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Introduction

In April 2008, the Vietnamese corporation Hoàng Anh Gia Lai Joint (HAGL) signed a memorandum of understanding with the Government of Laos (GoL) agreeing to finance the construction of a \$19 million athletes' village. HAGL financed this property complex in support of the Southeast Asian (SEA) Games, a biennial regional sporting event that the GoL was hosting for the first time from December 9th to 18th, 2009, in the capital of the Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR), Vientiane¹. The aid provided by HAGL was divided into two parts: a \$4 million cash grant and a \$15 million interest-free loan. In return, the company was given the rights to explore for mineral potentials in Sekong and Attapeu provinces of southeastern Laos, log timber from and plant rubber on a 10,000-hectare (ha) plot of land in Attapeu, construct two rubber processing factories in Attapeu, and develop a real estate complex in Vientiane (VietnamNet Bridge 2008). The \$15 million loan would be repaid in part via rental fees on the 10,000 ha.

In December 2008, HAGL signed a contract with the GoL that officially gave the company the right to the 10,000 ha for timber exploitation and plantation development, but the contract contained a clause saying that the plantation could not be developed on degraded forest, barren land, or land that "local people own or have the right to use" (GoL 2008). By February 2010, when I conducted the fieldwork for this research, provincial and district level governments had already allocated 8,078 ha to the company, land which was used in some capacity by seven

¹ Pronounced as 'Viangchan'

villages, 1,291 households, and 7,331 people. 65% of the 8,078 ha had already been cleared, out of which 61% had been planted with rubber. Despite the contract clause, villagers had previously used this land for a number of different purposes such as cultivating rice and vegetables, grazing cattle, and foraging for forest products. Such land played a critically important part of their livelihood strategies, providing them with food, resources, and income. Without the resources of such land to rely on, many villagers needed to find other sources of income, predominantly working for HAGL on its rapidly expanding rubber plantation.

This case of land acquisition is representative of a broader trend of land grabbing that has increasingly occurred in Laos and across the Global South over the last few years. A number of recently emerging reports from development agencies and international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) have shown that investors from around the world have been purchasing and leasing massive amounts of land in developing countries (GRAIN 2008, Cotula et al. 2009, Daniel and Mittal 2009, World Bank 2010). The World Bank report (2010) documented that in 2009, contracts were signed for the sale or lease of 45 million ha. In comparison, the global area of farmland only expanded by 4 million ha in 2008. While all of the reports contend that there is a lack of empirical evidence documenting how these agricultural investments are impacting peasant livelihoods, there is a growing recognition that the potential for negative ramifications is significant.

This process has occurred at the same time in Laos, but mostly in the form of land concessions whereby. Lao law prevents foreign investors from purchasing land in the country, but land concessions allow them to lease land for a period of between 35 and 75 years, often with the possibility of renewing their contracts. Land concessions have become increasingly common throughout the country over the last half-decade, particularly for extracting land-based resources

such as through mining, hydropower, and tree plantations. While the largest investors come from the neighboring countries – China, Thailand, and Vietnam – South Korea, Japan, India, and Australia are not far behind (Schoenweger and Üllenberg 2009). As reports of the environmental and social consequences of land concessions have emerged it has led the GoL to enact an ambiguous policy of placing and then removing a moratorium on all concessions over 100 ha. Regardless, land concessions have remained the dominant mode of investment in land and the defining feature of the country's resource-led development path.

Development reports at the global level, particularly by Cotula et al. (2009) and the World Bank (2010), have posed their research question as the following: is this vast increase of investment in farmland generally a negative or positive change for the livelihoods of peasants throughout the developing world? In other words, are we witnessing a giant land grab or a development opportunity? This paper addresses this question from a different angle. Instead, the research question is not whether transnational land acquisitions are inherently 'good' or 'bad', but instead how they are restructuring agrarian social relations of production and consequently what impacts such transformations might entail for rural livelihoods. Posing the question of land acquisitions as either positive, negative, or something in between is overly vague and fails address the central issue. Understanding how the social relations of production in rural areas are changing can help engender a much more comprehensive understanding of the consequences that such restructuring may hold for peasant livelihoods. In order to paint a fuller picture of the impacts that transnational land acquisitions are having upon agrarian regions, it is critical to understand *who* is impacted and *how*.

This paper employs the theoretical framework of primitive accumulation in order to understand this process of restructuring. As conceived by Karl Marx in *Capital, Volume I*

(1976 [1867]), primitive accumulation is a historical process whereby a separation is created between producers and their means of production or subsistence, i.e. their land. Subsequently, the producers *sans* means of production are left with little choice but to join the industrial reserve army working in urban factories while their old land has been taken up for agricultural capitalist production. Primitive accumulation is a necessary process of producing the capital-relation, the social division of labor that is a prerequisite for the capitalist mode of production.

While for Marx much of the emphasis was on the need to produce a large proletariat class that could supply the labor needs of the newly burgeoning factories, land concessions in Laos show that primitive accumulation is less of a strategy for creating a labor force and more of one for freeing up land and resources for commodity production and capital accumulation.

Vietnamese and Chinese companies in Laos could easily, and would gladly, draw upon a massive, disciplined, and willing labor force in their own countries without employing a single Laotian, if it were not for Lao laws requiring such projects to employ 90% Laotian labor on all investment projects. Yet, these companies also employ Laotians because the promise of gainful employment is an important part of the strategy used by company representatives and GoL officials to force peasants off their land. Thus, this paper is concerned with the particularity of primitive accumulation in the Lao case – the contextual, contingent effects it has on restructuring social relations and as a result, transforming livelihoods. This paper identifies and elaborates the three moments of primitive accumulation – separation, proletarianization, and accumulation – as dispossession, semi-proletarianization, and enclosure in the context of HAGL's Lao land concession.

The paper is structured as follows. The second section lays out the theoretical framework of primitive accumulation and whether it can be conceived of as a process that is primarily

historical or logical and inherent to capitalist expansion. The third section examines how HAGL's rubber plantation fits within national strategies of conceding land to foreign investors as a component of the GoL's resource-led development path. The last section uses the primitive accumulation framework to understand the processes of peasant land dispossession, semi-proletarianization, and the enclosure of freed up land as spaces of accumulation via timber extraction and plantation development. Ultimately, this section seeks to demonstrate what impact these changes have upon peasant livelihoods.

This research is based upon semi-structured interviews with government officials (national, provincial, and district levels), company representatives, village leaders, and village households. Between February and March 2010 my research assistant and I interviewed village heads (*nai ban*) in all seven villages impacted by the concession, and in each of the three focus villages out of the seven we interviewed ten households. The research is also based upon data collection from survey documents, investment contracts, and project maps. GIS maps were created from government and company maps as well as GPS coordinates that we recorded in the villages and plantation fields.

