

# World Heritage Sites and Indigenous Peoples' Rights

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## Indigenous Peoples and Modern Liabilities in the Thung Yai Naresuan Wildlife Sanctuary, Thailand: A Conflict over Biocultural Diversity

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### Introduction

Since the 1970s, a global environmental and developmental crisis has been conceptualized and negotiated in controversial modern discourses about nature conservation, sustainable development and globalization. The need to protect endangered 'natural forests', 'wilderness areas' and 'biodiversity hotspots' as global heritage and assets figures prominently in academic arguments and conservation strategies of non-governmental organizations, as well as in the policies of national and international administrative bodies.

In this context, conflicts have emerged between culturally diverse local communities, particularly indigenous peoples, who derive their livelihoods and identity from their lands and resources, and external modern actors and institutions who claim rights and control over these areas and resources, invoking national and global interests in nature conservation and modernization. These conflicts represent an historically specific expression of competing claims at the fringes of expanding modern societies, framed in current discourses which increasingly propose, at the same time, the preservation of biological as well as cultural diversity.

*Left: A Karen house in Gosadeng village in the Thung Yai Naresuan Wildlife Sanctuary. Photo: Reiner Buergin*

This article is concerned with these widespread conflicts over bio-cultural diversity, focusing on the particular case of the Karen indigenous communities living in the Thung Yai Naresuan Wildlife Sanctuary in Western Thailand. Together with the adjoining Huai Kha Khaeng Wildlife Sanctuary, their living place was declared a UNESCO World Heritage site in December 1991. The two sanctuaries encompass more than 6 200 km<sup>2</sup> and are the core area of the so-called Western Forest Complex, constituting Thailand's largest remaining forest area. Based on an extensive study of the history and current situation of the Karen communities in Thung Yai, the paper will refer to the relationship between the local communities and their natural and social environments, their interaction with the Thai state and the World Heritage nomination and management systems, recount changing ideological and legal views of the conflict, and explore approaches to solving the problems.

## History, identity and livelihood of Karen people in Thung Yai

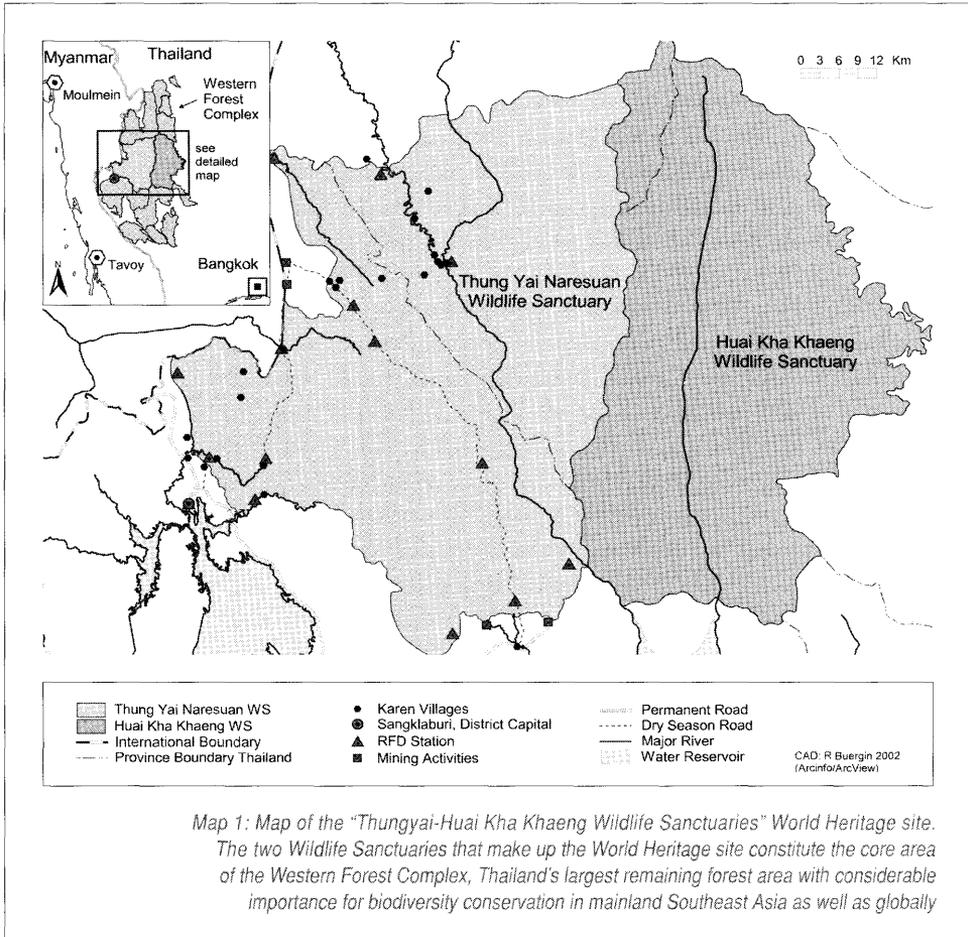
At the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, some 3 500 people are living in the Thung Yai Naresuan Wildlife Sanctuary. Most of them are Pwo Karen and were born in Thailand, predominantly within the sanctuary itself. They generally grow rice as subsistence farmers on swidden and paddy fields.<sup>1</sup> According to Karen oral history, their ancestors came to the area fleeing political and religious suppression in Burma after the Burmese had conquered the Mon kingdoms of Lower Burma in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The first written historic references to their residence in Siam's<sup>2</sup> western border area can be found in chronicles of the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. In the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, they received formal settlement rights from the Governor of Kanchanaburi, and the rank of Siamese nobility *Khun Suwan* was conferred on their leader. When the status of the border area was raised to that of a *muang* or principality – between 1827 and 1839 – the Karen leader of the *muang* was awarded the title of *Phra Si Suwannakhiri* by King Rama III. Since 1873 at the latest, *Phra Si Suwannakhiri* has resided in Sanepong, which became the centre of the *muang* and is now one of the Karen villages lying within the Wildlife Sanctuary. During the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century this *muang* was of considerable importance to the Siamese kings, guarding part of their western border with British Burma. Karen living there were consulted regarding the delineation of the border between Siam and Burma under King Rama V.<sup>3</sup> It was only at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, after the establishment of the modern Thai nation state, that the Karen in Thung Yai lost their former status, reappearing on the national political agenda as forest encroachers and illegal immigrants towards the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The Thai name *Thung Yai* (big field) refers to a savannah in the centre of the sanctuary. For the Karen, the savannah is a place of deep spiritual significance, referred to in Karen as *pia aethala aethae*, which can be translated as 'place of the knowing sage'. The Karen term

1 The survey data on which this article is based is accessible in Buergin 2002a, 2004, see also note 6.

2 The Kingdom of Siam was renamed Thailand in 1939.

3 See Buergin 2004, pp. 83-100; regarding the history of the western border areas see also Renard 1980; Thongchai 1994.



*aethae* refers to mythological hermits who, according to Karen lore, lived and meditated in the savannah. The story of these hermits is important for the identity of the Karen in Thung Yai and they are honoured. Karen seeking spiritual development still retreat to this place for meditation. To refer to their community and homeland, the Karen in Thung Yai use the term *thong bou tai*. The term refers to a specific way of life and values, focusing on the control of greed and spiritual development. These conceptions are related to the Telakho sect, a millenarian Buddhist sect originating in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, possibly in or close to the present-day sanctuary, and which is still influential in Thung Yai.<sup>4</sup> All the villages in the sanctuary, as well as some Karen villages at the edge of the sanctuary, are included in this culturally and geographically determined community.

