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Whose climate change adaptation 'barriers'? Exploring the coloniality of climate change adaptation policy assemblages in Thailand and beyond

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Climate change adaptation (CCA) 'barriers' are frequently seen as responses to biophysical climate impacts, and thus defined as 'obstacles' to be 'overcome', rendered into categories of the techno-managerial. However, barriers are often undertheorized and are blind to explanations of their origins or the causal mechanisms by which they operate. This is especially complex for barrier critiques in the Global South in particular. Using a 'hybrid' assemblage and postcolonial approach, this paper disentangles existing barrier critiques in Thailand to lay bare underlying power imbalances and tensions. It finds that 'simplistic' vulnerability framings have deep roots in postcolonial histories; 'complacent' mainstreaming/budgeting trajectories have been nurtured by various IOs, and not necessarily much-maligned Thai bureaucrats; and limited technical expertise/willingness to engage are not so illogical, but rather results of diverse external forces. Given this, this paper urges institutional actors and researchers to reflect on epistemology, ontology, and their own positionality when assessing barriers in future.

Keywords: Climate change adaptation, barriers, assemblage, postcolonialism, power, policy

Introduction

Thailand is one of the most vulnerable countries to climate change impacts, including floods, drought, and sea-level rise (Marks, 2011). Despite this, climate change adaptation (CCA) planning is only in very early stages and has yet to see any real on-the-ground traction (Wongsa, 2015). Over the last few years, however, interest in the topic and formal planning around it has increased, with the launch of the National Adaptation Plan (NAP) in 2018 and the beginnings of the Agriculture Strategic Plan on Climate Change (2017–2021) taking place. Many of these plans look to first assess the baseline vulnerability and adaptation capacities of key sectors of the Thai economy to determine ways forward. Thus, much of the conversation around CCA to date has revolved around 'barriers' to adaptation, including institutional shortcomings, such as limited information, knowledge, and expertise (Kraisoraphong, 2010); lack of relevance and impetus; and 'rigidity traps' or 'institutional gaps' (Eucker, 2014; Lebel et al., 2009, 2011). In general, these sorts of barriers are taken-for-granted and rendered simply as 'obstacles' to be 'overcome' (Moser & Ekstrom, 2010), even though they may be 'undertheorized' and 'used [only] phenomenologically to list existing hindrances to public adaptation policy, leaving aside the explanation of their origins or the causal mechanisms by which they operate' (Dupuis & Knoepfel, 2013: 31). Indeed, Biesbroek

et al. (2013: 14) voice the concern that 'most studies on the barriers to the governance of adaptation are still implicit in their ontological and epistemological assumptions', which 'greatly hampers the transparency and integrity of research as these (implicit) assumptions determine what is analysed and how this is interpreted'.

In the face of these critiques, it is useful to turn to more traditional political economy analyses. They show that longstanding power-laden dimensions, especially unsustainable land use laws, unfettered urban expansion, and corruption (Marks, 2015; Marks & Lebel, 2015; Manuta *et al.*, 2006), among others, make it politically unviable to adapt or unlikely to enable adaptation for those most vulnerable in urban environments (Beringer & Kaewsuk, 2018; Friend *et al.*, 2014). While these studies point to systemic barriers, they tend to focus their critical lens on national and sub-national governmental entities, bureaucrats, and private actors. However, this paper argues there are other layered influences, across time and space, that have yet to be explored. It also makes the case that, as Biesbroek *et al.* (2013) argue, many of these critiques do not reflect deeply on their assumptions which may be steeped in normative judgements (Eriksen *et al.*, 2015; Shackleton *et al.*, 2015).

Following Nightingale's (2016) call to use an 'epistemologically plural' research design to help reveal new patterns in CCA analysis, this paper uses a combination of two theoretical strains of analysis—assemblage and postcolonialism—to disentangle other forms of power imbalances within the CCA policy assemblage, especially between the actors assessing and highlighting supposed barriers and their possible complicity in forming them. We find that some seemingly straightforward barriers have deeper ties to Thailand's postcolonial condition than previous literature has found. For example, policymakers' 'simplistic' framings of rural livelihoods and vulnerabilities are not just from a lack of imagination or understanding, but are also deeply rooted in postcolonial histories; 'complacent' mainstreaming and budgeting foci are not just rigid bureaucratic ideas, but the active domain of external international organizations (IOs); limited technical expertise and bureaucrats' limited willingness to engage with CCA policy are not just quirky or illogical traits, but the result of diverse external forces. We believe this result is instructive for the CCA barrier literature writ large: researchers and organizations involved in CCA policymaking must reflect on the underlying mechanisms and reasons for barriers to CCA, their own complicity in making them, and how to possibly overcome them in the end.

Beyond 'techno-managerial' CCA 'barriers'

In a much-cited paper by Moser and Ekstrom (2010), CCA barriers are defined as 'obstacles that can be overcome with concerted effort, creative management, change of thinking, prioritization, and related shifts in resources, land uses, institutions, etc'. This means that they are often taken-for-granted and seen as straightforward objects that can be easily diagnosed and overcome. Indeed, Moser and Ekstrom (2010) themselves admit that their definition is descriptive rather than normative. But as Shackleton *et al.* (2015: 323) note, 'barriers to adaptation are almost always context-specific and dependent on normative judgments'. At the same time, these barriers are often grouped in two types of categories, with 'some…being relatively obvious (e.g. financial, technical), while others more hidden and often forgotten (e.g. social cultural, political-economic)'. The 'obvious' barriers are largely descriptive and techno-managerial, including institutional deficiencies (e.g. fragmentation, overlaps, gaps); lack of resources; 'practical' or 'motivational' issues (e.g. lack of awareness and communication; motivation and