Primitive accumulation: constructing the capital-relation

Marx used the term 'primitive accumulation' to describe the transition from feudalism to capitalism – a transformation based upon violent historical appropriations of land and wealth from peasants, ultimately leading to the capitalist division of labor. “In actual history, it is a notorious fact that conquest, enslavement, robbery, murder, in short force, play the greatest part [...] As a matter of fact, the methods of primitive accumulation are anything but idyllic” (Marx 1976 [1867]). For Marx, the necessary component of primitive accumulation is the separation of

producers from their means of production, leaving them only with their labor power to be sold for a wage. This act is a precondition of capitalism and thus is called ‘primitive’ in the sense that it necessarily comes before the creation of the capital-relation between capital and labor:

The capital-relation presupposes a complete separation between the workers and the ownership of the conditions for the realization of their labour. As soon as capitalist production stands on its own feet, it not only maintains this separation, but reproduces it on a constantly extending scale. The process, therefore, which creates the capital-relation can be nothing other than the process which divorces the worker from the ownership of the conditions of his [*sic*] own labour; it is a process which operates two transformations, whereby the social means of subsistence and production are turned into capital, and the immediate producers are turned into wage-labourers. So-called primitive accumulation, therefore, is nothing else than the historical process of divorcing the producer from the means of production. It appears as ‘primitive’ because it forms the pre-history of capital, and of the mode of production corresponding to capital (Marx 1976 [1867]: 875).

The act of primitive accumulation can be differentiated into three separate, but interrelated processes. The first is separation – the producer is separated from the means of production and/or subsistence. The second is proletarianization; the producer without the means of production is now a wage-laborer for those who do own the means of production. The third is the act of accumulation – the division “frees up” the producer’s previous means of production (particularly land and resources) for whoever can enclose it and accumulate capital from the commodification of its produce.

The second and crucial point of the above quote is that Marx arguably viewed primitive accumulation as a pre-cursor to the development of capitalism. The question is whether this is an historical or logical argument – did primitive accumulation occur at one point in time in order to produce capitalism as a mode of production or does it necessarily occur every time that the capital-relation established? Whether or not Marx was making an historical or logical argument, it is clear that primitive accumulation is an inherent and immanent characteristic of the expanded

reproduction of the capitalist system of production, as evidenced by the new round of dispossession under global land grabs.

Perelman (2000) argues that Marx believed primitive accumulation to be a continuous, inherent process but intended to de-emphasize its importance for political and strategic not theoretical reasons. An overly emphatic critique of primitive accumulation would put too much focus on the most violent aspects of capitalist expansion and thus distract the analysis away from the reproduction of everyday capital relations, which Marx sought to deconstruct. De Angelis (1999, 2001, 2004) argues along similar lines but contends that Marx was arguing that primitive accumulation would always occur in advance of the establishment of capitalist social relations, and thus it is inherent to capitalism.

If primitive accumulation is defined in terms of the preconditions it satisfies for the accumulation of capital, its temporal dimension includes in principle both the period of the establishment of a capitalist mode of production *and* the preservation and expansion of the capitalist mode of production *any time the producers set themselves as an obstacle to the reproduction of their separation to the means of production* (De Angelis 2001: 13).

De Angelis is arguing that Marx distinguished between two separate, but intertwined sets of logic within the capitalist mode of production. The first is preservation, or the reproduction of the capital-relation as a means of capital accumulation. The second is its expansion, based upon the understanding that capitalism operates under laws of continuous capital accumulation and thus is dependent upon its expansion as a universal mode of production. For such expansion to occur, capital will inevitably encounter and need to overcome non-capitalist modes of production, such as when peasants live and work upon sought-after land and resources.

Harvey (2003), however, argues that Marx did not believe primitive accumulation to be a continuous process, and thus provides his own explanation for why capitalism needs to expand into non-capitalist areas via the process of primitive accumulation. For Harvey, capitalism is

characterized by crises of overaccumulation that, in order to be averted, require the opening up of new areas of investment in order to reduce costs and provide cheaper goods to the market, thus increasing effective demand.

The implication is that non-capitalist territories should be forced open not only to trade (which could be helpful) but also to permit capital to invest in profitable ventures using cheaper labour power, raw materials, low-cost land, and the like. The general thrust of any capitalistic logic of power is not that territories should be held back from capitalist development, but that they should be continuously opened up (Harvey 2003).

Harvey, who calls this process “accumulation by dispossession”², further, argues that

What accumulation by dispossession does is to release a set of assets (including labour power) at very low (and in some instances zero) cost. Overaccumulated capital can seize hold of such assets and immediately turn them to profitable use. In the case of primitive accumulation as Marx described it, this entailed taking land, say, enclosing it, and expelling a resident population to create a landless proletariat, and then releasing the land into the privatized mainstream of capital accumulation. Privatization [...] has, in recent years, opened up vast fields for overaccumulated capital to seize upon (Harvey 2003).

Regardless of what Marx believed, there is ample evidence from the global development of capitalism in the 150 years since his writing showing that primitive accumulation is a continuous process. The rapid increase of global land grabs over the last few years shows that primitive accumulation is as, if not more, important for capitalist expansion than it ever has been before. By viewing primitive accumulation as an immanent component of capitalist expansion and reproduction, analyzing primitive accumulation no longer distracts from critiques of the everyday reproduction of the capitalist mode of production and can actually be powerfully subversive. As Harvey argues,

If the current period has seen a shift in emphasis from accumulation through expanded reproduction to accumulation through dispossession, and if the latter lies at the heart of

² Harvey opts to use the term “accumulation by dispossession” because he finds it odd to call an ongoing and contemporary process “primitive”. I prefer to refer to the original term, though, because it keeps the emphasis on land. Furthermore, it reminds us of the predatory or even “savage” (Tsing 2005: 27) nature of the destruction of non-capitalist, or what Glassman (2006) refers to as “extra-economic” realms of production.

imperialist practices, then it follows that the balance of interest within the anti- and alternative globalization movement must acknowledge accumulation by dispossession as the primary contradiction to be confronted. But it ought never to do so by ignoring the dialectical relation to struggles in the field of expanded reproduction (Harvey 2003).

This in turn allows critiques of global land grabbing to also be critiques of global capitalism, allowing us to move beyond calls for regulation, investor responsibility, and codes of conduct (World Bank 2010, Cotula et al. 2009).

