



ANDREW COCK, *GOVERNING CAMBODIA'S FORESTS: THE INTERNATIONAL POLITICS OF POLICY REFORM*, COPENHAGEN, NIAS, 2016, 302 P.

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PROLOG

The Nordic Institute of Asian Studies published in 2016 a book by Andrew Cock on the politics of forestry in Cambodia that deserves the attention of forest and development experts. Andrew Cock is currently Research Associate at the United Nations University in Tokyo and conducted extensive field work in Cambodia as a consultant with the NGO forum between 2000 and 2004.

Far from a technical book on tropical forestry, *Governing Cambodia's forests*, is definitely a political sciences product as its title suggests. Through the example of Cambodia, Cock's book aims at explaining why the goals of forestry reforms were never achieved and why despite a high level of foreign aid, international agencies have not only failed in implementing "sustainable forest management" schemes but actively supported the destruction of one of the most important resources for the balance of the planet.

CHAPTERS

The book comprises seven chapters. The three first chapters, "The international politics of policy reform", "Tropical forests in the global states-system" and "Aid donors and the Cambodian elite" offer a refreshing analysis of the system of multilateral and bilateral foreign aid to developing and emerging countries and its unexpected consequences. Cock points at the responsibility of foreign aid agencies, especially the World

Bank, in the complete failure at curtailing deforestation. The main input of Cock is that he does link this question with the integration of forest peripheral areas and their dwellers into the State control system. In that sense, Cock appears to be a follower of James Scott. He is using *Seeing like a State* by Scott but totally ignores *The Art of Not Being Governed* that would have been very relevant here (Scott 2009).

The book starts with a well-known fact: "From the late 1980s Cambodia's forests were heavily logged" and the apparent paradox that deforestation worsened when multilateral and bilateral aid focused on policy reforms. These reforms followed the implementation of the 1991 Paris Peace Agreement that eventually put an end to the war that was raging in Cambodia for the preceding two decades. In fact, over twenty years of war protected Cambodian forests from logging companies. Starting with the United Nations Temporary Authority on Cambodia (UNTAC, 1992-1993), foreign aid poured into Cambodia. Plans and agreements were drawn to stop the depletion of Cambodian forests. In 2000-2001, the levels of logging reduced but the areas logged were turned into plantations leading to a loss of forest. International donors, including the World Bank, used conditionality to link aid to the implementation of reforms. Cock shows that it was inefficient and sometimes counterproductive. World Bank has been an active promoter of logging, focusing its analyses on the revenues of the timber industry and downplaying its environmental consequences. The introduction of a "sustainable forest management" agenda did

have little impact on deforestation as undervalued prices of tropical timber jeopardized the economic model of sustainable forestry, that provided lower profits than more aggressive methods, especially when logged area were then turned into plantations. In the second chapter, Cock provides us with a stimulating analysis of the World Bank metalanguage and points out how it can lure conservation NGOs, such as the World Wild Fund (WWF), into schemes that, in the end, lead to deforestation and depletion of wild life.

Cock then demonstrates how foreign aid helped the political elite of Cambodia to enhance its grip on the natural resources of the country. This had severe consequences for the dwellers of forest areas. Before looking at the involvement of high ranking civil servants and followers of the Prime Minister Hun Sen into the logging sector, he focuses on the ways the 'ruling class', as he puts it, captured State and national resources for its own profit. Cock perfectly understood the importance of the patron-clients networks in the Khmer kingdom, and also understood that this was nothing new. He then explains how international donors, Western powers, international agencies and now China, by acting in place of the State allowed the ruling class to divert a larger share of national goods and resources for its own profit (pp. 56-61) and how officials channelled foreign aid for projects that, in the end, supported their private agendas. This kind of networks used by the rulers to prey on the country resources is deeply entrenched in the functioning of the Cambodian State and society. Aid agencies have just made those of Prime minister Hun Sen stronger, something that not many foreign aid experts understood.

The next three chapters, "Cambodia's timber boom and external pressures for reform", "Extraction", and "Appropriation and enclosure" offer an analysis of timber production in Cambodia since the late 1980s and of the forest concession system. Timber production rose when aid from the COMECON drastically reduced in the late 1980s. Thai entities were allowed by the different Cambodian factions to purchase timber in the areas they controlled. After the 1993 elections, the competing Cambodian political forces, Hun Sen's Cambodian People Party (CPP), Ranariddh's Funcinpek and the Khmer Rouge used logging operations as a means to get access to funds. The concession system was developed in this context. A large part of the fees

paid by concessionaries were diverted from the State budget and channelled to political factions in order to finance the upcoming military confrontation. In 1997, a coup opposed Hun Sen's security forces and those of Ranariddh, while most of the former Khmer Rouge were surrendering. Timber logging during these years has been fast and highly destructive. After the coup won by Hun Sen's forces, many of the concessions issued to Ranariddh's partners were given to Hun Sen's cronies. A rapacious run for timber was orchestrated not only by the State but also by powerful civil servant and high ranking military and police officers. As Cock points out, "the rents that logging generated contributed to the expansion of clientelistic networks" (p. 107).

