

Doing a Dam Better? Understanding the World Bank's Eco-Governmentality in Lao Hydropower Development

Nicholas R. Zeller¹

Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to make explicit the governmentality of the World Bank in the cases of Pak Mun Dam in Thailand and Nam Theun 2 Dam in Laos. Much of the literature on Nam Theun 2 Dam focuses on the incorporation of conservation practices and the creation of state apparatuses that account for natural resources and local populations through a discourse of environmentalism. Using World Bank planning and evaluation documents, I argue that although these practices represent an escalation of the role of environmentalism in the justificatory logic for new hydropower projects, they do not represent a change in the World Bank's major justificatory mechanism, the presence or absence of institutional structures necessary for present and future project implementation. That is, project justifications continue to rest either on an already established relationship with the borrower that allows for the transmission of the World Bank's technical and managerial expertise, or on the presumed likelihood that such a relationship can be established. In either case, the emphasis is on the creation of what I call a seasoned borrower and its inclusion in the production of knowledge that is legible to development discourse.

Introduction

That hydropower projects continually produce harmful unintended consequences is no longer an acceptable end to scholarship on this type of development work. That hydropower development has disastrous social and environmental effects, not to mention dubious efficiency, as an energy-production method, has been repeatedly demonstrated; a study focused on confirming the unintended consequences of yet another project would thus be redundant (Rich 1994; WCD 2000; McCully 2001). Despite the consistent effects of hydropower development, however, international development institutions have continued to build such projects and to do so with no more than partial acceptance of the social and environmental consequences. In order to understand the nature of the disconnect between reliably negative project outcomes and the development institutions behind them, it is therefore necessary for studies critical of hydropower to conduct other lines of research. One such line of research is the Foucauldian-influenced investigations into how development has continued to be a productive source of discourse despite its obvious shortcomings (Ferguson 1994; Li 2007). It is my goal in this paper to use such a line of analysis to demonstrate at least

¹ Nicholas R. Zeller: University of Wisconsin, Madison, Department of History, 3211 Mosse Humanities Building, 455 N. Park St., Madison, WI 53706 USA, nzeller@wisc.edu

one way in which the ‘out-of-handness’ of hydropower development can be understood. Scholars such as Whittington (2012) have documented the contested nature of hydropower development at an institutional level, specifically in Laos, between international organizations both for and against dams. I attempt here, instead, to illustrate the structure of World Bank (or Bank) discourse as something generated through contestation but also instructing the way in which projects are planned and justified. As I hope to make plausible, this discursive structure is not reducible to a mapping of the motivations of all concerned individuals.

As will be shown below, this mode of analysis helps to understand the structures surrounding development projects by focusing on how their failures can actually strengthen the institutions’ place of power in this particular field of knowledge production. The analysis leaves out consideration of the problem of broken promises by institutions such as the World Bank. The question guiding this research is, therefore, not *why* do these projects continue or are they ultimately helpful or harmful, after all costs and benefits are weighed, but *how* is it that hydropower projects continue to be planned and built in Southeast Asia *despite* project failures and opposition to such projects at multiple scales?

Following Goldman’s (2005) analysis of the World Bank’s so-called eco-governmentality, I compare the rationale used to justify the Nam Theun 2 Hydropower Project (NT2) in Laos to an earlier project of at least equal controversy in northeastern Thailand, the Pak Mun Dam. Although much of my research serves to support Goldman’s (2005) thesis and the work of many others suggesting that NT2 represented a shift in the outward expression of the World Bank’s development practices, I also discovered a marked consistency between the two projects. Namely, that the surface manifestations of World Bank governmentality, while differing for each case, nonetheless spring from a discursive structure whose main driver is the assurance that the project in question leads to further projects.

This consistency appears in the discourse of the World Bank’s project-related documents in the form of a justificatory mechanism, which I have labeled the *seasoned borrower*. Following the work of other development scholars, such as Ferguson (1994) and Li (2007), I would like to move away from the implication by some scholars that the justifications and reflections published by development experts are some type of ruse, as Friedrichs and Friedrichs (2002) argue in the case of the Pak Mun Dam. Rather, although the images created by the World Bank of the object to be developed are always quite different from what is considered ‘true’ by academic standards, they are different in a very specific way that carries with it a degree of consistency. It is this consistency that should be of interest to studies of development projects that intend to make use of Foucault’s (2004) concept of governmentality.

Analytical Technique in Foucault’s Governmentality

To begin, I would make only a few remarks on what Foucault meant by governmentality and how it might be used in an analysis of hydropower development. Although the seeds of Foucault’s line of reasoning regarding governmentality can be found in his earlier writing, the concept was never explored in his published work. As such, the following review is drawn from his lectures on the subject. Foucault defined

governmentality as the “conduct of conduct.” In his 1977–1978 lecture series, entitled *Security, Territory, Population*, he stated that governmentality was the “ensemble formed by institutions, procedures, analyses, and reflections, calculations, and tactics that allow the exercise of this very specific, albeit very complex, power” (Foucault 2004: 108). That is, of government. To study governmentality is to study the techniques of government as a field of power. Such a study involves, according to Foucault, three shifts in analysis. First, one must shift analysis to outside the institution. Rather than analyzing the problematic of the institution as an institution, the study of governmentality entails understanding the type of power organized within it while also external to it (Balke 2010). For example, the structures internal to the World Bank, and their necessity as structures internal to the Bank, cannot be understood outside the broader context of a global commitment to betterment through modernization and to the use of government to achieve the goals that commitment entails.

The second shift is to outside the institution. There are multiple ways of listing and accounting for the failures of World Bank projects. Scholars can and have published volumes on the stated goals of World Bank projects compared with their seemingly inevitable damaging effects (Rich 1994; McCully 2001; Fredrichs and Fredrichs 2002; Bakker 2010). Such a focus assumes, without analysis, that the institution persists despite these functional defects. Indeed, in the realm of hydropower development, a project’s functional defects may be grounds for further projects for both international financial institutions and the state. On this point, Foucault (2004: 118) uses the example of the prison, saying, “The real history of the prison is undoubtedly not governed by the successes and failures of its functionality, but is in fact inserted within strategies and tactics that find support even in these functional defects themselves.” The second shift is a move away from function toward an analysis of strategies, tactics and techniques. Or, as Ferguson (1994: 20) would have it, development projects may produce unintended consequences that, despite their ‘unplannedness,’ are nonetheless “incorporated into anonymous constellations of control.”