HAGL's 10,000-hectare land grab

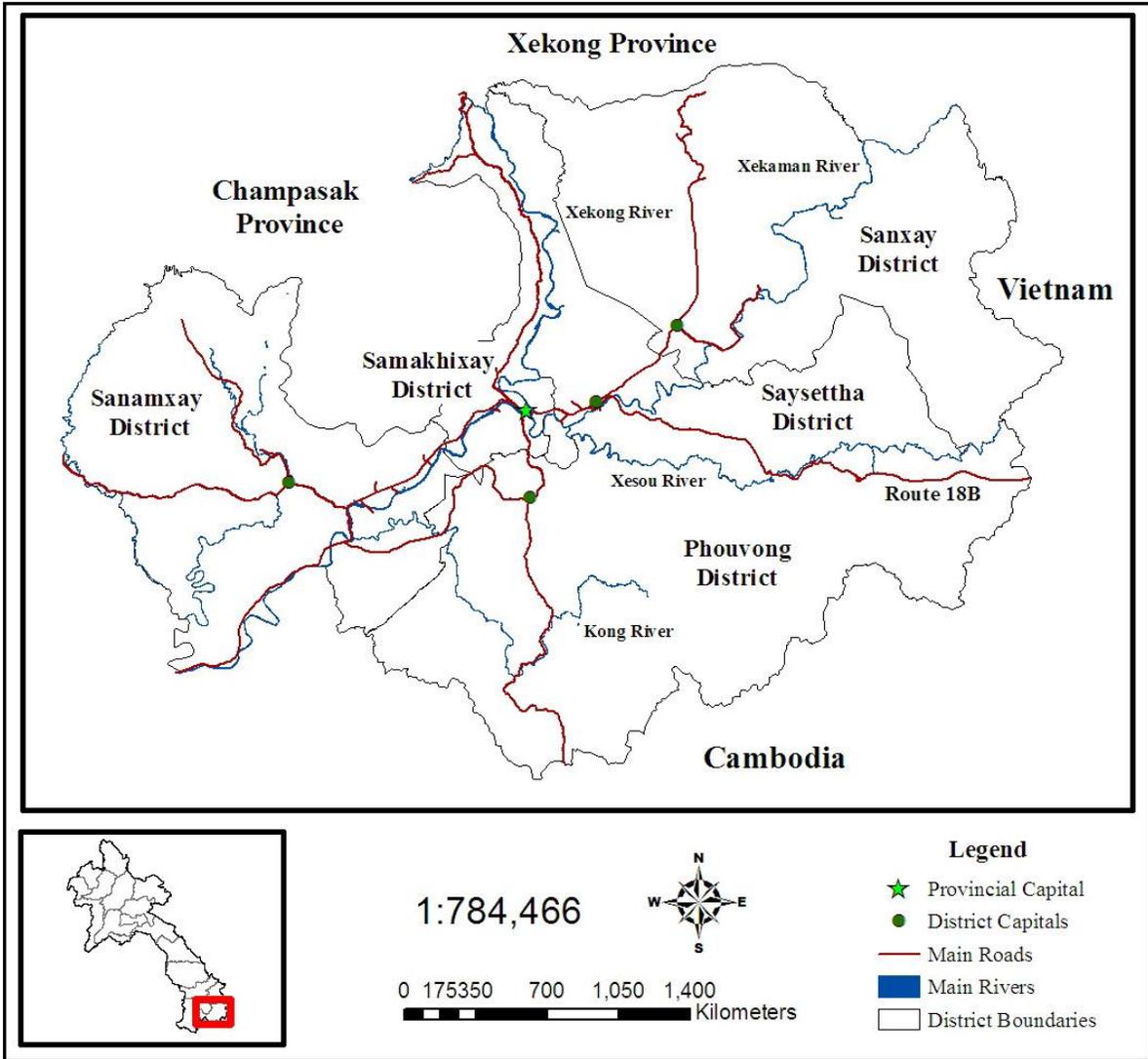
Despite being the third largest corporation on the Ho Chi Minh Stock Exchange (HoSE) by the end of 2008 (Than Nhien News 2009), HAGL began as a small carpentry business in Gia Lai province of Vietnam's Central Highlands, started by the current CEO, Mr. Đoàn Nguyễn Đức. Đức began his work by crafting wooden furniture products for local schools, but his business quickly took off and in the early 1990s he moved into the timber sector, at a time when Vietnam's forests were being rapidly deforested by uncontrolled logging. However, HAGL made its real money in real estate when Đức began to acquire a number of land plots in Ho Chi Minh City between 2002 and 2003 to build high-end apartments and hotels at a time when land prices were low. Over the following five or six years, the city urbanized rapidly and the value of land increased ten-fold. At the same time, the company continued to expand its holdings in other provinces by constructing a chain of four- and five-star hotels (HAGL 2010). By the end of 2009, 80% of the company's sales came from real estate and its stock had tripled since first being listed on the stock exchange 2008 (Forbes Asia 2009). At this point, the company's total assets had passed \$1 billion, with Đức's shares at 55%. Although this meant Đức had not yet reached his personal goal of becoming Vietnam's first billionaire, he did become Vietnam's first private

aircraft owner after purchasing a \$7 million Beechcraft King Air 350 from the US in 2008 (VN Business News 2008)³.

More recently, the company has turned its gaze towards natural resource extraction and development, expecting that rubber, mining, and hydropower will make up the core of the group's revenue stream by 2012. In Đức's words, "I think natural resources are limited, and I need to take them before they're gone" (Forbes Asia 2009). Domestically, HAGL has already moved into hydropower, mining, and milling. Increasingly, though, the company has set its sights on Vietnam's less-developed and more resource-rich neighbors, Cambodia, Laos, and Myanmar. In Cambodia, HAGL has the rights to grow rubber on 15,000 ha and had plans to begin extracting iron ore from a \$20 million invested mine by August 2010 (Vietnam News Service 2010).

However, the company intends for Laos to become its largest destination for international investment. The company's website states that HAGL has plans to invest a total of \$450 million in Laos in the coming years (HAGL 2010). \$100m will go into the construction of the "Vina Tower complex" in Vientiane, consisting of a five-star hotel, villas, and luxury apartments (Vietnam News Service 2010). A larger portion, however, is going into natural resources. Exploration is currently under way in Sekong and Attapeu provinces to develop mines for iron and copper ore. \$120 million is being invested in two dams on the *Nam* (river) Kong in Attapeu and HAGL expects to complete them in the next two years with a combined electrical output capacity of 120 megawatts. *Map 1* on the following page is a general map of Attapeu province.

³ HAGL also owns a top Vietnamese football club, named after the company. Not only another personal ambition of Đức, the football team can also be used as a public relations arm of the company. This was certainly the case in 2002 when they offered enough money to convince the Thai football star Kiattisuk Senamuang to play for HAGL, especially after the Thai national team had beat Vietnam the year before. (cf. Forbes Asia. 2009. Condo Boss. 30 November)



Map 1: Attapeu province

As briefly addressed in the introduction, the contract that HAGL signed with the GoL to log timber from and grow rubber on a 10,000-ha plot of land for 35 years was acquired in conjunction with an agreement to finance the \$19 million SEA Games athletes’ village. Besides the athletes’ village, the government also borrowed a \$100 million loan from the China Development Bank and in return gave the rights to a Chinese company, Suzhou Industrial Park Overseas Investment, to lease a 1,640 ha plot of wetlands in the center of the capital for 50 years

in order to develop a “modern town” complete with business centers, hotels, factories, and tourism facilities (Vientiane Times 2007b).

