled to receive any benefits from the project for 10–12 years, until the foreign investors had recovered their entire investment (International Rivers Network 1999).
8. The Thai government agreed to buy 126 MW of power from Houay Ho at a price of 4.22 cents/KWh.
 9. It was not until 1999 that the GoL passed its Environment Law, making EIAs for large dams compulsory (Baird and Shoemaker 2008: 350).
 10. At the time, legislation had not yet been passed that would require that all large dams be subjected to detailed social and environment impact assessments.
 11. Unlike the lowland Lao, the Heuny and the Jrou bury their dead in cemeteries.
 12. “Tractebel Moves into Southeast Asian Hydro,” *International Water Power & Dam Construction*, 1 Oct. 2001.
 13. In the 1960s and early 1970s, part of their territory was included in Sayasila District in Attapeu Province; see Sage (1970).
 14. Other Heuny villages in Paksong are also presently scheduled for resettlement, as well as other impacts, as a result of the development of the Xekatam Dam (Lawrence 2008).
 15. See Conboy (1995) and Briggs (2009) for a general overview of the role of road-watchers.
 16. Gary Oughton, personal communication, Apr. 1995.
 17. Ibid.
 18. For a similar example of village-to-village borders among a Western-Bahnaric language-speaking group, see Baird (2008), in relation to the ethnic Brao of southern Laos and northeastern Cambodia.
 19. Quoted by Phetsavanh (2004: 5).
 20. Dot La-ounmuang, personal communication, Feb. 2006 and Mar. 2010.
 21. However, Dong Ah Co. built a number of new roads, and upgraded others, in preparation for full-scale construction before the project was cancelled.
 22. Animist rituals involve sacrificing chickens, pigs or buffaloes to malevolent spirits that are believed to cause illness or misfortune to people if they are not appeased through sacrifices.
 23. That is, space has shrunk because it has become possible to pass through it with much less effort, and over much shorter periods of time.