The third, and final, shift is to outside the object. When applied to the World Bank, this shift means a refusal to use the concept of development as traditionally defined through notions of betterment. The World Bank’s actions and knowledge production cannot be measured by the standards of the object of development in this sense. Rather, they must be understood as establishing a field of truth containing objects of knowledge through the technologies of power. In other words, the governmentality of the World Bank involves the creation of specific knowledges in the constitution of a domain called ‘development.’

The third shift moves the power relations away from meeting objective development standards and toward the production of the concept of development—the production of a development discourse. It is a shift to outside the object of government. Power and discourse cannot be separated, because the production of the latter involves the use of the former. Describing Foucault’s conception of this relationship, Howarth (2009: 315) writes, “Power is important...in terms of locating those moments of exclusion, in which certain statements are condemned to...‘a wild exteriority,’ and in highlighting a positive set of rules, procedures and mechanisms that makes possible the production of discourse.” Located as it is in the field of power known as government, the World Bank avails itself of the inequality between the Bank and those it intends to

govern in determining what development is (Ferguson 1994; Goldman 2005; Li 2007).

The combination of these three shifts is a framework in which questions of *how* can be answered. The focus can be placed not on the World Bank as an institution but on its technologies of power. That is, on the material and discursive structures that enable the World Bank to maintain its contested position of power in hydropower development. The continuation of the role of the World Bank in development projects despite its well-documented history of failures (McCully 2001) can be reframed to focus on how tactics are arrived at that are supported by the functional failures themselves. Finally, a focus on whether or not the World Bank is actually capable of moving a population toward development can be replaced with a focus on the Bank's participation in the definition of development itself, based on its location in unequal power relations. Now that the question of *how* is possible, it is necessary to determine the point at which to begin an examination specific to the World Bank and the hydropower projects considered here.

Development Discourse and the Role of Experts

If the art of governing requires the appropriate arrangement of humans to each other and to resources through myriad techniques such that the multiple, specific goals of those governing can be met, then it must also require some method with which to plan and assess the performance of specific techniques. As Li (2007: 6) points out, "Calculation is central." In order for those governing to plan and implement interventions, the complex realities of society must be standardized and legible (Scott 1998: 11). This is done through an expert discourse that is distinct from other forms of knowledge about an area, its people, and its resources (Ferguson 1994: 29). Although the experts who plan development projects must always do so with reference to the socio-historical and geographic context in which they hope to intervene, there are nonetheless recognizable patterns in the planning of interventions based on the structured position of experts within a specific governmentality.

Li (2007: 7) observes two key practices in the translation of the order of betterment in planned interventions. The first is problematization, or "identifying deficiencies that need to be rectified." The second is "rendering technical," which has to do with the set of practices employed to represent that which is to be governed as a legible field with identifiable characteristics (Li 2007: 7). Key to rendering social reality technical is the location of certain forces that can be used to solve the deficiencies identified through problematization. These practices are not separate. What is important in this process is the creation of a reality in which the target for intervention experiences exactly the kind of problems in exactly the type of situation that a development institution can resolve or improve. As Ferguson (1994: 69) puts it, if an expert analysis is to comply with the needs of development institutions it must make the target for intervention "out to be an enormously promising candidate for the only sort of intervention a 'development' agency is capable of launching: the apolitical, technical 'development' intervention." Power is expressed through the exclusion of certain knowledges from a given discourse, but the need to exclude knowledges necessarily means that an opposing group with forms of knowledge to exclude exists, and that this group poses a challenge to those governing (Howarth 2009). In

considering the rendering of social and environmental problems technical, one must consider both a) the production of knowledge in development discourse and b) the methods by which other forms of knowledge are excluded in an expression of governmentality.

Ferguson (1994) introduces another layer to the practice of rendering technical. That is, as problems are identified and rendered appropriately technical, they are also made apolitical. As he shows through his analysis of development projects in Lesotho, poverty is addressed by both state and international agencies as a problem of bad policies and mismanaged resources rather than the product of politically maintained wealth inequalities. Experts working in the development industry ignore the political economic relationships between social groups and focus on the capacities of the poor to improve their position. This is not an oversight or product of poor research. It is the product of research conducted under a completely different standard than is imposed on those who criticize it (Ferguson 1994: 30). The removal of politics from the condition of poverty is an essential aspect of training for development experts, and rendering political problems technical is taken as a sign of good research, according to development industry standards.

In describing this removal of political economic problems by experts, Mitchell (2002) emphasizes the importance of making the target of intervention a product of some natural process. He writes, "Objects of analysis do not occur as natural phenomena, but are partly formed by the discourse that describes them. The more natural the object appears, the less obvious the discursive manufacture will be" (Mitchell 2002: 210). To take an example from hydropower development, if poverty can be linked to either a need for irrigation, problems of seasonal flooding, or a technical inability on the part of the borrowing country to seize its abundant water-resource potential, then the application of an apolitical development discourse appears all the more appropriate, especially for the experts involved. Although project failures may occasionally lead to raising the political economic issues faced by those being governed (as in the case of the Pak Mun Dam), experts have been repeatedly able to reframe failures in terms of the poor implementation of their prescriptions. As Mitchell (2002) and Ferguson (1994) have both shown, such reframing is a common practice among development experts, who are constantly confronted with contradictions between project goals and outcomes.