The connection between Vietnamese and Chinese aid to support the SEA Games and land concessions is unique in comparison to most foreign investments in land. Yet, in many ways they are representative of the process by which foreign direct investment in land has been institutionalized throughout the past few decades in Laos. While officially a communist country, Lao PDR has undergone significant economic reforms over the past 35 years. In 1986 the government initiated the New Economic Mechanism, which gradually opened up the country to outside economic forces, following the model of Vietnam. Over the years, foreign investment increasingly found its way into the country’s greatest comparative advantage – land – in order to exploit and produce land-based resources such as timber, minerals, and hydropower energy. Neither the GoL nor domestic private investors ever had the necessary capital to harness the power of these resources and internally induce economic growth. Laos was thus dependent upon foreign investors to invest in resources, yet the government wanted to ensure that the state reaped the benefits from such investment. As importantly, the GoL wanted to protect the territorial sovereignty of the nation-state. Therefore, instead of allowing foreign investors to purchase land, investors were permitted to lease land from the government for a period of 35 to 75 years. Ultimately, the ownership of all land within the country remained with the Lao state.

The inability of the ministries to deal with land management and land conflicts, led to the former Prime Minister, Mr. Bouasone Bouphavanh to create the National Land Management Authority (NLMA) installed under the Prime Minister’s Office. Additionally, in the same year he placed a moratorium on all land concessions over 100 ha for industrial trees, perennial plants, and mining. Despite the moratorium, land concessions continued to be issued, oftentimes at the

provincial level without notifying the central administration (NLMA and GTZ 2009). Within this political economic context of land concessions, HAGL’s land acquisition is not all that unique.

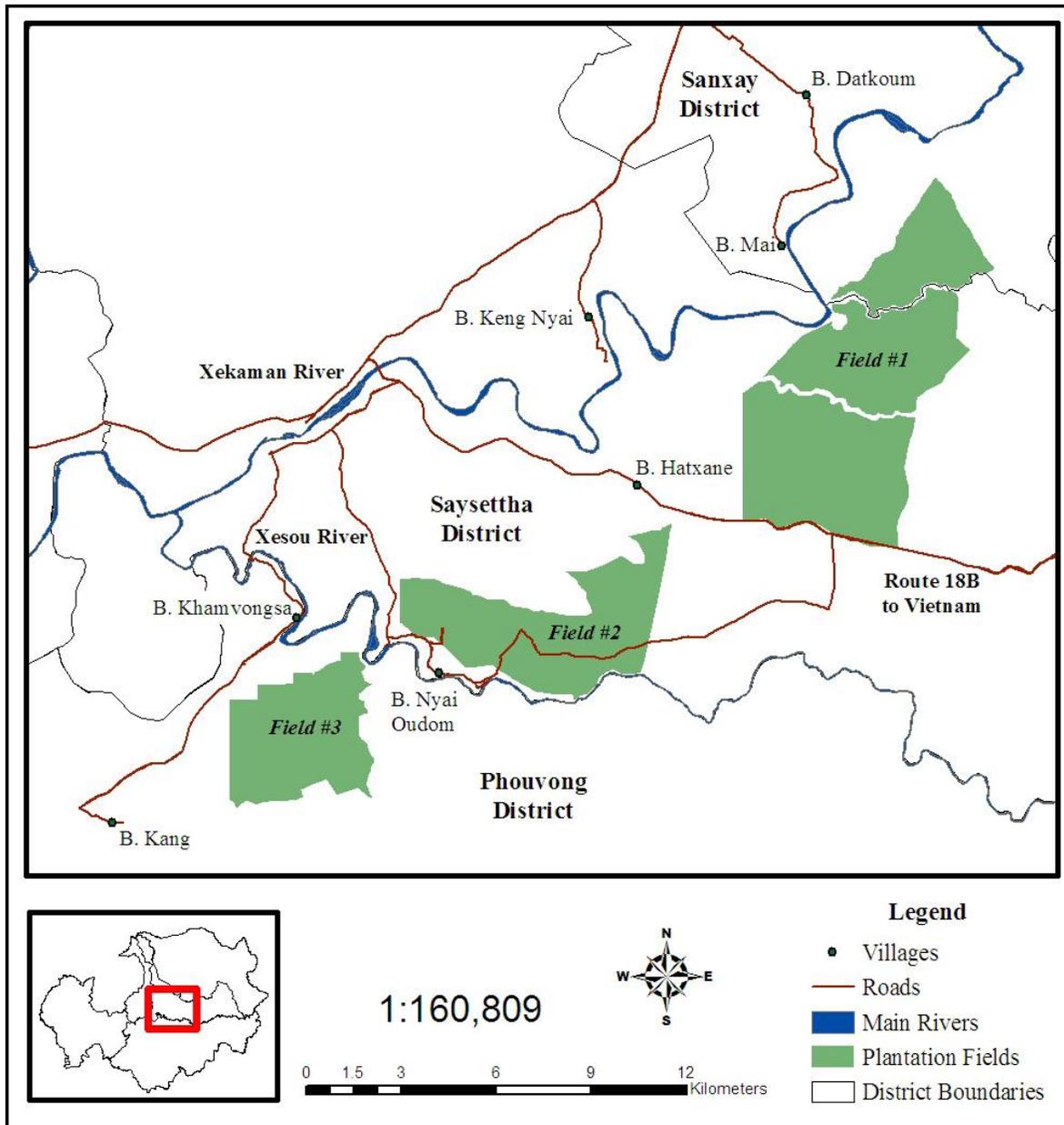
By the time of our fieldwork in February 2010, 8,078 ha of the planned 10,000 had been allocated HAGL (Attapeu PLMA 2009). The breakdown of this allocation into three different fields in Saysettha, Sanxay, and Phouvong districts, can be seen in *Table 1* below. Additionally, the location of all three fields can also be seen on page 19 in *Map 2*⁴ on the following page. Although 10,000 ha of contracted land had yet to be allocated by the time of the fieldwork⁵, the company has developed the acquired land at a rapid pace. Between May 2007 and August 2009, 5,318 ha of rubber had been planted with rubber and 2,005 ha of land had been cleared, while 2,885 ha remained untouched.

Field number	District(s)	Total area (ha)	Area planted (ha)	Area cleared (ha)	Area not yet cleared (ha)
1	Saysettha, Sanxay	4,419	2,264	1,645	510
2	Saysettha	2,100	0	0	2,100
3	Phouvong	1,559	954	360	245
	Total:	8,078	3,218	2,005	2,855

Table 1: Plantation sizes

⁴ *Map 2* was created using a variety of data sources. The field borders came from a company map made in August 2009. The numerical order of the fields was designated by the company in the map, and thus replicated in this paper. The village points and roads came from GPS data recorded in the field. The district borders and river shapefiles came from a stock database with GIS shapefiles of Laos.