4 See Stern 1968; Ewers Andersen 1976; Buerjgin 2004.



*Karen ceremony for the guardian of the forest 'rukkhajue', part of a big festival in the 'Thung Yai' savannah to honour the mythological hermits 'aethae'. Photo: Reiner Buergin*

The Karen in Thung Yai conceive of themselves as people living in and of the forest, as part of a very complex community of plants, animals, humans and spiritual beings. Within this community, the Karen do not feel superior but rather as highly dependent on the various other beings and forces. Living in this community requires adaptation as well as specific knowledge about the interdependencies and rules of the community. Fostering relations with the various caretaker spirits of this 'forest community' is an important part of Karen life in the sanctuary. Their permission and support has to be sought continuously in order to live in and use the forest and land. From a modern perspective, many of these rules and traditions could be labelled 'ecological knowledge'. In these rules and norms, as well as in their daily livelihood practices, passed on and transformed from generation to generation, a very rich and specific knowledge has been conserved about the environment of the Karen.

The Karen's relations with the outside world, specifically the 'Thai world', have changed frequently. During the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Karen communities were largely autonomous, even though the villages in Thung Yai were formally integrated into the Thai nation state. It was not until the 1960s, in the wake of the growing interest of the state in its peripheral areas, that state institutions became increasingly relevant in Thung Yai: stations of the Border Patrol Police (BPP) were established in the 1960s, followed by various state offices supporting 'development', as well as the Royal Forest Department (RFD) and the military since the 1980s.

The permanent presence of Thai people in Karen villages since the 1960s, as well as the activities of government institutions aimed at assimilating the Karen into the Thai nation state, resulted in changes in the social, political and religious organization of Karen communities in Thung Yai. These include the decreasing importance of the traditional Karen matrifocal kinship groups and the emergence of a more household-centred and patrifocal ritual system at the village level, the clash of a rather egalitarian and consensus-oriented political organization at the village level with a more authoritarian and hierarchical external political system, and the obstruction of the transmission of Karen identity to the younger generations due to the introduction of the Thai education system in the villages.<sup>5</sup>

The economic organization of most of the households remained relatively unchanged until the late 1980s and early 1990s when restrictions on their land-use system began to threaten the subsistence economy and material wellbeing of the Karen in Thung Yai. Even today, most of the households in Thung Yai practise subsistence farming, predominantly growing rice in swidden fields and some paddy fields. Within a territory 'supervised' by the village community, every year each household selects a swidden field according to household size and work capacity. The secondary vegetation of a fallow area – predominantly bamboo forest – is cut, and burnt after a period of drying. After being used to grow hill rice, generally for one year, the field is once again left fallow for several years, while numerous plants growing in the fallow are used continuously. The traditionally long fallow periods of 5-15 years or more are currently prohibited by the Thai Royal Forest Department (RFD), which considers land uncultivated for that length of time to be reforested, and therefore land that cannot be cleared or used for cultivation. In swidden fields, gardens and forests, a great variety of other plants are grown and collected. Fishing is important for protein. Small supplementary cash incomes are obtained in most households by way of selling chillies, tobacco and various other fruits grown within the traditional land-use system. Wage labour is of little importance to most households. The mean annual per capita income in 1996 was less than US\$ 50.<sup>6</sup>

## Deforestation, protected areas and 'hill tribes' in Thailand

Throughout the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the relationship of the Karen in Thung Yai with the Thai state was predominantly defined by the state categorizing them as 'hill tribes' and declaring their living place a national forest. Profound changes to their economic organization began in the

5 Regarding the complex dynamics of these changes see Buergin 2002b, 2004, pp. 269-322.

6 To date, the data collected in 1996/97 (see Buergin 2002a, pp. 219-278) is the most detailed and reliable data available. More recent demographic and economic data regarding the Western Forest Complex (WEFCOM) was collected in 2003/2004 by public authorities in rapid socio-economic surveys and were compiled in the context of the GMS Biodiversity Conservation Corridors Initiative of the Asian Development Bank (see ADB 2005, pp.8-11). According to this data, the mean annual income in Sub-district Lai Wo (which comprises most of the Karen communities in Thung Yai) was around US\$ 263 per household or US\$ 53 per person, while the figures for Lai Wo in my survey in 1996/97 were US\$ 271 per household and US\$ 57 per person. Population data for 2004 giving a total of 3,319 Karen people living in the Thung Yai Naresuan Wildlife Sanctuary likewise indicates that basic socio-economic data such as population size and incomes has not changed significantly.

1980s and were closely related to the follow-on effects of the declaration of Thung Yai as a Wildlife Sanctuary in 1974. The case of Thung Yai is only one example of a broader controversy on people and forests in Thailand (and globally), rooted in conflicting interests involving the resources of peripheral forest areas in the context of changing forest, development and conservation policies.<sup>7</sup>

Forest and biodiversity conservation in Thailand has focused on the establishment of protected areas that are controlled by the government. This modern approach to nature conservation gained strength in Thailand in the 1950s, during a period of pronounced nationalism, and was based on a prevailing international trend of presupposing an inherent incompatibility between nature conservation and resource use by local communities. Legal provisions for protected areas were created in the 1960s, and the RFD was made responsible for their creation and management.<sup>8</sup> Prior to this approach that emerged in the 1950s, the main concern of the RFD was the allocation of concessions for teak extraction, a lucrative business. After World War II, however, tropical forests were increasingly seen as important and swidden cultivation was stigmatized as inefficient and detrimental to tropical forest resources. By the mid-1960s, almost 40% of Thailand's total land area had been assigned to concession areas, and swidden cultivation was prohibited. At the same time, the demarcation of protected areas was beginning, although this proceeded slowly at first. The global spread of modernization and the expanding world market was also influencing national agricultural policies: Thailand's rapid economic growth during the 1960s and 1970s was based on the state-propagated extension of agricultural areas for the cultivation of cash crops for the world market. Alongside a fast growing population, this policy resulted in rapid deforestation.