willingness to act; conflicting timescales); as well as cognitive factors (e.g. substantive, strategic uncertainty) (see Biesbroek *et al.*, 2011 for a comprehensive review). However, these cause-and-effect framings miss some of the complex socio-political issues underpinning all climate change effects (e.g. Forsyth, 2014; Nightingale, 2015, 2017; Taylor, 2013). This is because CCA policies are bounded by and mainstreamed into existing governing institutions and frameworks (e.g. Naess *et al.*, 2015); constituted through prevailing structures of power, potentially perpetuating or exacerbating standing pathways of vulnerability (Eriksen *et al.*, 2011; Manuel-Navarrete, 2013; O'Brien *et al.*, 2007); and increasing tensions along lines of authority, knowledge, and subjectivity (Eriksen *et al.*, 2015; Tanner & Allouche, 2011).

The CCA barrier literature that focuses on Thailand, likewise, leans heavily on old techno-managerial tropes, including a lack of knowledge and uncertainty (Chuangchote, 2007); limited cross-agency or multi-agency coordination (Kraisoraphong, 2010; Marks, 2011), and larger 'institutional gaps', which 'tend to reinforce existing [sectoral] norms for planning and implementation, as well as being barriers to meaningful participation of staff in policy networks from which learning about related problems and solutions of others could take place' (Lebel *et al.*, 2011: 46). Further, many studies find bureaucratic rigidity and limited willingness to engage as principal barriers for a variety of reasons. For one, climate change policy often comes under the purview of environmental issues and the Ministry of Natural Resources and the Environment (MONRE), which has limited leverage within the Thai policy landscape (Lebel *et al.*, 2010). In addition, Thailand's institutional structure and process is set up to encourage short-term gains specifically through national strategic plans and policies within the Government Administration Plan (Kraisoraphong, 2010). Indeed, even the centrepiece of Thailand's CCA policymaking, the Master Plan, was only recently ratified, with three different versions seen as conflicting with existing politics of bureaucracy (Wongsa, 2015). While considered a small success, there is consensus that the Master Plan is overly ambiguous and lacking clarity, making it a non-priority to line agencies (Eucker, 2014; Lebel *et al.*, 2009; Marks, 2011). Existing activities exemplify the 'bottom-up buffet' or 'you do what you see fit' style, with 'funding as the driving force behind most decisions', ultimately leading to the 'dysfunctional, disintegrated, and ad-hoc' state of Thailand's climate governance (Wongsa, 2015: 257). This literature finds that these barriers are not unique to climate change policy, but rather reflect Thailand's 'low level of institutional capacity' (Marks, 2011: 246).

While the techno-managerial literature dominates, there are some illuminating political economy inputs which focus on water (Blake, 2012; Molle, 2005) and urban flooding (see Lebel *et al.*, 2011; Manuta *et al.*, 2006; Marks, 2015; Marks & Lebel, 2015). They find that the water sector, an important stakeholder in climate change policy, is highly politicized and fragmented, where '[t]he sheer number of agencies, particularly in the water sector, and their reluctance to work along different scales and levels, weakens collective action' (Marks & Lebel, 2015: 9). In addition, many government actors suffer from normative barriers, whereby they prioritize projects based on dominant narratives of 'regional development' (Molle, 2005) and 'irrigationalism' (Blake, 2012) over longer-term flood risks. As Marks (2015: 634) finds, then, pathways of vulnerability to flooding have been engineered for decades, including through 'the rise of local politicians-cum-businessmen' which has led to the fire sale of land for industrial and housing projects and the expansion of road-centric development. This pattern was especially egregious in the Bangkok Metropolitan Region, but has also played a part in the uneven, haphazard development of smaller cities such as Buriram (Marks & Lebel, 2015) and Khon Kaen (Beringer & Kaewsuk, 2018), among others (Friend *et al.*, 2014).

While instructive, these case studies largely focus on the weaknesses and limitations of the government or on the capacities of bureaucrats working within them. This paper seeks to look above and beyond national-level actors to holistically disentangle existing CCA barriers. One such underlying mechanism, the role of Western actors in framing or perpetuating barriers, is an important part of the overall CCA barrier discussion, especially in order to interrogate ontological or epistemological power dynamics across space and time.

Given this, this paper seeks to answer the following questions:

- How do historical inequalities of power and authority shape contemporary adaptation policies, their legitimacy, and how legitimacy is achieved?
- Whose perspective and knowledge is considered, and counts, in decision-making?
- How do international development discourses, agendas, and institutions drive adaptation processes?

Assembling the coloniality of CCA barriers

'Assemblage', which although traditionally thought of as both a 'constellation' or 'amorphous collection of juxtaposed pieces that can be joined together in an infinite number of ways' (Deleuze & Guattari, 1986), will be used more as an analytical approach in this paper (Sassen, 2017). Assemblage affords us the ability to pick and choose sites of analysis, whose 'aim is not a totalization, a definitive tracing of limits, or a final theory of everything…[but] rather an expansion of possibilities, an invention of new methods and new perspectives, an active "entertainment" of things, feelings, ideas, and propositions that were previously unavailable to us' (Shaviro, 2009: 148–9). It thus encourages looking beyond one simplistic explanation behind complex issues, throwing open traditional lines of inquiry to see the 'many angles' (Li, 2007), especially when it comes to addressing the influences of globalization (Ong & Collier, 2005), the environment (Braun, 2006), and colonialism (Gibbs, 2013; Ranganathan, 2015), among others. A 'policy assemblage', in particular, is a 'gathering of heterogeneous elements consistently drawn together as an identifiable terrain of action and debate' (Li, 2007: 266). As Prince (2016) argues, then, policy is a dynamic outcome of contested and ever-changing input from a variety of actors, structures, and actions, across different spaces and scales.