Questions that cannot be addressed through technical rendering are, therefore, absent from the analyses and reports of development experts (Li 2007). Keeping political economic questions from being raised, however, involves a closing off of discourse that is problematic to resolving issues related to poverty, but it does serve two purposes. First, the specific way in which experts make social reality legible and apolitical reaffirms their status as experts. That is, attempts to solve the problems identified by experts with solutions outside the established technical and managerial range are basically nonsensical to development agencies and confirm the capacity of experts to diagnose problems in the first place.

The logic of this confirmation is essentially thus: (1) a technical/managerial problem is identified; (2) an appropriate regime of policies and actions is established to resolve the problem; (3) the unrecognized aspects of social reality impede the project's ability to meet its stated goals, yet remain unrecognized by development agencies; (4)

project failures are blamed on the inability or unwillingness of the population to adhere to the technical/managerial solutions; (5) the capacity of experts and the distance between their knowledge and other knowledges increases through the negative confirmation of the expert performance. To restate this final point, if not following the program laid out by experts meant project failure, strict adherence to the program must have meant project success. Development discourse is affirmed. It should be noted, however, that this is an abstract outline of a discourse and reflects only the broad strokes of the contestations between project-affected people, anti-dam organizations, and state and international development institutions (Whittington 2012).

Second, the closing off of development discourse is itself a reaction to resistance in some form from those being governed. Bounding a discourse and being unaffected by those outside the bounds are not equivalent. As Goldman (2005) shows, groups that present obstacles for development agencies are not overlooked. Both are involved in working out the limits of government in what he calls the "Terrain of the Conjunctural" (Goldman 2005: 24). As new challenges arise, new methods of rendering social reality technical must be established. New calculations must be made and the practices of government expanded for an institution to maintain its position in the power relationship.

There is a final important point to be raised about experts and the development discourse by which they are limited and which at the same time they constitute. Referring particularly to political economic approaches to the study of development projects and to the identification of interests, there may be a tendency to dismiss the work of development experts as wholly or partially misrepresenting the intent of development institutions. Following Ferguson (1994: 18), however, "that is no excuse for dismissing it." The actions and thoughts of development experts reflect a complex nexus of interests, but they are also the product of an ongoing pattern of development discourse. Their work, therefore, provides a suitable place from which to analyze development discourse and the rise of specific governmentalities. Here I am referring specifically to the texts produced by these experts, which I use and which have been used similarly in other studies of development (Ferguson 1994; Goldman 2005; Li 2007).

The Seasoned Borrower Mechanism

These explanations of governmentality, development discourse, and the methodological position associated with their analysis provide a context for considering Goldman's (2005) emphasis on the various institutional apparatuses associated with the conservation and sustainability efforts related to NT2. While these efforts do in themselves represent a change in how hydropower projects are planned and implemented, they do not strike exactly at Foucault's (2004) meaning, and so do not provide us with an explanation of how the success or failure of a given hydropower project has become so clearly immaterial to the power position of the private and state institutions that built the project. What is needed is to distinguish between the surface manifestations of a discursive structure and that structure's deeper logic. I argue that a more powerful explanation, one that is also in keeping with the concepts of governmentality and development discourse, can be found in the concrete

manifestations of the justificatory mechanism I have called the seasoned borrower. I will now provide a description of what is meant by this term and provide an example by comparing World Bank discourse in the cases of the Pak Mun Dam in Thailand and the NT2 in Laos.

The seasoned borrower is a borrowing institution for which the structures necessary for lending, planning and evaluation have already been established through prior projects. It is part of a mechanism that labels the borrowing institutions as already existing in the realm of expert knowledge such that, from the World Bank's perspective, the borrower is itself already able to competently produce the knowledge and techniques necessary for positive change through a particular project. Once a borrower is a seasoned borrower, project failures can be accounted for and defended though the construction of project-affected people as malcontents resistant to beneficial change. The seasoned borrower, at least in the discourse around the project, enjoys the benefits associated with expert knowledge even as its capacity to plan and implement are negatively confirmed through the supposed unwillingness of project-affected people to go along with its technical solutions to political-economic problems; that is, problems that manifest as severe inequalities of wealth.

As a justificatory mechanism, the seasoned borrower is a highly flexible construction. By the time of the Pak Mun Dam's Staff Appraisal Report (WB 1991), the World Bank had a history with the Electricity Generating Authority of Thailand (EGAT), which it was able to build upon to make the case that EGAT was a technically competent, reliable borrower concerned with the modernization and therefore the betterment of the people of Thailand. This was not possible, however, with the Government of Laos (GoL) by the time of the NT2 Project Appraisal Document (WB 2005). (Both documents are key because they contain the initial assessment of each project, laid out in full, and the approval for granting the respective loans.) The absence of this history with the GoL, however, does not equate to the absence of the seasoned borrower as a justificatory mechanism. Rather, it was precisely because the GoL did not have a sufficient track record that the seasoned borrower mechanism took hold. In the case of NT2, the promise of a seasoned borrower-to-be emerged. This resulted from the GoL's reported willingness to implement dam-related conservation initiatives such as supporting the Nakai-Nam Theun National Biodiversity Conservation Area (NNT-NBCA), a series of livelihood projects inside the NNT-NBCA, downstream compensation and mitigation measures along the Xe Bang Fai River, and the Public Expenditure Management Strengthening Program. If the seasoned borrower is a necessary condition for World Bank involvement in a given project, one of two scenarios, described below, can unfold.

EGAT and the Pak Mun Dam

The first scenario can be seen in the case of EGAT and the Pak Mun Dam. Pak Mun was originally conceived as a relatively (not actually) small, run-of-river project located in Ubon Ratchathani Province on the Mun River, 5.5 km above its confluence with the Mekong River (WB 1991; WCD 2000). In 1967, the National Energy Authority of Thailand (NEA) began conducting studies on the hydropower potential of the Mun River as part of a larger effort on the part of the Thai state, the Mekong Committee, and,

through the 1970s, the Interim Mekong Committee. As such, the earliest origins of the Pak Mun project are tangled with the Cold War politics that spurred the Ubol Ratana (Nam Pong) and Nam Ngum dams in Thailand and Laos, respectively. (For an analysis of Cold War hydropower politics, see Sneddon [2012].) These studies were conducted at the site of the Kaeng Tana Rapids by French consulting firm SOFRELEC. The proposed project would have had a drainage area of 185 square kilometers and its normal water level, the average height of the reservoir created by the dam, would have been 112 meters above sea level (WCD 2000: 16). This plan was abandoned three years later, however, when the same firm determined that hydroelectric projects on the Mun River were not economically or geographically viable (WCD 2000: 15). The plan would not be revisited for another decade.