The main consequence for the dwellers of forest area is that logging operations opened up these peripheral areas to the CPP controlled State. For external actors, such as the IMF and World Bank, logging operations, as they were conducted in Cambodia, became a source of concern, mostly because they diverted public resources needed for 'development' to private pockets. After the coup, the Cambodian government formally agreed to a forestry policy reform process that would promote "sustainable forest management". Using Global Witness reports and his own research, Cock explains how Hun Sen and its government managed to use the international experts and institution's recommendations as a means to increase their own incomes and their grip on the country, implementing only the portions of the reform that were in favour of their own interest. In fact, almost none of the foreign institutions or experts ever challenged the legitimacy of the concession system by which millions of hectares were given away to private, and most of the time, foreign companies, with no consideration for the people living in these areas. For these nearly three million people, the forest and its products were a source of income. Swidden cultivators and resin tappers were particularly affected. In the name of 'development', the concession system made the poor poorer and reinforced the coercive power of the rulers over the people.

The final chapter, "Integration and Forest preservation", summarises the main findings of the author: Forestry policy reform was directed at the commercial aspect of forest exploitation; its main focus was on the role of the State in the field of logging and concessions; reform supported the ruling elites predatory capacities; when policy reform failed external actors disengaged from

oversight mechanism. Therefore, the forestry reform agenda was ineffective in countering the destruction of Cambodian forests. It only supported the control of the periphery by the State, which had adverse effects for forest dwellers. The appendixes are very useful and offer further evidences to support Cock's claims, especially the colour maps of Cambodia's forest cover since 1973.

DISCUSSION

The holistic approach of Cock is the main quality of the book. The author masters the concept used in forestry and looked how relevant they were in the Cambodian context. He also uses some of the available knowledge on the history or the social organization of Cambodia. However, further readings, would have allowed him to make his case stronger. The "traditional" Khmer society, i.e. pre-colonial, its economy, its social networks would have been better understood by reading more recent works of historians and anthropologists who have described the patron-client system and its legal and theoretical framework in post-angkorian Cambodia (Ebihara 1984, Khin 1991, Mak 1995, Mikaelian 2009). In understanding that Hun Sen is using old ways of social control that support predatory attitude from the ruling class, he confirms the findings of Grégory Mikaelian in one of his recent papers (Mikaelian 2012).

The concession system and the functioning of the State today find their origin in the colonial system. Some historical researches would have allowed him to understand better the predatory attitude of the elite and of the State, as well as the social consequences of the plantation system (Thomas 2003, Edwards 2007, Slocumb 2007, Guérin 2008, Hémerly and Brocheux 2009, Tully 2011). Cock seems to consider that the alteration of Cambodian forest through extraction of timber is something new (p. 85), while it was already in place during the French Protectorate when Cambodia was part of French Indochina, even if this alteration was limited to forests located near streams and rivers. The scale on which it is executed is new.

While Cock refutes some of the recurrent preconceptions over Cambodian forest dwellers, he does not completely free himself from such preconceptions, especially in the chapter "Appropriation and Enclosure". In different parts of the book, he points out that forest

dwellers were not only subsistence forest farmers but he still presents the system in which they are incorporated as "a long-standing subsistence-oriented productive system" (p. 215) implying that their production was mostly for subsistence. This is largely true of their agricultural production, but not of the non-timber forest products. The products that they extracted from the forest were some of the main exports of Cambodia, together with rice and dried fish, in the Age of Commerce, as Anthony Reid coined the 16th-17th centuries period in the region (Reid 1988 & 1993). The King of Cambodia was perfectly aware of this fact. The tribute system requested from forest dwellers shows how important these non-timber forest products were for the crown. The trade roads to Vietnam or China for wood oil and other forest products are nothing new. Forest dwellers played an important role for the integration of Cambodia in international trade networks and their productions were still important in Cambodia's trade balance up to the early 20th century. They were badly affected by the Great Depression in the 1930s (Um 2016).

Andrew Cock spent a large amount of time while in Cambodia studying wood oil and resin production. Rather than just a moral approach on the competition between tappers and logging companies over *dipterocarpatus* trees, an economic study would have been welcome. Wood oil is not a cheap merchandise. It is an expensive organic product used to make torches, but also to waterproof boats and houses and is in high demand in the region. A comparison between the value of the production of sustainable wood oil and logged *dipterocarpatus* would have possibly made his point stronger. It would have complemented Timothy Killen's study of the economic potential of the heavily forested Cardamom mountains in South-West Cambodia (Killen 2012).

PERSPECTIVES

Andrew Cock's book is important because it challenges given preconceptions on tropical forestry. He offers case studies, of which implications go way beyond Cambodia, and prospects of thinking for any aid actors in the tropical realm. It is indeed about time to ask ourselves why and how foreign aid can support the predatory actions of local elites, with the complicity of International consultants, and lead to large scale environmental depredations.

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Submitted: 13.11.2016

Accepted: 15.11.2016