Despite the emergence of protected areas' legislation from 1950 through to the early 1980s, the forest cover in Thailand decreased from almost two-thirds to less than one-third of the total land area, and deforestation was increasingly perceived as a problem. The RFD then had to explain this rapid deforestation to a conservation-sensitive urban public with growing political power. It also had to deal with some 10 million rural people – about one-fifth of the total population – who were living 'illegally' in areas declared as forest reserves. Of these 'forest areas', more than one-third were being used for agriculture, constituting at least one-third of Thailand's entire agricultural area. In this situation of contested competence and growing resistance, the RFD concentrated on implementing a Protected Area System (PAS) that was to encompass 28% of the total land area of Thailand.<sup>9</sup>

The issue of people living in forest areas became an important societal controversy, including issues of justice, resource control, land rights and democratization. On the one hand, the RFD –

7 See for example Sato 2002; Buergin 2003b; Vandergeest and Peluso 2011. For a more comprehensive account see Buergin 2004, pp. 101-200.

8 On the history and policies of the RFD see Usher 2009.

9 See Buergin 2003a. The PAS was devised in detail in the Thai Forestry Sector Master Plan 1993 (TFSMP) without a stated timeline. While the TFSMP as a whole was never approved by the Thai government, the objective to designate 27.5% of Thailand's terrestrial area as 'protected areas' had already been adopted in 1992. In 2008, almost 19% of the land area was legally designated 'protected areas' with another 4% currently in preparation according to the National Parks, Wildlife and Plant Conservation Department (Usher 2009, p. 174). Furthermore, around 10% are designated as Class 1A and 1B Watershed Forests, which are not categorized as 'protected areas' but are subject to 'conservation' objectives. The most recent official forest policy statement (in the 10<sup>th</sup> Social and Economic Development Plan 2007) targets a minimum forest cover of 33%, incorporating both protected areas and watershed forests.

together with primarily conservation-oriented NGOs and academics – concentrated on conservation issues. For them ‘people and forests cannot co-exist’ and forest protection required the removal of human settlements from the forests. On the other, peasant movement groups, socially concerned academics and people-oriented NGOs focused on the interests and problems of rural communities and the rights and interests of long-standing forest communities. They presupposed a vital interest of local communities in protecting their forests as a source of livelihood, as well as for ecological and cultural functions, and pointed to a history of community conservation in the remaining forested areas.<sup>10</sup> This controversy led in part to the drafting of the Community Forest Bill (CFB), which was fiercely disputed throughout the 1990s and finally approved in 2007. The final passage of the bill did not, however, resolve the long-running conflict and the status of communities and community forests in protected areas remains problematic and controversial.<sup>11</sup>

The particularly problematic issue of ethnic discrimination is rarely addressed in the debate on forest legislation: most of the people living in areas designated for the PAS are members of the ‘hill tribes’, or *chao khao* in Thai. This term came into use in the 1950s as a generic name for various non-Tai ethnic groups living predominantly in the uplands of northern and western Thailand, and does not differentiate between those who have lived on their customary lands for generations, pre-dating the Thai state, and those who migrated into the Thai state at a later date. Officially it covers nine distinct tribal peoples, the Karen, Hmong, Lisu, Lahu, Akha, Mien, Khamu, Lua’ and H’tin, each with its distinct language and culture. The term implies a negative stereotype associated with destruction of the forest, the cultivation of opium, and dangerous non-Thai troublemakers. During the 1960s and 1970s, the move to eradicate opium cultivation and the on-going communist insurgency dominated the government’s attitude towards highland peoples. By the mid-1980s, both of these issues had lost their urgency, and forest conservation had risen to replace them in the public interest. Although the settlement areas of hill tribes were those areas where most of the remaining forests were to be found, the hill tribes were conceived of as being the main ‘problem group’ regarding deforestation and resettlement was the preferred solution.<sup>12</sup> Members of the highland groups dislike the term hill tribes and prefer either Thai Mountain peoples (*chao Thai phu khao*), more commonly used within Thailand, or indigenous peoples (*chon pao puen muang*), more often used internationally.

At the local level as well, conflicts between ethnic Tai and hill tribe groups arose during the 1980s. Resource conflicts over land, forests and water occurred as ethnic Tai farmers spread into the uplands, and as the populations of hill tribes grew and many of them took up cash cropping. Increasingly in the late 1990s, ethnic minority groups in the uplands were arbitrarily arrested, forcibly resettled and terrorized.<sup>13</sup>

10 For example Santasombat 1992; Ganjanapan 1998; Buergin and Kessler 2000; Laungaramsri 2000.

11 Brenner et al. 1999; Weatherby and Somying; 2007; Usher 2009.

12 Buergin 2000.

13 McKinnon and Vienne 1989.

## Nature conservation, oppression and eviction in Thung Yai

The idea to protect forests and wildlife in western Thailand by establishing two wildlife sanctuaries arose in the mid-1960s among conservation-oriented officials of the RFD. At the same time, Western biologists had drawn attention to the zoological importance of the region. By then, deforestation was already increasing considerably in other parts of the country, although it was generally not perceived as a problem at that time but rather as supporting national development and security. Due to strong logging and mining interests in the area, it was not until 1972 that the first of the two sanctuaries, Huai Kha Khaeng, was established. Commercial interests in Thung Yai Naresuan were even stronger. However, after a military helicopter crashed in Thung Yai in April 1973, revealing an illegal hunting party of senior military officers, businessmen, family members and a film star – attracting nationwide public outrage – the area was finally declared a Wildlife Sanctuary in 1974.<sup>14</sup>

During the 1960s, not only timber and ore were of interest for commercial profit and national development but also the waters of the western forests, as a hydroelectric power resource. Four major dams were planned in the upper Mae Klong River, incorporating both the major tributaries, Khwae Yai and Khwae Noi. Three of these were completed: Sri Nakharin was finished in 1980, Tha Thung Na 1981 and Khao Laem (later renamed Vajiralongkorn) in 1984. The fourth planned dam, the Nam Choan Dam, was supposed to flood a forest area of about 223 km<sup>2</sup> within the Thung Yai Naresuan Wildlife Sanctuary, and sparked a widespread public debate. The public dispute lasted for more than six years, dominating national politics and public debate in early 1988 until the project was shelved in April of that year with little prospect of being revived. Pointing to the area's high value for nature conservation and biodiversity, national and international opponents to the dam raised the possibility of declaring the area a World Heritage site. This prestigious option would have been lost with a huge dam and reservoir in the middle of the two wildlife sanctuaries judged most promising for fulfilling the requirements for nomination as global heritage.<sup>15</sup> The success of