In 1978, a study was conducted with the goal of addressing seasonal fluctuations in the availability of water resources in the Chi-Mun River Basin. Farmers in the basin experienced problems developing year-round cultivation that were attributed by EGAT and Bank experts to inadequate irrigation infrastructure. The resulting report, entitled “Water for the Northeast: A Strategy for the Development of Small-Scale Water Resources,” was presented to the National Economic and Social Development Board’s Water Resources Planning Subcommittee, and a new water policy for the Northeast was incorporated into the National Master Plan (WCD 2000: 2). The new policy had two key aims. First, it called for an emphasis on the use of existing distribution resources, which meant the development of a new irrigation infrastructure from already existing reservoirs as well as extraction from rivers. Second, it called for meeting basic requirements through the rapid development of small-scale irrigation projects that would be designed to meet subsistence needs and offer minimal irrigation during the dry season (WCD 2000: 2). In the same year, EGAT began its own feasibility studies for a run-of-river dam on the Mun River (WCD 2000: 16). EGAT’s *Summary Report: Pak Mun Multipurpose Development Project* was released in 1988, following dubious engineering and environmental studies conducted by SOGREAH (WCD 2000: 17). The Pak Mun Dam was seen by the Thai state as a small project and did not rank highly enough on either the World Bank or EGAT register to warrant its own loan document. It was packaged in with a loan for a lignite mine (the Mae Moh Mine in Lampang Province) in the Third Power System Development Project (WB 1991).

Construction of the Pak Mun Dam was completed quickly, with loan approval coming in 1991 and power generation beginning in 1993 (WB 1991, Foran and Manorom 2009). Despite this initial conception, however, the Pak Mun Dam has become, in both the NGO and academic worlds, a model of how not to conduct hydropower development, especially with regard to fisheries, and it was eventually declared economically unjustifiable by the World Commission on Dams (WCD 2000). Indeed, the negative impacts of this project, which included a severe loss of livelihood for those living around the project and countless battles for resettlement and livelihood compensation, were such that Rich (1994: 10) described the resettlement policies as “little more than a public relations hoax,” and Friedrichs and Friedrichs (2002: 26) found the World Bank’s “mode of operation [to be]...intrinsicly criminogenic.”

Although the World Bank’s Staff Appraisal Report states that only 150 species of fish were affected by the Pak Mun Dam, the Bank’s figure rose in 1996 to 202 fish species, only four of which were considered rare (WB 1996: 5). Independent studies

conducted by ichthyologists in 1994, however, found 265 affected fish species. Of these, 77 were migratory and 35 depended on rapids habitat for survival. After completion of the dam that same year, only 96 species were found in the upstream region of the Mun River (WCD 2000). Other reports cite only 45 indigenous species left after project completion (Jenkins et al. 2008). Directly upstream of the dam, fish catches experienced a decline of 60–80 percent. Total losses of communities above and below the dam range from 50–100 percent (WCD 2000).

Public protests began well before World Bank loan approval and increased after operation began in June 1994. Organizations such as the Mun River Villagers' Committee and the Assembly of the Poor gained enough support to organize protests that lasted well over 100 days, and a protest village was established close to the dam that lasted from 1999 to 2002 (Friedrichs and Friedrichs 2002; Foran and Manorom 2009). Although these protests were somewhat successful in winning agreements from the Thai central government to negotiations and large benefits for those affected by the fishery declines, many of the gains were lost with the change in the Thai government administration after the 1997–1998 financial crisis. Despite the release of the World Commission on Dams study in 2000, EGAT maintained that Pak Mun's negative effect on fisheries had been exaggerated and that other causes should have been considered. EGAT further argued that the actual energy production of Pak Mun Dam was in keeping with predicted figures, that it had paid compensation to more than 6,200 families for the loss of fisheries, and that Thai and foreign NGOs were encouraging local people to demand ever-increasing levels of compensation far in excess of what was lost as a result of the dam (Foran and Manorom 2009: 67).

In 2001, based on the findings of the Committee to Resolve Problems of the Assembly of the Poor, which did not include any members of the Assembly of the Poor organization, Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra ordered EGAT to open all of the sluice gates at Pak Mun for four months a year, from May to August. This original period was later extended to an entire year, during which studies were to be conducted by Ubon Ratchathani University on the return of migratory fish populations (Foran and Manorom 2009). During this time, independent studies found 129 fish species had returned to the upstream side of the river, and 94.9 percent of affected households had returned to fishing, for a total number of 6,915 households (Jenkins et al. 2008; Foran and Manorom 2009). Before an official assessment could be completed, however, EGAT announced it was willing to leave the gates open annually only between the wet season months of July and October (Foran and Manorom 2009). As of 2008, the gates of the Pak Mun Dam are open between May and August. Most migratory fish in the Mun River move upstream between the months of February and September (Jenkins et al. 2008).

Although the history of the Pak Mun Dam is one of contestation, a history of who won which concessions and when can miss the discursive structures at work, at least within the World Bank. An analysis of the World Bank's published reports reveals that it was able to construct a particular version of EGAT using the seasoned borrower mechanism in its Staff Appraisal Report (WB 1991). This version continually emphasized that EGAT was a trusted lender that was trying to help more than just industrial interests. Its goal was to supply power to a growing number of Thai people poised and ready for increased modernization. "Growth in power demand has consistently exceeded that of commercial energy consumption. This has resulted in a

per capita electricity consumption in Thailand...higher than the average for countries at an income level similar to Thailand” (WB 1991: 1). In this context, Pak Mun Dam was considered the most economically viable answer to the technical problem of energy generation, as it had “economic viability compared to the next best option of peaking internal combustion turbine generation” (WB 1991: 3).