At the same time, assemblage perspectives can fall into the trap of being too 'ambiguous' or 'all-encompassing' (Anderson *et al.*, 2012), or more damning still, run the risk of becoming 'de-political' (Brenner *et al.* 2011). Thus, this paper will use the 'postcolonial' as a focusing point in order to investigate related nodes of the policy assemblage. While a part of Thai national consciousness revolves around 'never being colonized' (Winichakul, 2011), the country can effectively be thought of as a 'crypto-colony' (Herzfeld, 2002), meaning although never formally colonized, it has all the hallmarks of a formerly colonized state, including patterns of national boundary demarcation, racial theory, citizenship, and gender relations (Reynolds, 1999). Jackson (2007) argues that Thailand functions as a 'semicolonial' state in which there are 'an interrelated system of powers…[with] one dimension at the international level and defines Siam's subordinate relations to the Western imperial powers…most visible in the domains of international economics and law' (Jackson 2007: 53); at the same time a 'second dimension…is at the local level and is defined by the intensification of state power over the local population' (Jackson, 2007: 54). Reflecting on this, there is no

one reading of postcolonial theory that will be specific to Thailand, but it allows us to at the very least have an understanding of coloniality, or 'long-standing patterns of power that emerged as a result of colonialism, but that define culture, labour, intersubjective relations, and knowledge production well beyond the strict limits of colonial administrations' (Maldonado-Torres, 2007: 243).

Bignall and Patton (2010: 10) would argue that postcolonial and post-structural theories, such as assemblage, may form a meaningful marriage of analysis based on 'a common desire to invest and explore "worlds less sure" but permanently open to renewal and transformation …both seek[ing] to contact an "outside" of established structures'. This marriage can serve a two-fold purpose. For one, it affords us the ability to look beyond traditional binaries in development and postcolonial critique (e.g. North/South, East/West, good/bad) to 'reformat' them (Raghuram *et al.*, 2014). Underpinning this is an emphasis on temporality and the process of becoming/unbecoming. Postcolonial temporalities are predicated on 'the tension between unfinished pasts and unstable presents' (Raghuram *et al.*, 2014); and in an assemblage framework the assemblage may be under constant contestation and change, whereby it may 'have been assembled otherwise' and maybe even change into something completely different in the future (Anderson *et al.*, 2012). Assemblage, then, much like Kontopoulos' (1993) 'heterarchies', moves us beyond 'closed hierarchies' to overcome the 'reductionist/autonomist dilemma' and the 'monism/dualism binary opposition', allowing us reflect on 'an emergentist materialism that implies multiple, entangled processes at different structural levels within a single historical material reality' (Grosfoguel, 2011).

Importantly, and relatedly, this leads us to the other purpose of this theoretical 'marriage': self-reflexivity, an essential part of postcolonial theorizing, where '[a]cknowledging one's contamination…[to] temper and contextualize one's claims, reduce the risk of personal arrogance or geoinstitutional imperialism' (Kapoor, 2004: 55), explicitly grappling with how to 'identify how dominant concept metaphors…when thought through radically different regional contexts, always work to pull us into forms of implicit and silent comparison' (Jazeel, 2014). Assemblage, too, lobbies for researchers to view themselves as situated within, and to some degree influential of, the resulting assemblage, recognizing that 'every action we take has the potential to either contribute to the reproduction of the conditions of the present or to aid us in the creation of new ways of coexisting' (Russell *et al.*, 2011: 579).

Assemblage as tool

Baker and McGuirk (2016) argue that an 'ethnographic sensibility' is essential when using assemblage. This requires analysing and disentangling socio-spatial/material aspects above and beyond traditional practices of immersion, in which the researcher must include and 'treat documentary materials, such as reports and downloadable PowerPoint presentation slides, as ethnographic artefacts that provide windows into the creation, mobilization, and application of policy knowledge' (Baker & McGuirk, 2016: 10). Given this, the authors assessed major CCA policy documents, including the Climate Change Master Plan (2015–2050), Agriculture Strategic Plan on Climate Change (2017–2021), Thailand's Communications to the UNFCCC, Thailand's Nationally Determined Contributions, the Climate Public Expenditure and Institutional Review Report, Thailand Technology Needs Assessments Report for Climate Change Adaptation, the 11th and 12th National Economic and Social Development Plans, and the inception report related to the forthcoming National Adaptation Plan (NAP).

The first author also spent ten months of intensive fieldwork in February–November 2015. This stay included 28 semi-structured interviews with high-level officials in relevant national, provincial, and district-level ministries and line agencies, such as the Office of Environmental Planning and Coordination (ONEP), which leads efforts on climate change initiatives in Thailand, as well as the Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives (MOAC), Land Development Department (LDD), Community Development Department (CDD), Office of Agricultural Economics (OAE), Royal Irrigation Department (RID), Department of Agricultural Extension, and Department of Disaster Prevention and Mitigation, as well as actors that worked directly with these ministries and agencies on research and projects, such as professors and researchers at Chulalongkorn University, Southeast Asia Regional Centre for START (SEA-START), and Thailand Development Research Institute; professionals at non-profit organizations such as Raks Thai Foundation, International Union for Conservation of Nature, and Climate Justice Foundation; as well as bilateral and international development agencies, such as UN Development Programme (UNDP), Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit GmbH (GIZ), and US Agency for International Development (USAID).