- 14 In a time of great political unrest, the poaching incident had become a focal point for the prevailing discontent with the military rule, triggering public protest and demonstrations that finally led to the fall of the Thanom-Prapas Regime after the uprising of October 14, 1973 and the establishment of a new democratic government. After the military had taken power once again in October 1976, many of the leaders and activists of the democracy movement fled into the peripheral regions of the country that were under control of the Communist Party of Thailand. Many of them sought refuge in the western forests and among the Karen people living in the sanctuaries. For commercial hunters, logging companies and state authorities, vast areas of the western forests became inaccessible until the beginning of the 1980s, one of the reasons why they have remained largely undisturbed until today.
- 15 Most outspoken in this regard were Veeravat Thiraprasat, then chief of the Thung Yai Naresuan Wildlife Sanctuary and supportive of the Karen in Thung Yai, and Prince Bernhard of the Netherlands, founder and former president of the WWF. Just before the Nam Choan Controversy reached its peak, Thailand had ratified the World Heritage Convention in December 1987. During a visit to Thailand in February 1988, Prince Bernhard had raised his concerns about the dam project in the wildlife sanctuary, emphasizing particularly the interest of the WWF in having the area declared a World Heritage site, which would require giving up the dam project. After the project had been shelved, student groups, NGOs and academics again pushed the idea, fearing the dam project might be revived – something which seemed to be less probable in a World Heritage site.

the anti-dam movement was not only a remarkable victory for conservation in Thailand but also a milestone for the development of Thailand's civil society and the process of democratization.<sup>16</sup>

However the Karen people living in the area to be flooded by the Nam Choan Dam never had a voice of their own in the debate. For the so-called Thienchai Committee, which was established by the government to decide on the project and predominantly included proponents of the dam, their existence was irrelevant. Their interests were partly brought to the debate by NGOs and journalists but hardly appeared as an important argument, very much in contrast to the forests and wildlife, which finally emerged as the crucial factors.

On behalf of the Royal Forest Department, the proposal for the nomination of Thailand's first natural World Heritage site to UNESCO was written by two people who had been outspoken opponents of the dam in the Nam Choan controversy: Seub Nakhasathien, chief of the Huai Kha Khaeng Wildlife Sanctuary, and Belinda Stewart-Cox, who had done research as a biologist in Huai Kha Khaeng.<sup>17</sup> Quite predictably, the Karen in Thung Yai were not included in the processes of elaborating the proposal. When the two wildlife sanctuaries of Huai Kha Khaeng and Thung Yai Naresuan were nominated together and subsequently inscribed as a Natural World Heritage site in December 1991, the 'outstanding universal value' was justified by the extraordinarily high biodiversity due to its unique location at the junction of four biogeographic zones, as well as its size and "the undisturbed nature of its habitats". Despite this "undisturbed nature", the nomination document defined the people living in Thung Yai and Huai Kha Khaeng as a threat to the sanctuaries and announced the resettlement of the remaining villages in the near future.<sup>18</sup>

The lead-up to the nomination had already seen a considerable amount of coerced resettlement of communities from both Huai Kha Khaeng and Thung Yai Naresuan. Karen villages in Huai Kha Khaeng had been removed in the 1970s when the Wildlife Sanctuary was established and when the Sri Nakarin Dam was built and later flooded their settlement areas.<sup>19</sup> During the 1980s, most villages of the Hmong ethnic group were removed from the Huai Kha Khaeng and Thung Yai Naresuan wildlife sanctuaries.<sup>20</sup> The resettlement of all remaining villages was stipulated in the management plans for the sanctuaries, drafted in the late 1980s<sup>21</sup> and adopted by the RFD in 1990, following an established policy of relocation of settlements from protected areas. When the nomination for a World Heritage site was prepared in 1990, there remained four Hmong villages in the north-east of the proposed site, some Thai villages which had only recently moved into the proposed buffer zone along the eastern border of Huai Kha Khaeng, and around 16 Karen villages in Thung Yai.

16 Buergin and Kessler 2000.

17 Seub committed suicide on September 1, 1991. Belinda Stewart-Cox commented on his death by reproaching his superiors at the RFD: "Seub's death was suicide – an act of despair – but it might as well have been murder. When he needed the support of his superiors to do the job they had asked him to do – stop the hunting and logging that was rampant in Huai Kha Khaeng at that time, master-minded by police and military officials – it was withheld. A terrible betrayal." (Stewart-Cox 1998).

18 Nakhasathien and Stewart-Cox 1990, pp. 44-45.

19 Jørgensen 1996.

20 Eudey 1989; MIDAS 1993.

21 Kutintara and Bhumpakhapun 1988, 1989.

The imminent relocation of all these communities was announced in the nomination documents.<sup>22</sup> This was noted – but not criticized – in IUCN's evaluation of the nomination,<sup>23</sup> and accepted by the World Heritage Committee without comment when it decided to inscribe the property on the World Heritage List.<sup>24</sup> While the relocation of the Hmong and Thai villages was accomplished in the early 1990s, the plans to remove the Karen from Thung Yai provoked strong public criticism and forced the RFD to reverse its resettlement scheme for the time being. Nevertheless, the objective to drive the Karen out of the sanctuary remained strong within the agency.<sup>25</sup>

Guarding a global heritage not only brought prestige to the Nation and the Royal Forest Department but also the prospect of economic assets as well as increasing political importance for the sanctuaries. Immediately after the declaration, international organizations, in cooperation with national partners, began to plan projects in and around the sanctuaries. The most prominent and most important in terms of 'economic weight' was a joint project of the World Bank and the Ministry of Agriculture, designed to improve biodiversity conservation and protected areas management in Thailand. The pre-investment study for the project was criticized by NGOs in Thailand who disliked its narrow conservation perspective, its top-down approach and the high costs of the project.<sup>26</sup> The negotiations between World Bank, state agencies and NGOs focused on the controversial issue of resettlement.<sup>27</sup> The study cautiously argued against resettlement in the specific case of the Karen villages in Thung Yai, although the option for resettlement was kept open and a whole chapter of the study devoted to its implementation. The negotiations only gradually led to limited agreement, and the NGOs refused to cooperate on a project based on the pre-investment study.<sup>28</sup> Even though the affected Karen people did not have a voice of their own in this debate, their interests were considered for the first time.

As resource conflicts between Thai lowlanders and 'hill tribes' heated up in the late 1990s, the RFD, under its new Director General, took up the offensive again in Thung Yai. On April 13, 1999,

22 Nakhasathien and Stewart-Cox 1990, p. 45; Thailand 1991.

23 IUCN's Advisory Body Evaluation notes that, "There is a policy to remove the remaining illegal settlements in the reserve and several have been relocated to date" (IUCN 1991, p. 70). The WCMC datasheet from March 1991, which is attached to the IUCN Evaluation, states: "Some 3,800 tribal people live within the sanctuary. There are still four Hmong villages... Since 1987, 2-3 Hmong villages have been moved each year... By 1991 all villages will have been closed. Sixteen Karen villages (1,826 people) are still resident [in the sanctuary complex], but there are plans to resettle them."