This image framed all other justifications for the project, which continuously imagined it as a small, unobtrusive, and most viable solution to EGAT’s problem—energy sector diversification (WB 1991). In addition, EGAT’s seasoned borrower status meant that its planning procedures could be trusted. Being able to plan projects capable, in development discourse, of achieving the goal of betterment is an integral part of being a seasoned borrower. Here, betterment is defined not only as improved standards of living (more electricity, higher incomes, greater number of color televisions, etc.), but also as the planning of projects such that they lead to the planning of still further projects. For the Pak Mun Dam, this meant including programs to improve environmental quality, energy conservation, and further privatization of the energy sector. This guarantee of further projects for the World Bank through assisting a capable borrower is the paradox on which the seasoned borrower mechanism depends. On the one hand, the Bank’s expressed level of trust in EGAT’s capabilities is very high: “There are no major risks associated with the program. Although EGAT’s Power Development Plan is ambitious, the utility’s demonstrated experience with system expansion and its state of preparedness assure the Plan’s successful implementation” (WB 1991: i). On the other hand, there is still work to be done in maintaining EGAT’s path to development: “Through the proposed loan, the Bank would continue its ongoing work with the power subsector and expects to provide a continuous review of EGAT’s PDP [Power Development Plan] to ensure that optimum investment programs are evolved which can be supported by various lenders” (WB 1991: 13).

The World Bank’s trust in EGAT’s ability to plan was not a desire for a hands-off approach but an assurance that the project would lead to further projects without undue complication. A major aspect of World Bank governmentality during Pak Mun Dam, therefore, was the arrangement of various Thai state apparatuses such that the institutional structures between EGAT and the World Bank were strengthened. This strengthening manifests itself, for example, in the post-implementation documents in which the World Bank notes that EGAT went beyond what was required to “meet the demands of affected persons, often expressed through confrontation” (WB 1996: 4). The problem with resettlement and compensation for lost livelihoods occurred because “relaxation of eligibility criteria and the increasing compensation and resettlement entitlements caused discontent among households which were either not or just peripherally affected” (WB 1996: 4).

Once construction of the Pak Mun Dam was completed and protests over compensation for fisheries had begun, the institutional realities borne out of the seasoned borrower construction were used to compel EGAT to address project-affected people’s grievances along technical and managerial lines (Foran and Manorom 2009). The success of this project was in maintaining the position of EGAT (and so the World Bank) as the organization most capable of solving livelihood problems. In its own reports, the World Bank found that “relocation was extraordinarily easy,” citing that “some households literally moved across the street” (WB 1998: 3). EGAT itself “actually

committed to exceed the World Bank resettlement policy, to improve the living standards of affected households, to provide a range of options, and to implement resettlement with the participation of affected people” (WB 1998: 4). The problems in compensating for the devastating loss of fisheries along the river and inadequate resettlement policies, according to the World Bank “was not one of EGAT’s commitments, *which is not subject to doubt*, but how to establish fair compensation” (WB 1998:4; emphasis added). One can see here a clear example of the rendering technical of political-economic problems.

The World Commission on Dams reported total project costs for Pak Mun Dam associated with resettlement and compensation had increased 68 percent, from US\$155.2 million in 1989 to US\$260 million in 1999 (WCD 2000). These costs included US\$15.8 million in compensation for loss of fisheries and resettlement compensation for 1,700 households, almost seven times the World Bank estimate (WCD 2000). The large increases in compensation payments that protesters were able to secure from EGAT and the World Bank serve as evidence that the Bank does not simply plan and implement projects exactly as it intends. Rather, opposition to the Pak Mun Dam was able to create enough problems for the Bank that an attempt was made to bring protester demands into development discourse as issues of bad policy. Once the dam’s impact on fisheries was rendered a policy failure, EGAT and the World Bank established a succession of committees to determine who was eligible for what level of compensation (WB 1996; WCD 2000; Foran and Manorum 2009). The committees, such as the Subcommittee of the Impacts of Fishing Occupations and the Committee for Assistance and Occupational Development of Fish Farmers, were a disaster. Yet again, however, project failure had little to do with the ability of EGAT or the Bank to govern, as all possible solutions continually led back to World Bank-funded compensation or World Bank-led livelihood programs (WCD 2000).

The World Bank’s ability to maintain its position of power was not in spite of project opposition but through the unintended mitigation policies it worked out in response to local people who were “protesting, including disruptive behavior at the project site, to demand *even more favorable* compensation and resettlement packages” (WB 1998: 5–6; emphasis added). That is not to say that if a positive outcome had resulted from the Pak Mun project, the World Bank would have been removed from its position of power either. Rather, an implication of EGAT’s seasoned borrower status is the assurance of future projects. Had the Pak Mun Dam achieved its stated goals, the Bank would likely still have been heavily involved in loaning EGAT money for the implementation and monitoring of development programs (WB 1991). To the extent that the Bank and EGAT were not able to account for project opposition through technical solutions, individual protestors were considered irrationally afraid of modernization and NGOs were dismissed as unwilling to work with the Bank due to equally irrational ideological opposition to all hydropower projects:

Despite the generous compensation for houses and land and many other social infrastructure and service benefits, many people claim they are not satisfied, that they are worse off. There is such a culture of complaint, of trying to win sympathy for even greater compensation claims and assistance, that it is difficult

to get affected people to be balanced about their resettlement experience. (WB 1998: 17)

In this way, the Bank validated the EGAT's actions in response to the opposition by comparing its proposed solutions to those of groups outside, and therefore illegible to, development discourse. For example, project-affected people were described as apprehensive about "being integrated into the modern economy, with its competitive, wage-based forms of income" and as having problems with the project that were "profoundly psychological and emotional, not economic" (WB 1998: 17–18). Although the EGAT and World Bank answers to protests and complaints are a result of contestations with local people and the Thai state's own agenda, the mechanism of the seasoned borrower is ever present in the World Bank's account of project outcomes and answers to local and national levels of contestation.