⁵ According to the survey maps created by the company in August 2009, they had only found 8,078 ha of suitable land. Originally, they had accepted a 1,564 ha field in Samakhixay district, close to the provincial capital. According to a PLMA official, however, the company changed its mind due to the poor quality of the soil on that plot of land and its distance from the other fields.



Map 2: Map of plantation field locations

Dispossession, semi-proletarianization, and enclosure

Foreign investors interested in the land-based resources of the Lao PDR encounter a distinct problem. The land under which the resources lie, flow through, lie on top of, or potentially grow out of is not barren, uninhabited, and unused. While some of the country's land is protected forest and thus off-limits to all potential users, the rest is used in some capacity by Laotian villagers for cultivation, foraging, raising livestock, etc. There is a parallel here with the identification of 'reserve' lands that has accompanied the global land grab (Cotula et al. 2009). Using remote sensing technologies, multilateral development banks have identified large sections of sub-Saharan African countries as unused and 'reserved' for investment. Yet, as investors acquired the land they met resistance from peasants that were already using such land for their livelihoods. Thus investors face a particularly tricky problem of divorcing peasants from the land they use, tenure (statutorily or customarily), and sometimes own. In this section I use the primitive accumulation framework to understand how HAGL has acquired land for investment – land previously used by Laotian peasants. I particularly seek to tease out the nuance and particularities of the HAGL case in order to build upon the primitive accumulation framework and illuminate how this process may be occurring in relation to land grabs throughout the country and across the world.

Primitive accumulation is contemporarily occurring in Laos in a way that reflects the complexity and complicated nature of interaction among the three acts of separation, proletarianization, and accumulation. Marx conceptualized primitive accumulation as a holistic process whereby the purpose was not only to free up land and resources for capitalization and create a wage laboring class, but also to create the class divisions necessary for the functioning of capitalism as a mode of production. He saw this class division as one between the industrial

reserve army of the proletariat and the urban, industrial bourgeoisie. In Laos, and the HAGL case in particular, primitive accumulation is less a strategy of accumulation based upon exploitable wage labor, evidenced in part by a lack of migration to urban areas. Even in cases where villagers do out-migrate, it is more often to work in Thailand since Laos has significantly less opportunities for work in urban areas. Yet, even within the rural areas of the plantations, investors have not used primitive accumulation as a way of creating a capital-relation and class division that allows them to exploit the wage labor of Lao peasants. This is largely because such investors see Lao labor as undesirable due to perceptions that Lao peasants are undisciplined. In the case of Vietnamese and Chinese investors, they would much rather import labor from their own countries, which have an extensive pool of young men seeking to work abroad on projects such as HAGL's rubber plantation.

For HAGL, primitive accumulation is a strategy primarily for spatially reorganizing the productive activities of a rural landscape. While they did not need to physically remove any peasants from the land they were living on, in comparison to mining and hydropower projects where relocations are often the case, they had to alter the relationship between people and their land. While previously this was a relationship characterized by insecure statutory land tenure in combination with a host of customary tenure practices, this link was removed in order to allow HAGL to create a much stronger connection between the company's capital and the productivity of the land – a productivity sanctioned by the government, protected by fences and ditches, and reified by the clearing of village land and forest upon which young rubber trees were planted. The semi-proletarianization of Lao peasants was not accomplished for the value of their labor power, which HAGL saw as inefficient and unproductive. HAGL was required to employ Lao labor due to GoL laws stating that 90% of the labor force on an investment project must be

Laotian. More importantly, perhaps, the promise of employment and the higher incomes that plantation employment would bring was a necessary part of the ideological development package brought to village leaders by company representatives and government officials. Without such a promise, it would have been much more difficult to convince villagers that the loss of their land would be a positive improvement for their livelihoods. The particularities of the primitive accumulation process in this case study as resultant from HAGL's priorities combined with government requirements and the wills and agency of peasants led to a particular process of restructuring rural relations. The way in which this restructuring impacted peasant livelihoods is essential to understanding the real impacts that land grabs are having upon rural areas.

Dispossession

The separation of farmers from their land was quite possibly the most contentious component of transforming a landscape characterized by diverse peasant subsistence into one dominated by a monopolized rubber plantation. The ability to enforce this separation was based upon a combination of repressive and ideological forces enabled by the vast power differential between the GoL and HAGL on the one hand and subsistence farmers on the other. This power relationship did not fully pre-exist but was enacted, practiced, and performed in a number of repressive ways. Yet the repressive forces of authoritative power were not enough by itself to create the separation. As important was the ideological project that the GoL and HAGL engaged in order to convince farmers that the concession of their land was both necessary and beneficial for the development of their villages.

One of the main strategies of repressive force used by HAGL was to begin clearing land for the project without alerting villagers beforehand. In some cases the company may not have

known that the land they were clearing existed within the boundary of a particular village, likely the case with forest and grazing land that is not visibly used or under production. While HAGL certainly did not intend to understand the complex statutory and customary land tenure arrangements of the landscape, even if they tried, the land management system in Laos makes it almost impossible to determine many of the land use categories. This is evidenced by the fact that the only land use maps of village lands are signboards posted in front of the village. In one village where that board had washed away the previous year in a flood, neither the district or provincial government had a paper or digital copy. However, HAGL often cleared land that was obviously in use and under production such as paddy rice fields and vegetable gardens.

Out of the seven impacted villages, only four were warned beforehand that land from their village had been conceded. Their stories show the type of repressive and ideological pressure they faced to accept the concession. In *Ban* (village) Nyai Oudom, when government officials came to inform the village of the plantation, village leaders were told that the provincial government had already agreed to give the company 2,100 ha in the area, part of which would come from their village. Village leaders felt that they had no choice since the decisions were already made at higher levels of government. At *Ban* Hatxane, the *nai ban* told us that the only consultation process to occur was that a Lao representative of the company called and met with him to inform him that land in the village would be appropriated as decreed by the signed contract. The *nai ban*'s feeling of despair was evidenced in his rhetorical question: "if the central government, province, and district have already agreed, how can a small village disagree?"

Accompanying repressive forces, HAGL also delivered an ideological package to influence village leaders that the concession would be good for their village. This ideological package included both castigating their previous livelihood practices that had "kept them poor

for years” while illuminating how the rubber plantation would improve their lives via employment and new infrastructure. Government officials and company representatives argued, in short, that by allowing HAGL to acquire part of their land and through the productive use of such land, the village would escape its backwardness and poverty and become wealthy and modern. HAGL painted a rosy picture of the village improvement that would follow the plantation including new roads, electric lines, schools, and health clinics. More importantly, they told the villagers that they would have access to gainful, high-wage, and stable employment on the plantation. Most of the village leaders did not have experience with such a significant investment project and thus had no base from which to judge the development claims of the project.