24 UNESCO 1991, p. 29.

25 Buergin 2004, pp. 175-186.

26 MIDAS 1993. The proposed project was to have a timeframe of five years, beginning in 1994. The total project cost was estimated at US\$ 96 million to be covered by a grant of US\$ 20 million from the Global Environment Facility (GEF), a US\$ 40 million loan from the World Bank, and funds from bilateral aid donors and the Royal Thai Government.

27 The study had argued against resettlement in the specific case of the Karen villages in Thung Yai Naresuan Wildlife Sanctuary, albeit in a rather ambivalent way and under strict conservation reservations. The detrimental effects of the villages and risks to the sanctuary were assessed as relatively low, while their resettlement would supposedly cause high costs and considerable difficulties.

28 The project was halted after grant funds from the GEF were made conditional on ratification of the *Convention on Biological Diversity* (CBD) in July 1994, which Thailand had not yet ratified. In the controversy about the project the representative of the Bank had tried to exert moderate pressure, indicating that the limited funds of the GEF may go to other countries if the ratification of the CBD were delayed.

the Director General himself flew into the wildlife sanctuary, landing with his helicopter at the place where the Karen had just started to celebrate an important annual religious festival supposed to last for three days. The Director General demanded an end to the ceremonies. Soon after, soldiers burned down religious shrines of the Karen. From April 18 to May 12, soldiers and forest rangers went to the Karen villages, demanded that they stop growing rice, demolished huts and personal belongings, and burnt down a rice barn.<sup>29</sup> Throughout the following months, efforts to convince the Karen people to resettle 'voluntarily' continued. Military officials prohibited agricultural activities and prevented villagers from using their fields. They allegedly even confiscated identity cards and house registration papers while they raided villages, arresting people without warrants and holding them for days, and removing families without Thai identity cards. Even though the Senate Human Rights Panel criticized the incidents, RFD and the military continued their joint resettlement programme in November 2000, announcing further relocations of families as well as the preparation of the resettlement area for all the villages.<sup>30</sup> The Karen oppose any relocation from their lands, a position expressed in detail during a comprehensive household survey conducted in 1996/97 in which they almost unanimously expressed their wish to stay in Thung Yai in the face of ongoing efforts to evict them from their homeland.<sup>31</sup>

Since the RFD had to delay its resettlement plans regarding the remaining Karen villages in Thung Yai in the early 1990s due to public pressure, it concentrated on the elimination of the traditional land-use system of the Karen by prohibiting the use of fallow areas older than three years.<sup>32</sup> In the longer term, these restrictions will lead to the breakdown of the traditional land-use system, as the soils under constant use rapidly lose their productivity. In the villages where control on the part of the RFD and the military has been most effective, people were already reporting decreasing yields in the second half of the 1990s. In 2002, the RFD also began planting tree seedlings on swidden fields in some villages,<sup>33</sup> at the same time announcing in Thailand's periodic report to UNESCO that: "If Karen villages inside the WH zone exert increasing demands on natural resources in the park, relocation will be conducted".<sup>34</sup>

The human rights implications of the resettlement programme were overlooked by both the World Heritage Committee and IUCN during their examination of the nomination proposal in 1991, as well as during their review of Thailand's periodic report on the state of conservation of the sanctuaries in 2003. This happened even though the Thai government has never been reticent in explaining to IUCN and the World Heritage Committee that the involuntary resettlement of long-settled communities is part of its management strategy for the sanctuaries. The Committee has

29 When these events became public, the Director General of the RFD downplayed his role in the incidents, at first denying any military actions at all. In contrast to the Director General, the commander of the military troops involved seemed rather proud of the achievements. He declared the operation a 'pilot project' of the new alliance between the military and the RFD agreed upon in May 1998, and exemplary in their joint efforts to prevent forest destruction.

30 For details and references regarding evictions and oppressions in Thung Yai see Buergin 2004, pp. 159-200.

31 Buergin 2002a, pp. 290-293.

32 Even from an external utilitarian conservation perspective, the resettlement of the Karen and the prohibition of their subsistence-oriented swidden system is unreasonable. Assuming a mean fallow period of 10 years, the total agricultural area in the sanctuary, including fallow areas, only accounts for about 1% of its area.

33 Steinmetz, personal communication February 2002.

34 Thailand 2003, p. 234.

never questioned this although it is demonstrable that the Karen in Thung Yai – far from being a threat to its continued existence – have long been an integral part of a complex eco-social system in which they shape and manage their environment in Thung Yai.<sup>35</sup>

## Local resistance and transnational alliances

Forced to choose between being charged with being forest destroyers ‘provoking’ relocation or facing severe subsistence problems, the only possibility for the Karen to adapt to the restrictions on their swidden system – apart from trying to conceal their fields – seems to be ‘modernization’. They can either try to increase the productivity of the fields, using fertilizers and pesticides (which most of them cannot afford), or turn to cash cropping in, or wage labour outside, of the sanctuary. Intensification of agriculture and cash cropping is already supported by some of the government institutions and NGOs working in the sanctuary. Most of the Karen in Thung Yai reject these efforts, however, and are trying to carry on with their subsistence farming. Furthermore, intensification of land use, cash cropping and increasing market orientation – that is, ‘modernization’ – jeopardizes their reputation as ‘forest people living in harmony with nature’ on which their claim to remain in the sanctuary is based.

A concept of ‘benign environmentalists’ has gained strength in international debates on environment, development and human rights since the 1980s, which conceives of traditional or indigenous people rather as partners in biodiversity conservation than as culprits or foes. In Thailand, such an alternative image, in contrast to the still prevailing stereotype of the forest-destroying hill tribes, has come to be assigned to at least some of the ethnic groups in the uplands – prominent among them the Karen. Here, this image emerged in rising conflicts towards the end of the 1980s when an emerging peasant movement, concerned academics and NGOs – resisting resettlement policies in forest reserves, eucalyptus plantations, illegal logging and corruption – developed a community forest concept as an alternative perspective and a counter model to the conservation concept and commercial reforestation approach of the RFD and big agribusiness companies. In Thailand, as well as on an international level, this alternative stereotype meets with reproaches from various sides as being partly fictional, over-generalizing, or in violation of people’s right to development.<sup>36</sup> However, far from being ‘comfortable’ for the Karen, this positive image of ‘benign environmentalists’, attributed to the Karen in Thung Yai in parts of national and international public discourse, is presently the only position in these disputes to which they can relate at least to some degree. As long as their inherent land rights to the area are not acknowledged and the legal basis for their continuing settlement in national Thai law is ambiguous, this seems to be their most important asset in the debates that will decide the future of their villages.