Additionally, the first author attended several high-level events on CCA in Thailand in order to contextualize interviews and analyse practices and interactions of different actors. One event in particular, the Climate Appraisal Framework Workshop, allowed the first author to understand the role and input of UNDP on practices within the CCA arena. With notable government ministries and line agencies in attendance, from the Ministry of Public Health to the Bureau of the Budget (BOB), the first author was also able to get a sense of their positioning on the topic as well as their relationships within this specific constellation of actors.

How postcolonial nodes affect CCA assemblages in Thailand

The following discussion will take a 'hybrid' approach (Nightingale, 2016), in which a first 'classical' reading of CCA barriers will be critically reviewed and juxtaposed against an 'assemblage' one. This structure is meant to give full weight and value to assemblage as a tool, in which it is used to see the fuzzy bits and pieces that explain a particular phenomenon, to de-centre it from traditional points of foci and to give credence to the 'penumbra' of its edges (Sassen, 2017). From this literal de-centring, we zoom in specifically on a postcolonial node of the assemblage reading, which serves as a site in which (i) to levy critique of powerful actors within the assemblage that are often left out of CCA barrier discussions; and (ii) to disentangle first-order 'classical' interpretations by re-'mapping' them with assemblage as tool (Deleuze & Guattari, 1986: 12).

There are three specific nodes of CCA barrier assemblages that the discussion will touch upon: 1) limited and simplistic visions of rural livelihoods; 2) emphasis on 'complacent' policy directions, including 'mainstreaming' and budgeting; and 3) limited technical expertise and bureaucratic rigidity. These three 'angles' are illustrative of the ontological and epistemological trajectories of CCA policymaking in Thailand today, and unveil the ways in which CCA barriers are (i) 'rendered technical' or simplified based on 'science', requiring a straightforward intervention; (ii) 'authorized knowledge' or imbued with 'truth', which confirms enabling assumptions, while containing critiques; and (iii) 'managed for their failures and contradictions', which finds failure as the outcome of 'rectifiable deficiencies', so they seem 'superficial rather than fundamental' (Li, 2007).

'Classical' View 1: Policymakers have a simplistic view of farmers

The agricultural sector is listed as one of six priority sectors in Thailand's Master Plan and NAP; and the 'vulnerability' of rural farmers is a common ontological starting point for CCA policymaking. This reading makes the case that current understandings and framings of farmers' vulnerability, however, are often limited and simply see the solution to be something as 'rendered technical' (Li, 2007) through access to climate science, physical inputs (e.g. ponds), and/or a change of behaviour to need and consume less. The 'Sufficiency Economy Policy' (SEP), a building block for many rural development programmes, including CCA policy, is one of the larger reasons why these notions of CCA barriers persist today.

SEP gained traction in the late 1990s after the economic crash, which was seen as a result of globalization gone awry and abandonment of the Thai agrarian village-based past (Dayley, 2007). At that time, King Bhumibol Adulyadej suggested, 'Thais should make do with less, consider de-linking from the export economy and be satisfied with enough to get by' (Bhumibol, 1998, as cited in Hewison, 2016). Almost immediately, SEP gained a foothold in Thailand's development policy, with government agencies adopting programmes related to it, the 2007 constitution mentioning it, and the 2009 economic stimulus policies referring to it (Unger, 2009). This trend continued in various CCA-related policy documents, including the National Communications, Master Plan, and NAP. SEP plays a prominent role in Thailand's NDC:

> Thailand's adaptation efforts aim to enhance climate resilience through the guidance of [SEP], bestowed by His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej. [SEP] stresses the middle path as an overriding principle for appropriate conduct by Thai people at all levels, from family to community to country. 'Sufficiency' means moderation, reasonableness, and the need of self-immunity for sufficient protection from impact arising from internal and external changes. To achieve this, the application of knowledge with due consideration and prudence is essential (ONEP, 2015: 111).

The connection to SEP and its inclusion in various policy documents ramped up after the death of the King in 2016. While the King was on his deathbed in 2016, the interim Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha's statement to the 71st Session of the United Nations General Assembly On the Sustainable Development Goals mentioned 'His Majesty the King's [SEP] as an alternative development model, in which people-centred approach, moderation, reasonableness, inclusiveness and resilience are key principles' (Chan-o-cha, 2016). This served to reinforce the King's relevance to the international stage as well as the Prime Minister's closeness to the royal family. At the Conference of Parties (COP22) in Marrakesh, Morocco in the same year, Thailand's pavilion was dedicated entirely to the King, further reinforcing his image and narrative in climate change arenas.

SEP has also translated within different ministries, their understandings of farmers' ability and intentions. Frequently, strategies to overcome rural farmers' barriers to CCA come down to relatively low-level inputs of technology or capacity building. For instance, an MOAC official adheres to the framing of the 'happy farmer', '[F]rom my opinion, when I think of…a rice field, we [are] just happier as a farmer'—and believes that farmers simply require more climate information, 'The farmer say they [don't] know about climate information. They just forecast by their own…I think we need to use a channel to send a signal to the farmer to adapt themselves' (Interview 17, MOAC, pers. comm., Bangkok, 2015). An LDD bureaucrat also adheres to the same understanding, 'The [farmer's family] are always happy to receive [a] pond because you can

grow vegetables during the dry season' (Interview 18, LDD, pers. comm., Bangkok, 2015).