Compensation for lost land can be seen as a retroactive tactic used to reduce resentment to the project after land had been acquired. Rather than being a proactive strategy of offering high prices in advance to force villagers to give up their land, compensation was retroactive in the sense that it was intended to smooth over resentment that might result from the bumpy process of directly appropriating land. In most cases, compensation was only offered when villagers confronted the company about land that had already been cleared. HAGL only offered compensation in advance when they could visibly see highly valuable economic productivity on the land, such as commercial tree plots, or when they encountered farmers working in their fields during the clearing process. Compensation can be seen as a strategy for lessening the possibilities of civil unrest, sabotage to plantations, etc. Whether proactive or retroactive, the compensation process went unregulated – compensation amounts were decided based upon individual negotiations between the village household and HAGL representatives, characterized by a clear imbalance of power. Such negotiations led to prices far below the market value of the

land, and much less than what villagers requested. HAGL forced villagers to accept such low prices by threatening to not award any compensation at all, a threat that villagers felt they could have no recourse against.

Under such repressive and ideological forces, it is unsurprising that village leaders and households gave up their land for little in return. However, there was one instance where village leaders resisted the concession of village land. This case provides insight into what pushes villagers to react against, rather than accept, such forces. HAGL and the GoL came to *Ban Kang* of Phouvong district a number of times to ask for survey and clearing rights, but were repeatedly denied by the *nai ban*. Eventually, HAGL employees began clearing village land two separate times and both times they were stopped by the *nai ban* with armed village police. After the second offence, the *nai ban* managed to extract a fine of three million kip (about \$355) from the employees for the six hectares of village land they had cleared. When HAGL and GoL officials returned to find out what the problem was, the *nai ban* refused again and finally they agreed not to clear the village land. The *nai ban* told us that he refused to concede village land because of how important such land was for livelihoods in the village. Additionally, he had learned of the negative impacts of plantation development from relatives in Bachieng district of neighboring Champasak province who had already lost much of their land in the same way.

This single successful case of resistance shows that it is possible for supposedly powerless village leaders to assert their power over investment decisions concerning their village land. While it is possible that the leadership of *Ban Kang* was well connected with the local government thus ensuring their success, their case also showed that because the ideological veil of HAGL's investment project had been pierced, HAGL was unable to force the village to accept the project. Additionally, they were successful because they acted quickly and resolutely against

all attempts to appropriate their land. Most importantly, it shows that the proper application of strategies of primitive accumulation by investors and the state alike is crucially important for ensuring a smooth, efficient, and effective separation of peasants from land.

Semi-proletarianization

As noted above, the proletarianization of Lao peasants was not the primary objective of the HAGL land concession, and can be seen as more of a side effect, and in actuality as undesirable but necessary by HAGL. The promise of employment was both a necessary component toward ideologically convincing villagers that the loss of their land was beneficial and it was also a requirement by Lao law. Yet, despite the secondary importance of peasant proletarianization for HAGL, it is an incredibly important part of the transformation of the rural landscape and of peasant livelihoods.

More accurately, this livelihood transformation process should be referred to as semi-proletarianization, since not all households have lost agricultural land. Furthermore, many households have only lost some of their land or have only lost access to communal resources such as forest products and grazing land. This is in part because the plantation had only been implemented for three years at the time of the fieldwork and only 65% of the allocated land had been cleared. Therefore, the changes to livelihoods are only partial and incomplete and as more land is lost in the future as the plantation expands to its full extent, livelihoods will certainly continue to change. Yet, at the time of fieldwork, village livelihoods had only been semi-proletarianized as many villagers could still rely on some components of their previous livelihood strategies.

Before examining the change in livelihoods, it is important to first describe livelihoods before the concession, including village demographics. Currently, all of the seven villages are located in lowland areas with flat-lying agricultural land. However, most of the households in the villages are from ethnic groups that have historically lived in upland areas where agricultural practices mostly consisted of shifting cultivation and forest product collection. Most of these villages are ethnically dominated by people belonging to the Brao ethnic group, with the exception of *Ban Keng Nyai*, which is mostly composed of Jeng people, a group related to the Brao. Many of the villages also have some Lao households, while *Ban Datkoun* is the only village to have ethnic Ye and Alak households. Ethnic composition and demographic information can be seen below in *Table 2*.

District	Village Name	Majority Ethnicity	Year of Village Relocation	Number of Households	Number of People
Saysettha	Hatxane	Brao	2000	225	1,216
	Keng Nyai	Jeng	n/a	252	1,552
	Nyai Oudom	Brao	1976	465	2,600
Sanxay	Mai	Brao	1976	89	549
	Datkoun	Brao	1955	58	330
Phouvong	Khamvongsa	Brao	1976	202	1,084
	Kang	Brao	1984	69	386

Table 2: Village demographics

All of the villages except for *Ban Keng Nyai* have been relocated, most for at least 25 years. Therefore, all of the villages have acquired lowland agricultural practices for many years. Despite their assimilation into such agricultural practices, however, many upland agricultural practices have been infused with their lowland practices. For example, a number of households still practice a form of shifting cultivation on flat, forestland. Although this land is technically

classified as garden land since shifting cultivation is illegal, it involves dividing small plots of one to two hectares into four to eight sub-plots, growing upon one sub-plot per year.

An incredibly important component of households livelihoods is foraging for forest products. There is a wide range of useful forest products that are collected, such as food, medicine, fuel, and construction materials. Many households rely on the sale of such products, both within and outside of the village, as a significant portion of their monetary income. Another important livelihood strategy reliant upon communally land is the raising of livestock for both consumption and sale. Raising livestock, principally cows and buffalos, requires a large amount of land for grazing. The most important source of livelihoods, however, is the cultivation of wet rice, or paddy – relied on both as a direct source of food and for income. For poorer households, selling their labor can become an important part of their more meager incomes. Two predominant forms were expanding and preparing paddy land and logging timber and helping to build houses for wealthier villagers.

The loss communal land used for foraging and raising livestock has had the most widespread effects on all of the villages since almost all villagers are dependent upon communal land for their livelihoods. Interviewed households were able to make anywhere between 200,000 and four million kip (about \$23.67 and \$473.37) per year from the sale of forest products. In all three villages, the main areas for collecting these products were the forests that had either been cleared already or that were designated to be within the concession area, such as in *Ban Nyai Oudom*. For a number of poorer households, especially of *Ban Nyai Oudom*, the loss of forest resources has been particularly damaging as labor for logging timber to build houses in the village was one of their main sources of income in otherwise subsistence-based lives. The loss of

communal grazing land is also problematic for livelihoods. Many households reported that after the concession was implemented it was difficult to find land for their livestock graze on.

Livelihood changes related to the loss of individual agricultural plots are less widespread in comparison to those related to the loss of communal lands, yet they are more acute and intense as they lead to a direct loss of agricultural production, income generation, and food production. Only certain households whose lands were unfortunately located in the concession areas have suffered from these losses. It was impossible within the scope of this study to determine how many households had lost agricultural land and how much agricultural land was lost in total due to the lack of data. Thus it cannot be determined how many households have experienced livelihood impacts directly from agricultural land loss. Government survey documents officially reported that 115 families lost land, yet this only included four of the six villages where agricultural land has and continues to be appropriated.