So far, the Karen in Thung Yai have had no chance to participate directly in the national and international discourse and decision-making regarding their homeland, including its declaration as part of a wildlife sanctuary and a World Heritage site. In their encounters with state agencies, they

35 Boonpinon 1997; Steinmetz 1999; Buergin 2002a, 2004; Delang and Wong 2006.

36 Regarding the ambiguities of this stereotyping, see e.g. Buergin 2003a; Forsyth and Walker 2008.

frequently feel powerless and without any rights. Open resistance to continuous repression and acts of violence on the part of the RFD and military officials is difficult for the Karen, not least due to specific cultural frames of behaviour and historically grounded inter-ethnic relations between Karen and Thai. They have the impression that their rights and concerns are not relevant in the national and international discourses about their homeland. A strong feeling prevails among them that they cannot communicate their own view, that they have to use words, arguments and ideas that are not really their own while trying to justify their claims, even with their Thai allies among the peasant movement, NGOs and activists. The Karen conceive of these 'communication problems' not predominantly as language problems, even though many of the elder Karen have only limited competence in the Thai language, but attribute them to different cultural contexts.

Almost all of the Karen in Thung Yai believe that resettlement is neither justified nor desirable but they do take different positions towards the external influences and the resettlement threat. There is a rather small group, including most of the Phu Yai Ban (the village heads in the context of the state administrative system) which is open to 'moderate modernization' while trying to retain a Karen identity. The vast majority is rather more reluctant to engage in 'development' and 'modernization, preferring to 'live like our grandparents did' as a common saying goes. Among them there are marked differences in their reactions to the external influences. A rather large group, who could be labelled 'extroverted traditionalists', including many influential elders as well as young people, is trying to shape the change and resist the threats. They are doing so by trying to strengthen and revitalize Karen culture and identity as well as seeking support and advocacy outside of Thung Yai. Another group of more 'introverted traditionalists' is likewise focusing on strengthening 'traditional' Karen culture but invoking millenarian and more 'exclusive' frames of Karen culture to a higher degree, avoiding transcultural exchange and support.

Despite these differences in position and strategy, all these groups wish to remain in their villages as well as to protect their homeland and way of life. Furthermore, they all refer to the same specific cultural frame of values and objectives regarding a 'decent' life appropriate to a Karen living in Thung Yai. Sharpened – but not created – in the clashes with external actors and influences, this conception of specific Karen values and objectives focuses on the concepts of 'modesty' as opposed to 'greed', 'harmony' in contrast to conflict, as well as 'spiritual development' versus 'material development'. The counterpart to these concepts is quite obvious and explicitly named by the Karen as such. It is primarily the 'modern' Thai society which is increasingly 'intruding' into their traditional living places and spaces, threatening their cultural particularity and physical existence in Thung Yai.

## **Modern legacies, national liabilities and indigenous peoples**

This article has tried to give a rough idea of the complexity of the conflicts over Thung Yai, where the local, national and international levels are highly interdependent as well as asymmetric in power. Transformations on a national and international level involving shifting framings of the 'problem' of the Karen in Thung Yai have significantly determined the changing circumstances of the local communities. In the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the economic and political interests of colonial and

regional powers in Southeast Asia brought about the demarcation of territorial nation-states according to Western models. In the context of this national territorialization, Thung Yai and the Karen living there were enclosed in the 'geo-body' of the Siamese nation-state, which at the same time became part of an international community of states primarily defined in terms of territory and economic relations, while heterogeneous social and physical spaces were merged in the modern nation-state.

In the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the development of a specific national identity of this state focused on a common language, Buddhism and the monarchy. The Karen in Thung Yai, who had been incorporated into the state spatially, were now excluded from its 'people-body' in the context of this nationalization process and disappeared from the political agenda. Since the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, growing international and national interests in the resources and people of the peripheral areas of the state – in the context of modernization objectives and the fight against communism – have resulted in the extension of state institutions into these areas as well as their exploitation for national economic development. The people living there were now predominantly conceived of as backward problem groups or alien troublemakers in conflict with national interests, which had to be controlled and modernized. After the environmental costs of this economic development became obvious in the 1980s, the forests of these peripheral areas were declared precious wilderness and biodiversity assets of global significance, which had to be protected against encroachments from local people in the context of a global 'ecologization' of peripheral areas of modernity. In this frame, the Karen in Thung Yai became a disruptive factor in a natural global heritage, requiring strict monitoring as long as their removal was not feasible. When Thung Yai was declared a natural World Heritage site in 1991, the Karen were seen as a 'disruptive factor'. In contrast, the studies done there since then clearly indicate that the Karen are an integral part of Thung Yai. With their sustainable land-use system, they have shaped the sanctuary considerably over a long time and even increased its biodiversity. In their culture, they keep a unique body of knowledge about their natural environment with which they maintain a specific and deep spiritual relationship. As noted earlier, the Karen have unanimously expressed their desire to remain on their lands and reject continuing efforts to relocate them.

Pressure to exclude or assimilate highland peoples, including their removal from protected areas, is still strong in Thailand. Over the last 30 years, however, Thailand has undergone a remarkable process of democratization and enacted a constitution in 1997 that explicitly recognizes the rights of local communities to cultural self-determination as well as to the use of local resources.<sup>37</sup> This may provide political space for the Karen to seek a greater level of control over their future. Unfortunately, these commitments are not always easily realizable. Furthermore, their interpretation is often contested and subject to social bargaining, whereby weaker social groups may be at a disadvantage. The Community Forest Bill and conservation policies are a case in point, where these problematic asymmetries urgently need to be reconsidered and amended, specifically regarding the vulnerable position of highland peoples.

37 Thailand 1997. Section 46 states: "Persons so assembling as to be a traditional community shall have the right to conserve or restore their customs, local knowledge, arts or good culture of their community and of the nation and participate in the management, maintenance, preservation and exploitation of natural resources and the environment in a balanced fashion and persistently as provided by law."