The story of the pond is particularly illustrative. In 2000, various departments of the MOAC launched an integrated farming project based around ponds as part of the King's 'new theory' of self-sufficiency. The ponds comprised 30 per cent of the total area of a 2.5-hectare plot, where families were able to use it as a water source to grow vegetables or fruits and raise fish or ducks (LDD, 2005). Since 2005, when the LDD took over a new iteration of the initiative, at least 450 000 households received ponds. In 2005–2007 alone, the programme was accorded a budget of 2.16 million THB (USD 65 million) (Penning de Vries & Ruaysoongnern, 2010). As of 2015, LDD told the first author that the only foreseeable future CCA project would be to 'build more ponds'. While it could be argued to some degree that this answer was due to a lack of imagination or bureaucratic rigidity (more on that in a later section), the King's support ultimately allowed ponds to take a prominent place in all drought-related initiatives. This begs the question: To what degree do existing projects with clear links to SEP get to persist under a climate change umbrella? Or rather, do these projects gain more recognition and relevance with each new buzzword that is applied to them in order to continue the legacy and myth of the King as the 'Father of Water Resources Management' (Blake, 2015)?

SEP also plays a normative role within strategic governments agencies, including the CDD: 'we try to push and promote the learning process to communities towards self-sufficiency, we don't want to do everything for them but encourage their participation in the development process. When we work we don't force people to do, we encourage the learning process and let them choose and decide by themselves' (Interview 15, CDD, pers. comm., Udon Thani, 2015). The belief in agency and local wisdom are admirable, and certainly in line with popular CCA wisdom of today. However, relying on 'self-sufficiency' can end up in an ahistorical trap, in which larger forces—particularly increasing fertilizer and pesticide use to maintain productivity means degraded soil, reliance on volatile cash crop markets propped up by government subsidies, and costs of household goods and rising consumption patterns—make it difficult to eke out a sustainable livelihood and adapt accordingly (Rigg & Oven, 2015). It also simplifies the realities of farmers' lives, discounting their aims of utilizing and reworking the purpose of government-subsidized projects, for example (Walker, 2012). Indeed, multiple interviews with farmers in a rural village of Udon Thani showed that many of the LDD ponds meant for 'self-sufficiency' purposes were often used to increase irrigation for dry season cash crops rather than household stores. These framings must be questioned, as Thailand has a long history of simplifying rural livelihoods and North/Northeastern peoples; to police and make difficult their lives, including through restrictive and counterproductive forest law (Hirsch 2009; Vandergeest 2003), blaming them for environmental degradation (Forsyth & Walker, 2008), and limiting their political power (McCargo, 2017), among others.

Assemblage View 1: Framings of rural livelihoods have deep roots in interactions with the West
The first reading of this 'simplistic' vision of rural livelihoods would suggest that national-level policy actors, especially ministry and line agency bureaucrats, have limited imagination and understandings of vulnerability and possible ways to treat it. It would also acknowledge that these actors would be beholden to interests of the Royal Family for legal, prestige or social capital reasons. This assemblage reading, while giving deference to the first one, argues that there are deeper temporal nodes in the CCA

barrier assemblage to be investigated, especially regarding relations with the West: the Royal Family and urban elite may be simply repeating or going along with overly simplistic visions of rural livelihoods rooted in Western notions of 'rude-refined' oppositions (Hall, 1999).

Europeans have a long history of framing 'newly discovered' indigenous peoples as 'simple' or 'innocent' and living in a 'Golden World', and 'Earthly Paradise' (Hall, 1999: 209). Thailand is no exception: starting in the 19th century, European explorers 'discovered' Thai rural life to be fecund and filled with 'lazy natives' (Bowie, 1992). As Victor Savage's (1984) account shows, men such as Captain Cope and the Norwegian naturalist Carl Bock, found Thailand 'as fruitful as any spot of ground in the world in rice, legumen, fruits and roots, cattle, wild and tame' (Cope, 1754: 362); and northern Thais 'naturally lazy, and, with a fertile soil which provides them with all the necessities of life without any appreciable effort on their part, their indolence is encouraged' (Bock, 1884: 316), respectively.

At the same time, the Royal Family and elites also thought of it as 'utopia' due in part, as Bowie, (1992: 799) believes, 'by the encounter with European imperialism, converg[ing] ironically with the effusive fantasies of boundless wealth by the Europeans themselves'. Indeed, royalists readily accepted this image in order to maintain a level of superiority and control over their kingdom and to shelter it from Western imperialist machinations. Not only this, but the monarchy 'saving' the nation from colonization or imperialism became an important part of national narratives (Winichakul, 2011). In order to further this framing, the Thai royal family emphasized the link between royal virtue and agricultural and economic prosperity (Reynolds, 1979). With their help, the rural countryside could develop and become more civilized. Thus, any suggestion that the peasantry was not well-off could have been interpreted as a criticism of the monarchy. At the same time, Bangkok elites also adhered to this one-sided image in order to maintain power and play a paternalistic role over rural affairs. As famous scholar Phya Anuman Rajadhon noted, '[w]hatever life is like, it continues so, with no progress upward and forward, because the country[side] must depend upon the wealth, intelligence and power of the city for maintenance and improvement' (Rajadhon, 1961: 7). However, this 'benevolent, even utopian' will to improve is also marked by coercive, assimilative, or disciplinary modes of domination (Li, 2007). It can be read as an extension and modification, not a departure from, colonial forms of power (Cameron, 2012).