The Government of Laos and Nam Theun 2 Dam

The role of the seasoned borrower justification in the Nam Theun 2 Dam project differs from its role in the case of EGAT in that the GoL presented no history of prior successful projects. As I hope to show in this section, the justificatory role of the seasoned borrower for the GoL is the promise of what the government could become. The absence of the conditions necessary for a seasoned borrower justification is the justificatory ground for the project. This can be seen in the concern expressed by members of the Social and Environmental Panel of Experts (PoE) that without the involvement of the World Bank, the unsuccessful history of the GoL would repeat itself and result in the devastation of important environmental and livelihood resources. It can likewise be seen in the establishment of the Public Expenditure Management Strengthening Program, a Bank initiative in which experts are hired by the GoL to oversee the application and distribution of project revenue to further development projects.

Although World Bank loan approval came in 2005, heavy Bank involvement in planning can be traced back at least to the first PoE report in 1997. Unlike the Pak Mun Dam, NT2 is a particularly large project, and was closely watched on all sides by development institutions and their critics. The project itself includes a 39-meter-high dam on the Theun River and the diversion of water from the project's large reservoir into a channel running into the Xe Bang Fai River. It became fully operational in December 2010 in violation of its Concession Agreement, which stipulated that all resettlement activities had to be completed prior to full operation (IRN 2010; WB 2010; McDowell et al. 2010). Supporting some of Goldman's eco-governmentality thesis, the most significant differences between the planning for NT2 and the Pak Mun Dam were the World Bank's emphasis on environmentalism and the incorporation of experts from INGOs focused on conservation in the case of NT2.

The authors of the PoE reports went beyond using conservation as a justification for the project, eventually expressing great frustration over delays in World Bank loan approval, fearing the project would be implemented by other international financial institutions with whom they had no relationship and who would not bring with them the social and environmental requirements of the World Bank (Scudder et al. 1997a;

Scudder and Talbot 2004). This was largely because, according to the PoE, “With or without World Bank assistance, the Government believes it has no option but to continue developing its hydropower resources. Unfortunately, its record with such development during the 1990s in regard to environmental and resettlement issues has been very unsatisfactory” (Scudder et al. 1997b: 6). This concern is repeated more directly in the PoE’s sixth and seventh reports, which state: “The main constraint to livelihood improvement on the Nakai Plateau is the further delay in the implementation of the NT2 Project or project implementation without a World Bank financial guarantee” (Scudder and Talbot 2004 27; Scudder and Talbot 2004: 29).

It is clear from the PoE and World Bank documents that the range of specific finalities intended for NT2 differ from those for the Pak Mun Dam, in particular the creation of the large Nakai Nam Theun-National Biodiversity Conservation Area (NNT-NBCA) adjacent to the project. The conservation aspect of the NT2 project remained, at the end of the construction phase, the most important outcome to the PoE and the “primary reason for the involvement and support by the World Bank and other international financial institutions and key environmental organizations” (McDowell et al. 2009: 35). Despite its involvement in livelihood restoration on the Nakai plateau and Nam Theun River, the PoE maintained that the NNT-NBCA was the reason NT2 was a possible global model for hydropower development. The protected area is the largest in Laos and extends from the upper edge of the NT2 reservoir to the border with Vietnam. The PoE touted the area’s value for global biodiversity by emphasizing in its reports the five species of mammals, previously unknown to science, that had been discovered since planning for NT2 began. The reports also noted the cultural diversity of the 6,500 human inhabitants and their ten ethnic groups, “three of which have only been described since 1966” (McDowell et al. 2009: 35).

The programs recommended by the PoE and implemented by the GoL contain within them a bizarre mix of modernization and the drive to turn the NNT-NBCA, its wildlife, and its people into a sort of living museum. Long, one-sided debates span the reports, which continue over more than a decade, about the appropriate width of roads in the area such that only two-wheeled tractors may enter or leave, or how much of what kinds of animals are suitable for hunting. One of the livelihoods that was considered a viable option for those living within the NNT-NBCA was to work for the newly formed Watershed Management Protection Authority (WMPA), which was tasked with patrolling the area for poachers and monitoring fishing, among other things. This, however, was somewhat problematic as WMPA employees were sometimes shot at in the course of trying to control human actions in the NNT-NBCA and many did not “believe that the area’s wildlife is severely degraded” (McDowell et al. 2009: 38; 2010: 28).

Nonetheless, the PoE consistently rated the GoL’s performance in conservation matters very highly and frequently blamed shortcomings on the international institutions that were either not pressing hard enough for conservation, delaying funding, or putting more focus on construction (McDowell et al. 2010). The estimation of the GoL’s performance and the particular accounting for its shortcomings was likely a tactic of the PoE to continue the conservation projects despite setbacks. The high estimation of the GoL emphasis on conservation ultimately mixed with the precarious nature of its ability to realize its conservation goals in a way that legitimized Bank

involvement before and after loan approval in 2005. In fact, the high degree of potential risks identified by the PoE had an impact on the project justifications in the loan approval document, the Project Appraisal Document (PAD) (WB 2005). Chief among these risks were the GoL's poor record with hydropower projects and concern that the revenue generated by NT2 might not be used on future public programs (WB 2005).

The PAD begins in much the same way as the Pak Mun Dam's Staff Appraisal Report (WB 1991), with the construction of a borrower facing exactly the types of challenges the Bank is able to help it meet. However, whereas EGAT needed only a small boost toward energy-sector diversification, Laos required much more involvement from the World Bank due to its low stage of development and poor record with similar projects. Nonetheless, the World Bank saw hope for Laos in the abundance of underutilized natural resources.