A recent positive step was the approval of the government project “Recovering the Karen Livelihood in Thailand”, proposed by the Ministry of Culture and adopted via a cabinet resolution of the Royal Thai Government in August 2010. The resolution recognizes the particular ethnic identity and culture of the Karen people, and seeks to actively support them in perpetuating this culture, including their rotational farming system and traditional land management, while deploring “the arrest and detention of the Karen people who are part of local traditional communities settled on disputed land which is traditional land used for making a living”.<sup>38</sup> For the Karen communities in Thung Yai specifically, the resolution recommends the implementation of a “special cultural zone” intended to support the transmission of cultural heritage.<sup>39</sup> The resolution also recommends the “promotion of the Karen rotational farming system to become a world cultural heritage” (presumably under UNESCO’s 2003 *Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage*).<sup>40</sup> The recommendations of the cabinet resolution reveal a new sensitivity to the problems and indicate a sincere intention to approach them; however, it remains to be seen how the project will be realised.<sup>41</sup> The case of the Karen in Thung Yai, as well as the more general problem of integrating the ‘hill tribes’ into Thai society, remains a controversial challenge for democratic forces in Thailand.<sup>42</sup>

In this type of globally widespread conflict between the livelihood interests of local people and national or global interests in nature conservation and ‘modernization’ – which may be

38 The cabinet resolution further made the following recommendations: “Repeal the declarations concerning protected areas, reserve forests and settlements of Karen people which already have the capability to prove that their settlement, living on and use of these lands has continued for a long time or since before the declaration of laws or policies that now cover these areas”; “Support and recognize the rotational farming systems which belong to the Karen ways of life and livelihood, and which support the sustainable use of natural resources and self-sufficiency”; “Support self-sufficiency or alternative agriculture instead of cash crop production or industrial agriculture”; and “Support and recognize the ways of using the land and the management of local traditional communities, e.g. through issuing communal land titles” (see Thailand 2010).

39 The Lai Wo Sub-district (Sangkha Buri District, Kanchanaburi Province) has been designated as one of four pilot areas. Most of the villages which constitute this Sub-district are located within the Thung Yai Wildlife Sanctuary where they comprise about 64% of the Karen population in Thung Yai. Considering the close relationship of these villages to the other Karen villages in the eastern part of the sanctuary (Sub-district Mae Chan, Umphang District, Tak Province) it seems desirable to include all the Karen villages in Thung Yai into this ‘cultural zone’. Furthermore, the villages in the eastern part of Thung Yai are closely related to the Karen village Le Taung Hkoo in the Umphang Wildlife Sanctuary, which is also recommended as a ‘special cultural zone’. Together, these villages constitute what the Karen in Thung Yai identify as ‘*thoung bou tai*’, their homeland and cultural community (see text above).

40 The 2003 Convention explicitly recognizes the “deep-seated interdependence between the intangible cultural heritage and the tangible cultural and natural heritage” and was adopted “Considering that existing international agreements, recommendations and resolutions concerning the cultural and natural heritage [such as the 1972 World Heritage Convention] need to be effectively enriched and supplemented by means of new provisions relating to the intangible cultural heritage” (Preamble). If the Karen rotational farming system is indeed recognized under the 2003 Convention, Thung Yai could potentially become a ‘model’ World Heritage site, illustrating the interaction between the two (1972 and 2003) Conventions.

41 Recent violations by the National Park staff and the Thai military against Karen people living in the Kaeng Krachan National Park in 2011 indicate that at least some state authorities are ignoring the resolution and still following more familiar repression and resettlement policies (see AIPP 2011).

42 Evident, supposed or assigned differences between social groups are frequently highlighted and exploited in these struggles over resources, redistribution, identity, social status and power. Not least, these struggles are significantly framed and negotiated in discourses about national identities and cultural diversity, which unavoidably invoke disputed conceptualizations of modernity. (See e.g. Keyes 2002; Connors 2005.)

termed conflicts over biocultural diversity<sup>43</sup> – not only livelihoods and homelands are at stake but also issues of local identity and self-determination as well as cultural diversity and self-conceptualizations of modern societies. The ideological and legal framings of these conflicts over biocultural diversity are predominantly negotiated in very heterogeneous discursive and political spheres at the national and international level.<sup>44</sup> It is here that local people's chances of resisting transgressions and defending their rights are determined, even though these people frequently have no access to the discourses and institutions that are framing their circumstances and chances. Very often, they are not even represented in any appropriate way in political processes and decisions regarding their living places. However, these discourses also provide new chances for them to defend claims to local resources and particular identities.

In particular, the concept of 'indigenous peoples' has become a powerful idea, adopted as a legal concept or operational category by important international institutions such as the United Nations, ILO, the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank, and increasingly acknowledged by many nation states. It emphasizes indigenous rights to lands, territories, resources and self-determination<sup>45</sup> and provides an appealing reference point regarding identification, compensation and action for many marginalized peoples at the fringes of modern societies. However, the concept often provokes considerable caveats at the national level, particularly among Asian governments where – in Southeast and East Asia – only the Philippines and Japan accept the use of the term to describe parts of their populations.<sup>46</sup>

The Thai state emphasizes its 'un-colonized' history<sup>47</sup> and, until recently, pursued an ambiguous policy towards the 'hill tribes', conceiving of them either as illegal immigrants to be expelled or proclaiming their total assimilation if eligible for naturalization.<sup>48</sup> It is hardly interested in recognizing any indigenous peoples in its own territory. In a reply to the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights and fundamental freedoms of indigenous peoples in February 2003, the Government of Thailand noted that the highland peoples were not considered indigenous

43 Buerjin 2009, 2010.

44 Interrelations between biological and cultural diversity – increasingly labelled biocultural diversity – have come into the focus of academic, political and economic interests and discourses since the late 1980s. In this context, the protection of cultural diversity is often conceived of as a promising means for the conservation of biological diversity. Furthermore, the worldwide loss of cultural diversity is causing increasing concern among scholars and activists and even provoking commitments on the part of international organizations such as UNESCO (2010) or global environmental organizations such as WWF (e.g. Oviedo et al. 2000) and IUCN (IUCN and WCPA 2003) with regard to the protection of cultural diversity.

45 See, for instance, the 2007 *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*.

46 See e.g. Kingsbury 1998; Erni 2008.

47 In Asia, European colonialism only rarely took the form of territorial conquest but rather resulted in radical transformations of regional societies by promoting or enforcing the formation of territorial nation-states and inducing modernization processes adopted and pursued by regional elites. Even though the pre-colonial Tai states never became European colonies, the formation of the modern Thai state was deeply influenced by European colonialism, which is equally true for the situation of the diverse Karen groups in mainland Southeast Asia from the first half of the 19th to the middle of the 20th century. In the case of the Karen in Thung Yai, evictions, repression and marginalization cannot be directly traced back to territorial occupations by European colonial powers but were predominantly caused by regional powers in the wake of colonial hegemony in mainland Southeast Asia as well as the spreading of a 'culture of modernity' deeply rooted in European and colonial history.