'Classical' View 2: 'Complacent' policy directions of 'mainstreaming' and budgeting
'Mainstreaming' CCA into development policy has become a popular refrain in different countries, but especially in Thailand. It is often seen as a silver bullet: 'Mainstreaming climate change into development plans and addressing adaptation in a broader context by aiming for long-term robustness and sustainability of the development plan, as well as community resilience both now and in the future, would lead to more realistic and justifiable plans for communities, as adaptation planning also addresses current problems and integrates socioeconomic dynamics' (Chinvanno & Kerdsuk, 2013: 15). While this framing has increasingly become the preferred way forward, it has only meant 'authorizing knowledge' (Li, 2007) in order to proceed with development planning with small tweaks, rather than actual on-the-ground policies.

In 2015, five years after Virachai Virameteekul, then Minister of Science and Technology, argued that 'adaptation can be used to meet the development needs of our countries' (Adaptation Forum Secretariat, 2010), ministries and line agencies were still

grappling with what 'mainstreaming' meant. For ONEP, there was still a need to get all relevant actors to come to an accord on what CCA meant so that it could be incorporated 'in parallel with the development process and be mainstreamed' (Interview 4, ONEP, pers. comm., Bangkok, 2015). Since the development process in Thailand is intimately tied to the National Economic and Social Development Plans (NESDPs), a five-year blueprint, 'mainstreaming' meant incorporating text about CCA in these plans. However, to date, CCA only makes nominal appearances, and there is some concern that the linkages are still 'feeble and superficial' (Wongsa, 2015: 254).

While the National Economic and Social Development Board (NESDB) and its development plans are seen as the best site of leverage for CCA policy to become priority, the BOB maintains a powerful role, serving as the driving force behind government strategies and policy (Wongsa, 2015). As one ONEP official put it, while the 'NESDB formulate national plan and strategy which is related, more of a big picture view…targets are more related to budget. Each agency/ministry has budget set by this national plan' (Interview 4, ONEP, pers. comm., Bangkok, 2015). Thus, as of now, 'mainstreaming' in the Thai context mostly means establishing a dedicated climate change budget code. In fact, 'mainstreaming' in Thailand is relatively 'complacent' (Salamanca & Nguyen, 2016), with continued emphasis on the need for 'allocating budget' as an essential ingredient to get CCA policy to take off. Much stock, then, is placed on cost-benefit analysis of climate impacts and adaptation: 'we try to allocate the budget…by using the climate analysis in the project proposal. This is the main thing we try to do' (Interview 6, OAE official, pers. comm., Bangkok, 2015). This has led to a paradoxical outcome, in which adaptation, 'for the policymaker, is [about] how to keep development targets with climate change…for the local level, it's how to survive with climate change' (Interview 22, Professor, Chulalongkorn University, 2015).

Assemblage View 2: Who made 'mainstreaming' and budgeting the focal point of CCA activities?
While the first reading may lay the onus of 'transformative' work onto government officials and bureaucrats, this second reading asks: Why is mainstreaming such an important part of CCA policymaking in Thailand? *Who* 'authorized' this effort in the first place (Li, 2007)? As one actor put it, 'If you look at the Master Plan there is a lot of talk about budget codes, which was put into action by UNDP. A lot of policies are influenced by [IOs]' (Interview 28, USAID, Bangkok, 2015). UNDP finds a mainstreaming approach familiar: 'It's like sustainable development, but new impetus especially because it should be integrated into the development process' (Interview 27, UNDP official, Bangkok, 2015).

UNDP has also played a central role in coordinating workshops and trainings to reinforce this framing. During the Climate Appraisal Workshop hosted by UNDP in Bangkok in 2015, the tensions and pushback of bureaucrats was laid bare. First off, Thai bureaucrats demonstrated scepticism about this 'new' framing of cost-benefit analysis and subsequent budgeting:

> I really want to ask the difference between normal project management and the project management for climate change. I personally do not see the difference. We normally deal with projects from energy ministry, agriculture ministry. For us, this is a normal budgeting project. I understand that the core of climate change is to get all agencies to think of cobenefits from climate change when implementing a project. But if the core concept is impossible to establish in each sector, then we will only discuss the budgeting and this will turn out to be like regular project management (Workshop Participant 10, pers. comm., Bangkok, 2015)

Second, some understood that this mainstreaming and budgeting approach means limited outcomes: 'I feel like each ministry only thinks about their own functions and have forgotten about the cross-agency budget. I wish that each sector was able to connect and give a hand to one another as a chain to see the tangible benefit. At the moment, it is more like working separately and too broad' (Workshop Participant, Ministry of Energy, pers. comm., Bangkok, 2015). This means that although Thai policymakers actively understood limitations of CCA mainstreaming through an overarching budget code, their concerns did not necessarily translate into policy outcomes. Indeed, the preferred UNDP way forward has seen more success than any other CCA policies to date.

The emphasis on mainstreaming and budgeting is not a new phenomenon, although certainly UNDP amplifies CCA's links to both. Bureaucracy, and its attendant apparatuses such as budgets and plans, has long been a part of modern Thai history. However, despite being thought of as uniquely Thai in many respects, bureaucratic structures in Thailand are also closely linked to Western involvement and thinking. For example, the documents which create the framework for bureaucratic behaviour, the NESDPs, have roots in Western institutions. After World War II, the United States in particular sought to deepen linkages with Thailand in order to stave off incoming 'communist threats'. As part of this plan, the World Bank conducted an official mission, with the blessing of recently installed Prime Minister Sarit Thanarat, in which they presented research that would become the underpinnings of the very first NESDP. In fact, the World Bank not only laid the groundwork for national development planning, but 'was [also] instrumental in establishing a new bureaucratic structure for promoting development, including a planning board (the Board of Investment), [BOB], investment promotion machinery and a restructured central bank' (Blake, 2012: 114). This is not to say that everything that the World Bank or other institutions (such as USAID) initiated were always heeded without pushback, but rather that they played a very heavy-handed historical role in creating existing hierarchies of government ministries and planning. And while UNDP's CCA work has not created the logics of the current bureaucracy, it does tend to exploit and nurture them.