As older forms of livelihood strategies are eroded through land loss, villagers are left with little choice but to work as wage-laborers on the plantation. Thus, they are transitioning from being land users to land laborers. In some cases they may be even laboring on the land taken from beneath their feet. Since the plantation is still expanding, there is still a significant amount of employment available, although this might not be the case as production advances into later stages when all of the land has been cleared and all of the rubber plants are in the ground, only requiring casual maintenance. For all employment, workers are supposed to be paid 30,000 kip (about \$3.55) per day yet their pay can be reduced to 20 or 25,000 (about \$2.36 to \$2.96) kip if they work too slowly. The employment involves the organization of laborers into groups of 10 to 20 people by a supervisor. This supervisor was usually a Vietnamese employee of the company.

When asked about the employment, villagers became animated with complaints about the conditions of work. The biggest complaint was that the quantity and difficulty of the work for the wages given was far too much. The workday generally lasts for 11 to 12 hours with a one-hour break for lunch. Interviewees complained that the supervisors did not treat them well, often reprimanding them for working too slowly and scolding them for taking long breaks. There was also a great deal of resentment among interviewees concerning the payment process. According to a number of interviewed households, HAGL would pay the supervisor for all of the group members' wages and the supervisor was then responsible for paying each worker. Since such payments are not regulated it opens up a significant space for corruption by the supervisor. Sometimes the supervisor would pay late or less than the standard rate due to a supposed lack of small bills. Other times the workers would not be paid at all.

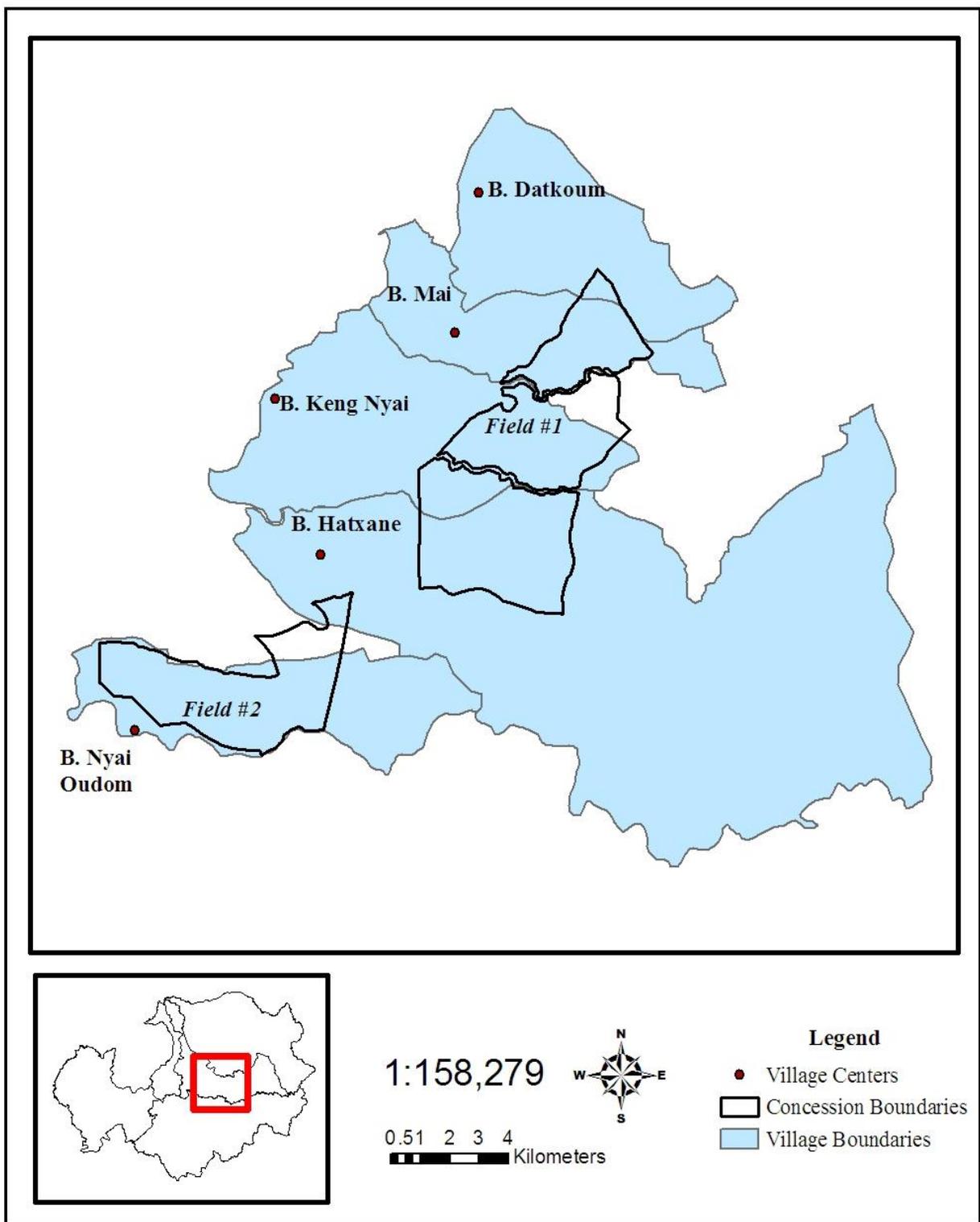
It is possible that households could make more money from working on the plantation full-time than growing crops in their own fields. However, the work was so demanding and that for the most part villagers only worked when they absolutely needed cash, which at the time of fieldwork was two or three times per year. One of the village *nai ban* is convinced that the company is making the work so difficult for the villagers on purpose in order to prevent them from coming to work. This would then give the company an excuse to evade Lao labor laws and allow them to import Vietnamese labor. Either way, this new form of livelihood is in no way desirable for many villagers in comparison to their previous livelihood activities.