48 See Buerjin 2000.

peoples under domestic law,<sup>49</sup> and when the World Heritage Committee considered a proposal to establish a “World Heritage Indigenous Peoples Council of Experts” as an advisory body to the Committee in 2001, Thailand’s representative disapproved of the idea arguing that “indigenous issues are a domestic, national question, and are best handled on that level”.<sup>50</sup>

However, United Nations human rights bodies and mechanisms, such as the UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples or the Committee on the Rights of the Child, clearly conceive of the so-called hill tribes or ethnic minority groups of Thailand as indigenous peoples.<sup>51</sup> Moreover, in Thailand, Karen increasingly identify themselves as ‘indigenous’ and participate in international organizations and networking in support of indigenous rights. Several of the associations of ethnic minority groups in Thailand are members of the Asia Indigenous Peoples Pact (AIPP), including the Assembly of Indigenous and Tribal Peoples of Thailand, the Hmong Association for Development in Thailand, the Inter Mountain Peoples Education and Culture in Thailand Association (IMPECT), and the Karen Network for Culture and Environment. Based on distinct ethnic identities, they share common experiences of discrimination and marginalization within nation-states and try to assert their rights to self-determination as well as land, territories and resources which, since the 1980s, are being increasingly challenged by national and global claims for nature conservation.

National conservation policies and laws worldwide have long been considerably influenced by modern ideas about nature conservation and protected area management, focusing on ‘fortress-conservation’ approaches. The rights and interests of local people in or close to protected areas have only recently been acknowledged, and these revisions are still contested. However, in international environmental discourses and institutions, principles of free, prior and informed consent as well as participation and cooperative resource management approaches are now approved standards regarding people in protected areas.<sup>52</sup> Protected areas for nature conservation are increasingly subject to international and transnational regulations regarding stakeholders and rights-holders – World Heritage sites being a particularly prominent example. This provides new opportunities for local people by appealing to international standards and advocacy. International standards clearly support the right of the Karen to live in their traditional and customary lands (in Thung Yai) and their forced resettlement is not a legitimate option. Having adopted Thung Yai as a global heritage, concerned international organizations (including UNESCO, the World Heritage Committee and its Advisory Bodies) should disapprove of the pressures and violence towards the Karen in Thung Yai and insist on their full and effective participation in decision-making processes, in accordance with their rights under international law.

Unfortunately, these international standards are often only hesitantly adopted on the national level, frequently encounter considerable national reservations and are open to interpretation and negotiation.<sup>53</sup> Furthermore, regulations regarding UNESCO natural World Heritage sites in parts

49 See Commission on Human Rights 2004, p. 18.

50 World Heritage Centre 2001, p. 2.

51 See e.g. Commission on Human Rights 2003, para. 22; Human Rights Council 2008, para. 464 ff.; or Committee on the Rights of the Child 2006. Also see UN DESA 2008, pp. 8, 28.

52 See for instance *Convention on Biological Diversity*, Art. 8(j); IUCN et al. 1999; CBD COP7 2004.

53 For example, when the World Heritage Committee voted to support customary law and customary management by ‘traditional’ or indigenous peoples as a sufficient basis to guarantee the protection of natural World Heritage sites, Thailand disassociated itself from the decision (UNESCO 1999, pp. 26, 56).

still fall short of these standards and evoke approaches to nature conservation that assume an inherent antagonism between 'man and nature'. However, these conceptualizations and provisions are debated and there are strong arguments for a revision acknowledging and supporting rights of local people living in and close to natural World Heritage sites in the light of UN commitments to universal human rights and the rights of indigenous peoples, as well as the significance of cultural diversity for the protection of biodiversity.<sup>54</sup> The establishment of the so-called Cultural Landscapes category by the World Heritage Committee reflects an awareness of some of these problems as well as a new attentiveness to interrelations between 'nature' and 'culture'.<sup>55</sup> The history of the Karen in Thung Yai and their relationship with their homeland suggests the need for a reconsideration of the status of Thung Yai, which may be better conceived of as a Cultural Landscape World Heritage site.

## Conclusions

The Karen in Thung Yai not only have to face the threat of eviction from their homeland but also the destruction of their 'culture', their local identity and their particular way of life in Thung Yai. They have consistently asserted their desire to remain in Thung Yai and to pursue a particular way of life there as Karen people but their legitimate interests and rights are largely disregarded and they have never been given the possibility of defending these rights on their own terms.

This paper cannot provide a 'Karen view' of the conflicts over Thung Yai. It is rather the perspective of a scholar who, whilst having some first-hand experience, is looking at the problem from the outside, based on a concern for the protection of human rights as well as cultural and biological diversity. His viewpoint is that of his own 'culture of modernity', which he is interested in critically exploring. From such a perspective, the case of the Karen in Thung Yai – as well as the situation of other 'local', 'traditional', 'tribal', 'native' or 'indigenous' peoples at the periphery of modern societies – is essentially interrelated with issues of modern identity and hegemony. To enable them to maintain a particular self-determined way of life, perpetuating global cultural diversity requires, not least, a culture of modernity which is attentive to its hegemonic and violating relations with non-modern groups, supportive of ways of life different from its own, and able to reconsider universalistic claims to modernity.

The moral and legal obligations of modern societies and international organizations already provide standards by which to assess infringements in the case of the Karen in Thung Yai and reason to call for changes in the approach of the government to the management of this area. Due to both their history in Thung Yai as well as national and international commitments to human rights and conservation ethics, the right of the Karen to remain in Thung Yai has to be acknowledged without reservation. The Thai government has taken some steps towards such a realization in the cabinet resolution "Recovering the Karen Livelihood in Thailand" (August 2010). This resolution should be implemented in cooperation with the Karen people as soon as possible and its objectives should be extended to all indigenous groups in Thailand.

54 Disko 2010; Hay-Edie et al. 2011.

55 For example World Heritage Centre 2003; Taylor and Lennon 2011.



*Participatory mapping of Karen land use areas in the Thung Yai Naresuan Wildlife Sanctuary, together with Wildlife Fund Thailand (WFT). Photo: Reiner Buergin*

With specific regard to the situation in Thung Yai, the Karen should be integrated into the management and decision-making processes concerning the sanctuary as well as the reporting to UNESCO. It is important to enable the Karen to participate in these processes and tasks through their own political institutions and in accordance with their own customs, which are adapted to their way of life in Thung Yai but which are not currently acknowledged in their interactions with the administrative agencies. As part of this, already existing interests and activities in participatory research, monitoring and environmental education in the sanctuary should be supported and expanded.<sup>56</sup>

More broadly, and external to the situation in Thailand, the monitoring of the World Heritage sites conducted by the responsible international organizations urgently needs to be improved to conform to their own standards and regulations. Regulations concerning the implementation and monitoring of World Heritage sites have to be reviewed to take account of international commitments, principles and declarations regarding the rights of indigenous peoples and the conservation of cultural diversity.<sup>57</sup> ○

<sup>56</sup> Steinmetz et al. 2006.

<sup>57</sup> Disko 2010.

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