According to the PAD, Laos's economy went through strong growth performance between 1991 and 2003, due to its steadily increasing market orientation. In the same time period, the GoL was reported to have made great strides in reducing poverty rates from 46 to 33 percent (WB 2005: 3). Despite such progress, the World Bank found severe poverty in many districts and especially among ethnic minority communities. In addition to poor policy structures for poverty reduction, Laos also suffered from "limited capacity in the central and provincial governments, a fledgling private sector, lack of infrastructure, and the absence of a strong civil society" (WB 2005: 3). In 2003, the GoL began its National Growth and Poverty Eradication Strategy, a program designed to bring rapid growth through sustainable development. Although the World Bank supported the overall strategy "through a program of analytical and advisory activities, and ongoing and new operations," it noted that meeting the GoL's goals would require an annual Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth rate of 7 percent (WB 2005: 3). Such a sustained growth rate was seen as possible, but only with certain important caveats. The PAD states:

[W]ith its significant natural resources and central position in the rapidly growing Greater Mekong Subregion...Lao PDR is well placed to achieve quality growth and reduce poverty, provided that the Government manages to increase the contribution of natural resources (especially sustainable hydropower and mining) to development; fosters a more enabling environment to promote private sector investment; and undertakes reforms to improve the quality of governance, management of public finances, and service delivery. (WB 2005: 3)

The introduction to the PAD points to two key national priorities that the development of hydropower infrastructure is particularly well suited to address. Both involve the connection between environmentalism and development established by the PoE. According to the report, hydropower expansion benefits the GoL by "first, promoting economic and social advancement by providing a reliable, affordable, and sustainable domestic source of electricity; and second, mobilizing foreign exchange and budgetary revenues to finance poverty reduction and environmental and social programs" (WB 2005: 4). Laos's geographic location between Thailand and Vietnam, two countries with reportedly high demands for energy imports, further strengthens

the case for hydropower expansion. The already signed memorandum of understanding between the GoL and EGAT for the latter's purchase of 95 percent of NT2's output, along with two preexisting dams serving the Thai market, served as further evidence for the World Bank that dam development was the best answer to Laos's problems, a line of reasoning that dated back to the justifications of the early Mekong Committee projects.

As reflected in the concerns of the PoE over delays in loan approval, the World Bank was not the only international financial institution capable of planning and funding a new dam in Laos, which meant it had competition from other international financial institutions during the planning of NT2 that were not present during the Pak Mun Dam years. The construction of the need for hydropower expansion was, therefore, not sufficient to justify taking on the risk of such a large loan to such an indebted country given the international attention focused on hydropower projects at the time. The World Bank's eco-governmentality, worked out through confrontation and international opposition, required a further step in terms of project justification. In the PAD, it was not enough that the World Bank was able to fund NT2. It was harmful for project-affected people if it did not. The report established a concern that the problems of previous dam projects would be repeated if the World Bank was not able to enforce its own technical and managerial expertise. For example, although World Bank planning so far had helped create "transparent financial management," "further progress will be essential if NT2 revenues are to be applied transparently and efficiently to the financing of priority expenditure programs for poverty reduction and environmental conservation/management" (WB 2005: 6). Indeed, despite the possibility of funding from other institutions, "the Bank is one of the few institutions with the broad range of skills needed to assist the GoL in the sustainable development of a large, private sector-financed hydropower project with multiple social and environmental impacts" (WB 2005: 6).

The PAD makes repeated reference to the GoL's "relatively weak country capacity and...weak track record on governance" (WB 2005: 7). Due to previous environmental and social failures in Laos, the "risks of the project [are] considered to be Modest to Substantial" (WB 2005: 36). In keeping with the technical rendering of political economic problems in development discourse (Mitchell 2002; Li 2007), the solution offered by the World Bank was a complex arrangement of management and evaluation strategies designed to ensure that NT2 revenues were used to fund poverty reduction and conservation programs, "ensuring early detection of problems and the timely implementation of appropriate compensating measures" (WB 2005: 36).

In exchange for loan approval, the GoL agreed to create an "effective, transparent and accountable" system for the expenditure of all revenue related to NT2 (WB 2005: 16). To do this, the World Bank and the GoL developed the Public Expenditure Management Strengthening Program (PEMSP), which covered: "fiscal planning and budget preparation, treasury, accounting and reporting, the development of information systems and the legislative framework for public expenditure management" (WB 2005: 17). The PAD mentions a series of smaller scheduled loans from the Bank from 2005 to 2007 for the implementation of the PEMSP. In addition to these loans, the GoL agreed to hire two long-term consultants of the World Bank's choosing. Once operational, the PEMSP would also integrate assistance from present

and future World Bank and Asian Development Bank (ADB) projects in Laos. The PAD mentions health, education and roads projects that have already been approved by the Bank and that include financial management systems, “particularly systems designed to channel resources close to the field level, as well as the formulation of sector level expenditure policies” (WB 2005: 17). After project completion, the GoL would work with World Bank consultants to adjust the use of NT2 revenues toward some projects and away from others on an as-needed basis. The PEMSP was enacted by the GoL in November 2005, and in 2008 the World Bank reported that its Financial Management Capacity Building Project had worked with the GoL to “improve budget preparation, execution, reporting, and auditing, all of which are essential for better management of funds generated from Nam Theun 2” (WB 2008: 1).

The PAD’s description of the PEMSP calls for some translation. According to the World Bank, it is a program created to render the GoL’s spending practices legible to the World Bank’s monitoring agencies, the justification for which is the historical likelihood that NT2 revenues will not be used for environmental and social development as planned (i.e., the high risk involved in conducting such a large project in Laos). At its inception, however, the program was linked directly to myriad other World Bank-funded projects. The GoL was required to hire World Bank-approved consultants for an undetermined, yet lengthy, amount of time, maintaining the power relationship between development experts and those being developed. These expert consultants would then assist the GoL in creating new development projects requiring World Bank funding.