'Classical' View 3: Limited technical expertise and bureaucratic rigidity limit progress
A recurring theme in literature on Thailand's barriers to CCA is limited technical expertise within ministries or line agencies. Several interviewees raised concern over the inconsistency in which policymakers view or act upon CCA; one renowned climate change expert put it as: 'nobody knows what adaptation is' (Interview 26, SEA-START, pers. comm., Bangkok, 2015). Linked to this, bureaucrats are seen as doing little more than going through the motions. As one Professor stated, while 'each ministry knows they must add a climate change target…it's like an additional, second task, not a priority' (Interview 22, Chulalongkorn University, pers. comm., Bangkok, 2015). There is consensus that this 'institutional rigidity' may prove too difficult to overcome. This follows longstanding critiques of Thai bureaucracy as bottlenecks in policy planning processes. As Lee (1999: 148) finds, bureaucratic actions stem from several key activities, including the pursuit of fun (*sanuk*), evident in 'the tendency to perceive social affairs and ceremonial activities as essential to bureaucratic objectives'. Jackson (2004: 223) is even harsher, stating that 'maintenance of public shows of harmony at its core, valuing conformity to displays of orderliness (*khwan-riap-roi*) above epistemological concerns with truth'.

Part of this 'ceremony' is to appoint point persons to attend CCA meetings, workshops, and conferences held by ONEP and IOs to be engaged with the CCA issue.

Within each of these arenas, it is important to demonstrate that bureaucratic limitations can be 'managed for failures and contradictions' (Li, 2007) through cooperation: After all, 'It is reasonable that each sector has a different development plan because the sectors have various goals. Nevertheless, climate change is not an issue for one specific agency because natural resources belong to our nation' (Workshop Participant 12, pers. comm., Bangkok, 2015).

Meanwhile, in private, bureaucrats note that many CCA projects may be limited by the knowledge of *other* line agencies: 'The [LDD] also has a project to dig wells and ponds. I am not sure if they are aware of climate change or not. Do they consider the climate change factor when doing this kind of project? They are offering a short-term solution. They don't really think about climate change that much. They only know that they lack water so they need to dig wells and ponds to make sure they get sufficient water for use' (Interview 16, RID, Bangkok, 2015). Further still, those most responsible for training and implementing strategic CCA policy nationwide make workarounds, effectively avoiding 'hard decisions' (Riggs, 1966) and preserving non-confrontational relationships with various ministries. As an ONEP official puts it, 'most ministries are already working on CCA; they just do not call it that' (Interview 4, ONEP, Bangkok, 2015), which means that most CCA projects will just change titles rather than long-term aims. CCA, then, becomes a 'technical planning exercise' rather than something transformative (Lebel, 2007; Lebel & Sinh, 2007).

Assemblage View 3: Questioning what constitutes CCA and 'action'
This second reading will question the analysis that bureaucrats are the bottleneck towards holistic and impactful CCA policies. First, the question must be asked: Who determines what constitutes CCA? Certainly, our interviewees felt that certain IOs or experts held the most authority on this issue. Only a handful of policymakers were comfortable or definitive in their understanding or assessment of CCA. As one ONEP official put it, 'sometimes adaptation is very abstract' (Interview 4, ONEP, Bangkok, 2015). At the first instance, this would mean that there might be a dearth of technical expertise because there is no academic background or training on these issues, or even a lack of desire to learn more. However, subsequent trainings that the first author attended were often led and facilitated by IOs, and could, at times, strike a very paternal tone that did not necessarily facilitate a full transfer of knowledge. For example, at the climate appraisal workshop mentioned previously, the entire training was given in English and by an ad-hoc consultant hired by UNDP. Indeed, while IOs in Thailand see themselves as a central source of knowledge, they often work in a bubble—to the consternation of Thai policymakers. In one case, USAID launched its Mekong Adaptation and Resilience to Climate Change Project in Thailand but had very limited interactions with major government institutions, including ONEP, leading to the question: 'How could you come to Thailand to work on adaptation and not work with the agency that works on it?' (Interview 5, ONEP, Bangkok, 2015). When they do not work in a bubble, as is the case with GIZ's staff who conveniently have a desk within the ONEP office, they do so to maintain close ties in order to be the first organization that climate change policymakers turn to. One GIZ staff readily admitted that the national office has had to reposition itself as a hub of knowledge and capacity building in order to remain relevant in Thailand.

At the same time, IOs and Thai government ministries are co-dependent on one another to legitimize their roles on the international stage. In fact, when it comes to international financial institution funding, very rarely do national ministries directly

apply as sole beneficiaries, but rather in partnership with IOs. They often 'provide' technical expertise and access to certain international finance mechanisms by being certified as official 'accredited agencies', as UNDP and GIZ are for the Green Climate Fund (GCF). For example, GIZ proposes in a GCF 'Readiness Proposal' that more than half of the requested budget go to their own staff salaries: 'For the management and technical oversight of the activities, GIZ will provide additional human resources, both international and national. These personnel resources, particularly the two national staff positions, will very closely work with the [National Designated Authorities] to ensure a smooth and effective implementation of activities' (GCF, 2018). In this instance, GIZ is able to drum up economic capital, but more importantly Thailand can make use of GIZ's social and cultural capital to engage in CCA work and subsequently hold up policy outcomes as legitimate (Ober & Sakdapolrak, 2017).