Enclosure

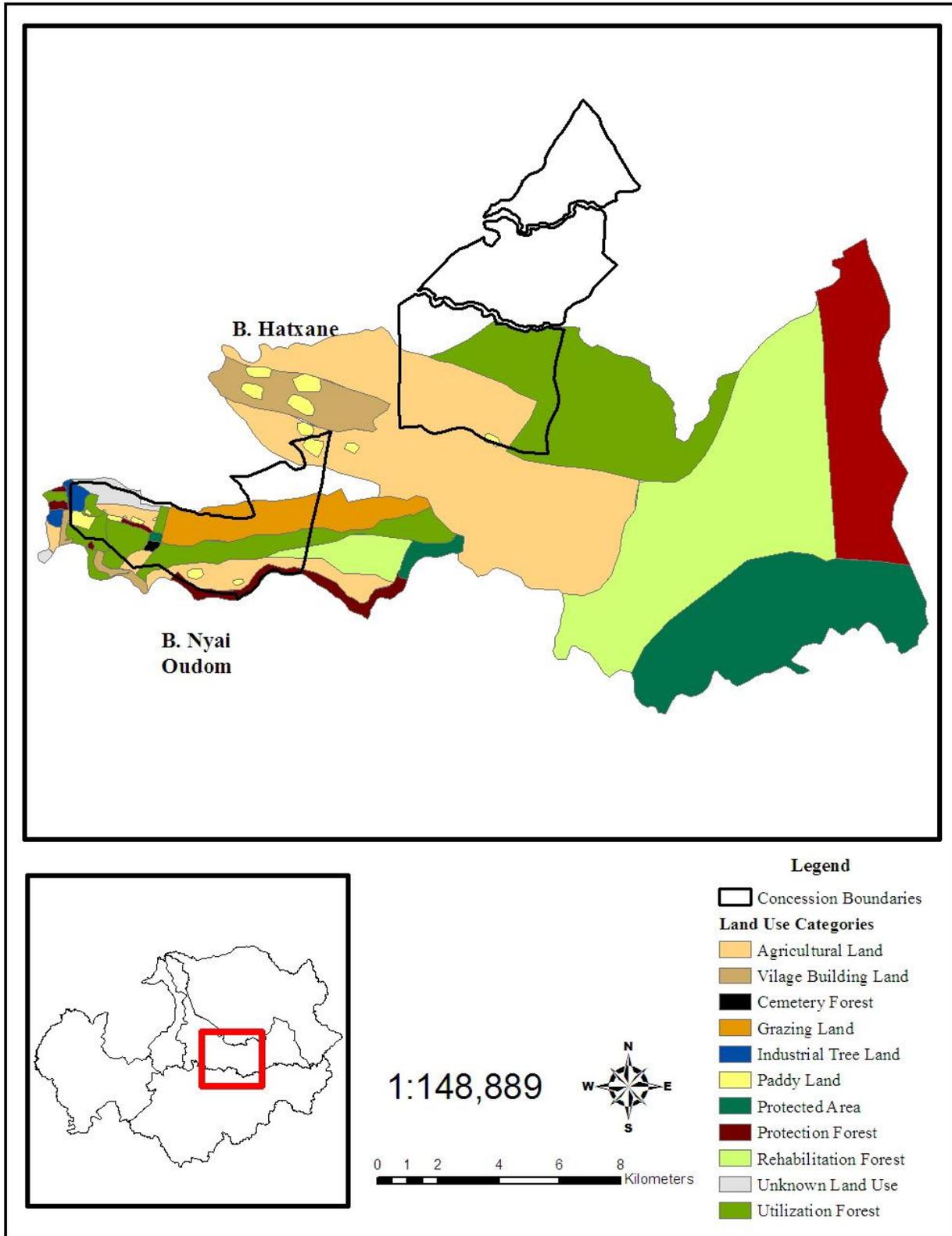
The ultimate goal of HAGL's plantation investment was to enclose the land that was freed up by the displacement of peasants and thus accumulate capital through the exploitation of

previously existing resources such as timber and the production of new resources, namely latex. The separation of peasants from their land allowed for such land enclosure and was the original intent of HAGL, much more so than the proletarianization of peasants. The act of enclosure was an act of redistributing spatial relationships – the social relations related to boundaries and categories of land. Thus, a completely different landscape was constructed, one that was no longer characterized by complex statutory and customary tenure arrangements of smallholding subsistence and cash crop production. Instead it was increasingly epitomized by monocropped, extensive rubber land held in ownership by foreign capital, managed by Vietnamese employees, and labored by Laotians.

Map 4, below, shows the centers and boundaries of the five villages for which land use and border maps were acquired with the concession boundaries overlaid on top, showing that the land allocated for the first and second fields comes from within the borders of village land. The amount of village land conceded to the company, however, is not the most important issue. It is much more important to examine the type of land lost and how that land was used, rather than the total amount and percentage of village land lost. For this reason, I also overlaid the concession boundaries for two villages in *Map 5* on the following page. The amount of each land type that was appropriated for these villages can be seen in *Table 3* below.



Map 4: Field locations and village boundaries



Map 3: Overlay of LFA land use categories and plantation field

Village	B. Hatxane	B. Nyai Oudom
Agricultural Land	962.3	357.06
Paddy Land	39.98	71.43
Industrial Tree Land	0	41.2
Grazing Land	0	496.21
Rehabilitation Forest	0	31.87
Utilization Forest	790.8	581.22
Conservation Forest	0	12.02
Protection Forest	0	88.53
Cemetery Forest	0	14.36
Unknown Land Use	0	106.69
Total	1793.08	1800.59

Table 3: Amount and type of land conceded (ha)⁶

The importance of these maps and data is that they begin to show how a heterogeneous landscape of diverse livelihood practices is being transformed into a homogenous one of monocropped rubber. The implication is not only one of spatial arrangements, new maps, and a changed landscape. It is about how social relationships surrounding spatial arrangements have been transformed. The transformation of the landscape is a manifestation of how rural social relations have changed. Previous relationships between villagers and the state concerning their right to use land for particular uses in combination of village understandings and manipulations of these rules has been completely erased in favor of a project of vast capital accumulation, and economic benefits to the state. Such accumulation could only occur through the erasure of such linkages between people and land, the complete emptying of polygons on a map of previous social attributes. This allowed HAGL to take up such land, transform it, and accumulate from it – the final step and ultimate goal of the primitive accumulation process.

⁶ For *Ban Nyai Oudom*, most of the land has yet to be cleared thus explaining why there has been no conflict over the loss of cemetery forestland included within the concession area. It is possible that the borders of the field could be modified to avoid clearing such sensitive land.

Conclusion

Part of the purpose of this paper has been to show how primitive accumulation, as a theoretical framework, can be used to analyze and help understand the transitions that are occurring in rural areas throughout the Global South via the onset of global land grabs. The process of dispossessing peasant land is one of capital accumulation through the extraction of land-based resources or production of agricultural commodities. Yet, these land acquisitions are not only a repeat of history, reminiscent of the land enclosures in England described by Marx and Polanyi (2001 [1944]) and the colonial period. There is something new to them as well.

One of these aspects is related to the second purpose of this paper – to show what how HAGL's land concession differs from Marx's conceptualization of primitive accumulation and thus expands the concept. The main difference is that proletarianization was not a central goal of HAGL's investment and in some ways was an impediment to the project. Proletarianization was more of a side effect, an unintended consequence of taking land from its owner, an obstacle to bypass in the reach for land. Primitive accumulation may be becoming less of a strategy for creating a class division between capital and labor, since that division already exists throughout most of the world, such as in Vietnam and China. Instead, it may increasingly be turning into a strategy that is solely concerned with accessing resources and removing anything that stands in the way. This understanding has incredibly important theoretical, political, and practical implications for dealing with the phenomenon of global land grabs and can hopefully help find ways to prevent such damaging livelihood transformations in the future.

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