Feminism Political Ecology and Land broker State in the Special Economic Zones (SEZs) in the Mekong: A case study of Thailand

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Outline

1. Framing: Frontier capitalism and Feminist Political Economy
2. State and Special Economic Zone: Emergence and its impacts
3. Women’s struggles over resources, their voices, and narratives
4. Conclusion
Framing my presentation

**Frontier capitalism**

- Backward/poor/wild/underdevelopment borders
- Local Authorities bypass central govn’t to support private sector to exploit frontier resources (Laungaramsri 2012:466)
- Dispossession frontier resources (Levien 2013: 383)
- Turning resource periphery into a resource revenue (Einzenberger 2018:13)

**Feminist Political Ecology**

- Gender: political ecological life (access to, control over, and knowledge of natural resources)
- Analyzing of identity, difference, and meanings in their relation to sites of environmental change, degradation, and struggle
- How gender identities and social relations shape, and are shaped by, power relations and social inequality and how gendered inequality are linked to questions of liberation struggles, environmental change, and degradation. (Rocheleau et al. 1996)
Levien (2012) The land question: special economic zones and the political economy of dispossession in India

- Grabbing land from farmers through SEZs, people got killed and women got raped in West Bengal.
- Refusing to give their land for a petrochemical SEZ promoted by an Indonesian company.
- Dispossession of land from peasants
- A land broker for capitalists”
Frontier capitalism in Isan region

- Isan frontier as "poor, underdevelopment and national security in Thailand
- Government has launched “backward development policy”
- Land, rivers and water have been regulated and transformed into commodities.
- Regional economic integration
Border trade between Thailand and Laos

Border trade between Thailand and Laos and Lao cross border trade booms

Isan people should benefit from border development?

https://www.krungsri.com/bank/getmedia/7f273893-1a4d-49f5-abe5-802750cfa4c1/Regional_Quarterly_Report_RQR.aspx
The NCPO’s order SEZs in Thailand
(National Council for Peace and Order (NCPO))

- Rule of the Office of the Prime Minister on the Area Management in the Special Economic Development Zone B.E. 2558 (2015)
- NCSEZ Announcement 1/2558 (AD 2015) on defining areas of special economic development zones
- NCSEZ Announcement 2/2558 (AD 2015) on defining areas of special economic development zones phase 2
Examples

• Income tax exemptions.
• A 50 percent reduction of corporate income tax
• Permission to double deduct costs of transportation, electricity and water supply for a period of 10 years
• Exemption of import duty for machinery
• Exemption of import duty for raw materials and essentials
• Permission to employ foreign unskilled workers
Roles of Government: Provincial authorities and Central Government: Case of Mukdahan Province

SEZs policy
• Government as “resource broker” by Department of Treasury
• Consolidating common land used by local people for the benefit of private and state enterprise sectors.
• Expropriating villagers’ land into infrastructure projects

11 sub-districts along the border area of Muang Mukdahan, Wan Yai, and Don Tan districts with a total area of 578.5 sq. km. (361,542 rai).
BOI: Investment in Mukdahan’s SEZs,

- Trading and Multimodal Transportation Center
- Twin-track railway from Khon Kaen - Mukdahan - Nakhon Phanom
- Highway
Narratives of everyday life struggles over resources
Women’s roles in household and family economics
Women’s suffer from loss of land and related resources: commercial grazing, aquatic animal, rice farming and wild product areas
Excluded from negotiation

• Both common and private land used by women have been expropriated
• State and some village leaders (males) mostly made decision on land expropriation
• No chance to negotiate with the NCPO
• For private land: Just tried to get a bit better compensation on their own land but that piece of land was granted as **Sor Por Gor. 4-01** (S.P.G. 4-01)
• S.P.G is an allotment of land from the land reformative committee
  • Under no circumstance may this land be bought or sold.
  • It confers the right to occupy only and be transferred only by inheritance.
  • Land may be used for agriculture only.
• They were treated by some officers that the govern could take back the **Sor Por Gor at any time.**
Conclusion

- SEZs as a representation of “Frontier Capitalism”
- State acts as “a land resource broker”
- Affects women’s everyday lives
- Creates day-to-day suffering due to prevent them from an access to resources
- Excludes women from the benefits of development
- Difficult to negotiation with government due chiefly to gender norms in favor of powerful men and state.
- Gendered inequality are linked to struggles, environmental change, and degradation under a centrality of ‘enclosures’ to transitions to frontier capitalist industries