The absence of the institutional structures necessary for successful project implementation is as central a justification for World Bank involvement in NT2 as the *presence* of such structures was in the case of Pak Mun Dam. Yet, the absence of these structures did not go unaddressed by the World Bank. This is partly due to the differences between the prospect of building a dam in economically stable Thailand in the early 1990s and economically fragile Laos in the 2000s. The emphasis on environmental programs with NT2 is a particular product of the global opposition to hydropower projects that came to a head in the late 1990s with the World Commission on Dams. The common line, that NT2 symbolizes the Bank’s reentry into hydropower, is questionable, however, because the Bank was conducting feasibility studies and social and environmental reports at the same time that it was assessing the outcomes of Pak Mun Dam. This chronology suggests that there was little or no break in its role as a knowledge producer in the region. The creation of the PEMSP, in fact, allowed for the establishment of the specific type of Bank/borrower relationship used in the seasoned borrower construction. By hiring World Bank consultants into long-term positions at a GoL agency with the task of identifying new problems and creating technical solutions, the World Bank was bringing the GoL into its own realm of knowledge production and governmentality.

Although NT2 remains a high-risk project, mechanisms like the PEMSP were included in order to facilitate involvement in future low-risk projects. Since a major justification for World Bank involvement in NT2 is the need to govern GoL practices to ensure that the project’s revenue is directed toward public programs, and since the World Bank has already connected future public programs to its own lending, it can be said that the justifications for the current project are the projects yet to come. That is,

NT2 will not only bring betterment through direct project-related programs (livelihood, conservation, etc.), it paves the way for other projects that bring the World Bank, the GoL, and the people of Laos into ever closer contact with one another. The PEMSP establishes a power relationship between all three that is totally irrelevant to the realization of NT2's stated goals. Whether development experts are to be believed as somewhat earnest in their stated agendas (Ferguson 1994; Mitchell 2002; Goldman 2005; Li 2007) or not (Rich 1994; McCully 2001), programs such as the PEMSP maintain the World Bank and the borrower as the legitimate authorities for identifying problems and creating solutions, even in the face of project failure or public opposition.

Ultimately, the World Bank was unable to construct the GoL as a seasoned borrower. The high international profile of the project and the addition of the PoE, the major arm of the 'eco' aspect of the World Bank's eco-governmentality, created a scenario in which it was not possible for the World Bank to justify NT2 based on the construction of already proven successes of the GoL with similar projects. Rather, the project's justificatory logic springs from the absence of a seasoned borrower and the need to create one to ensure betterment through monitoring of livelihood programs, and the establishment of government agencies designed to continually organize revenue expenditure around future World Bank projects. For both NT2 and the Pak Mun Dam, the borrower must either already have the sort of relationship with the Bank that will guarantee the connection of the current project to future projects, or there must be the possibility that such a relationship can be developed.

Conclusions

The construction of the seasoned borrower means more for the borrower than the requirement that it agree to several projects or to none at all. As with EGAT, it also means acceptance into the development discourse as a legitimate producer of knowledge at an international level. Countless accolades from both the World Bank and the PoE in the planning and implementation phases of NT2 construct an image of the GoL as eager to provide livelihood improvements to the people it governs but lacking the technical expertise and funding to do so. One report late in the implementation phases states, "While capacity has been stretched, the Government has in general done an admirable job in evolving institutions and helping people develop the skills to meet the new challenges of NT2" (WB 2010: 18). The PoE and the World Bank use such language in key moments throughout the process. For the former, the GoL becomes a more and more capable and willing borrower as delays in loan approval threaten the success of conservation projects. For the latter, the GoL's poor history of hydropower development is mentioned in the Project Appraisal Document but disappears after the establishment of the Public Expenditure Management Strengthening Program (WB 2005; 2006a; 2006b; 2008; 2010).

Although, at the time of my research, not as much information was available about the impacts of NT2 compared with what was available for Pak Mun Dam, the PoE reports prior to commercial operation indicated that the inclusion of conservation experts in the planning process had mainly resulted in the failure of a set of public programs that were different than the programs that might have been implemented if not for the conservation experts' input (McDowell et al. 2009; 2010). For example,

failures in the newly created programs connecting livelihood to conservation were attributed to this input. Much like the Pak Mun Dam, however, NT2 seems to have been a success in terms of maintaining the Bank's governing power, although bilateral projects like the Xayaburi Dam still represent a serious challenge for the Bank. The opposition raised by INGOs that pointed to the Bank's history of ecologically devastating hydropower projects was incorporated into NT2's planning process but was revised so that the general opposition to dams was presented as a process of working out the best possible policies and state apparatus for connecting conservation and development. Yet, this was done in such a way that it allowed for a host of committees and departments to be put into place to create new projects as solutions when livelihood and conservation projects encountered problems.

Li (2007: 269) clarifies her analysis of World Bank governmentality by saying that illustrating the limitations of its programs is "not suggesting that there was a hidden agenda for which the program's rationale was merely a mask." I would like to echo this sentiment in regard to this research. I do not find, for example, that the PoE hired for NT2 entered the project with the intention of strengthening the Bank's power in Laos or burdening an already poor population with the task of conservation at the expense of livelihood resources. Nor do I contend that Bank experts portrayed EGAT's resettlement and compensation plans for Pak Mun Dam as commendable so as to avoid further study and increased costs. Rather, the production of knowledge in development discourse inherently excludes the causes of social and environmental problems that cannot be addressed by technical and managerial solutions. Further, built into the construction of the seasoned borrower is a long-term commitment to solving problems through Bank-funded projects, which has negative consequences that limit the possible approaches to addressing even the most devastating project impacts.

Finally, I contend that World Bank governmentality cannot be understood solely at the level of the type of policy and institution it creates. Such an analysis misses what it is that governmentality tries to capture. It may be useful to think of this paper as emphasizing certain null findings. The change in emphasis from fisheries production during and after construction of the Pak Mun Dam to conservation with NT2 should not be understood as a new type of governmentality. Rather, these differences are surface manifestations of a deeper discursive structure—the need for a hydropower project to produce still further projects. The justificatory mechanism of the seasoned borrower, through focusing on the way in which project outcomes lead to more projects through the inclusion of the borrower in the development discourse is a step toward making fuller use of Foucault's original concept.

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