Given the ways in which IOs guide government agencies, we must also ask: Who determines what constitutes 'action'? Indeed, reasons behind inaction (or bureaucratic rigidity) can be logical. In the case of Thai bureaucrats, they are keenly aware that today's buzzword may be on tomorrow's policy scrap heap. When governments change, ministries may fall out of favour, as was the case for climate change policy: '[For] the last government, climate change [was] a strategic issue or in the national strategic plan. But for this government strategy it is now not in the plan' (Interview 5, ONEP, Bangkok, 2015). Since bureaucrats have weathered 19 coups d'etat since 1932, they know whether to 'try not to initiate new projects because they're waiting for new elections' (Interview 28, USAID, Bangkok, 2015), or they mentally compart-mentalize between new mandates and the mission of the ministry itself because 'the job description, the mission of our department, it doesn't change much even when the government changes…maybe they change the name of the policy, but the discussion does not' (Interview 17, Department of Agricultural Extension, pers. comm., Bangkok, 2015). It is clear that while bureaucrats may be unwilling to catch onto or implement CCA policies, they also provide a stabilizing weight to ever-changing political circumstances.

The purpose of this critique is neither to emphatically christen the efforts of IOs as inherently wrong or detrimental, but rather to open up scholars' and organizations' eyes to the fact that seemingly 'complacent' policymaking is not always the fault of national policymakers or bureaucrats. Their jobs are in part influenced or even dictated to a large degree by external forces, with or without their explicit willingness to participate.

Implications for CCA 'barriers' in Thailand and beyond

This paper contends that CCA 'barriers' within the literature in general (Biesbroek *et al.*, 2013; Dupuis & Knoepfel, 2013), and in Thailand in particular (Chuangchote, 2007; Kraisoraphong, 2010; Lebel *et al.*, 2009, 2010), often follow old techno-managerial tropes or place the blame disproportionately on national or sub-national actors in the policy assemblage (Marks, 2011, 2015; Marks & Lebel, 2015; Manuta *et al.*, 2006). Taking a 'hybrid' approach (Nightingale, 2016), we use 'assemblage' as an analytical tool (Li, 2007; Sassen, 2017). At the same time, we recognize its limita-tions around questions of ambiguity (Anderson *et al.*, 2012) and the political (Brenner *et al.*, 2011), whereby we turn to a more traditionally power-attentive postcolonial angle to provide a dedicated point of analysis. This two-fold analytical approach proved useful in understanding more holistically the barriers to CCA in the

Thai context—and even as a self-reflexive blueprint for the authors themselves and for researchers in future.

An 'assemblage' perspective means taking into account the 'messiness' of CCA (Ford *et al.*, 2013), and highlighting the different nature of factors, influencers, dynamics, and pathways that may make up an assemblage (Greenhalgh, 2008; Li, 2007; Shaviro, 2009). In the case of this paper, it meant that different timescales, speeds/rhythms, and the contestedness and fluidity of CCA barriers are considered and seen more fully (Anderson *et al.*, 2012). It should be noted that an assemblage reading was not meant to renew focus on the Western world, or strip Thailand of its agency, rather it was meant to open up alternative readings of a falsely binary world (North/South, East/West, good/bad) (Raghuram *et al.*, 2014). Assemblage theory does not call for or even espouse a universal truth. It looks to purposely stray from the universal, and disabuse itself of singularities. It argues that while the political economy of floodscapes in Thailand can explain some of the systemic issues of environmental policymaking (Manuta *et al.*, 2006; Marks, 2011, 2015; Marks & Lebel, 2015), assemblage/postcolonialism can also show us that even with 'reform' of some of these barriers, deep-seated power imbalances from the past and through the present remain. In fact, Thailand is not a basket case, as some of the literature may have you believe, it is just one example in a whole host of non-Western realities that have lingering colonial intrusions still influencing policy outcomes. In Thailand, in particular, this has meant that seemingly straightforward CCA barriers that popped up during research were found to be not of sufficient explanatory value at a deeper analytical glance. Supposed 'simplistic' vulnerability framings have deep roots in postcolonial histories; 'complacent' mainstreaming and budgeting trajectories have been nurtured and extended by various IOs, and not necessarily the much-maligned Thai bureaucrats; limited technical expertise and willingness to engage are not necessarily quirky or illogical, but rather partially the result of diverse external forces.

We also found that an assemblage approach allowed us to become more self-reflexive (Kapoor, 2004) and see the 'many angles' (Li 2007) behind policy assemblages themselves. This paper aimed to look above and beyond first-order 'classical' framings, which were critically reassessed and re-mapped to give way to an assemblage one. At the heart of this understanding is the truth that researchers are actively a part of or may affect certain nodes of the resulting assemblage (Russell *et al.*, 2011).

This paper ultimately makes the case that current CCA barriers in the literature generally, and in Thailand in particular may be limited, and even, at times, neo-colonial. It urges researchers and policymakers to reflect upon their first-order assumptions: To what degree are current CCA barriers and critiques valid? Are there other, and perhaps deeper, explanations behind these framings? By combining assemblage and postcolonial approaches, it seeks to get to the bottom of longstanding (and maybe perpetuating) power imbalances between those assessing and highlighting supposed barriers and those implementing CCA, and also their possible complicity in forming them. Given this, we urge researchers and policymakers to be more transparent about their ontological and epistemological proclivities while assessing barriers (Biesbroek *et al.*, 2013) and start realizing that their conceptions of CCA barriers are influenced by normative judgements (Eriksen *et al.*, 2015; Shackleton *et al.*, 2015), with very real causal power and resulting political dynamics.

Acknowledgements

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