

CHAPTER 2

SALWEEN RESOURCE FRONTIER: HISTORICAL CONTEXT

[D]ominated (and dominant) space, which is to say a space transformed – and mediated – by technology, by practice... Dominated space is usually closed, sterilized, emptied out.

Henri Lefebvre (1991: 164-65)

As I reviewed in the previous chapter, a frontier is the expression of the spatial limits of state power, the manifestation of political control, and an indicator of changes in political power within and between states. It represents the process of the expansion of a political entity. In this sense, the Salween borderlands are ambiguous frontiers, ones which have not exactly set the juridical borderline as yet; there is a kind of unsettling character about the border itself, and this is reflected in the border's ambiguity.

According to Tsing, the Kalimantan frontier is a zone of not yet mapped or regulated, a wilderness and a disordered territory, which facilitates capitalist expansion or capitalization. She points out that, a frontier is imagined as an unplanned space; and that a new resource frontier emerges when landscapes are developed as areas for resource extraction. When states and capital, with dreams of order and progress, make nature to be freeing resources then anyone can use and claim resources. The landscapes are then narrated as empty and wild (Tsing 2005). For Tsing, frontiers are deregulated because they arise in the interstitial spaces made by collaborations among legitimate and illegitimate partners: armies and bandits; gangsters and corporations; builders and despoilers. It is made in the shifting terrain between legality and illegality, public and private ownership, brutal rape and passionate charisma, ethnic collaboration and hostility, violence and law, restoration and extermination. They confuse the boundaries of law and theft, governance and violence, use and destruction (Tsing 2005: 27-33). It is the frontier of capitalism that turned natural resources (forest and river) into commodities (timber or electricity) for trade in the markets. However, Pinkaew argues that the resource frontier suggested

by Tsing is not a naturally pre-existing phenomena. It is derived from re-reading the frontier landscape, by the dominants, in order to legitimize order so as to manage and control local resources. For instance, frontier capitalization, in the case of Laos, is the outcome of cooperation between capital and frontier state¹ (Pinkaew 2009: 315).

Furthermore, frontier capitalization is a subset of globalization in the sense that capital transforms natural resources into commodities, known as commodification of nature. It has worked in the Salween borderlands where the state power is unclear. One has to agree with Pinkaew's proposition, because the Lower Salween River Basin (Babel and Wahid 2009) did become a resource frontier that facilitated capitalization in which various actors are engaged in competition to use and claim rights over resources. It consists of collusion among market players, particularly TNCs, and the states to appropriate resources by introducing border development schemes and forest managements. This phenomenon is not different from its recent history of teak timber industry in the colonial and postcolonial Burma. The proposed Salween dam projects operate within this ideology, to generate capitalization² of the Thai-Burmese border zones.

Frontier capitalization, a process of capitalist expansion at the border regions, made a big change to the Salween borderlands since the 19th century when the British forces first came to take control Burma and annexed Burma's lands and border regions by military force. The colonial power declared that the Salween borderlands and adjacent territories belonged to them and claimed rights over lands and resources. By virtue of their superior coercive power, they extracted natural resources, particularly forests and minerals. It was a form of direct exploitation of nature that the British Empire had taken over Burma in nineteenth and early 20th century (also Japanese forces during World War II). In this regard, capital during this period was affiliated to the powerful regimes that ruled over Burma by military force.

The process of capitalization of nature is a way of producing nature where forests became a resource and whoever has power can exploit it. Actually, it is

¹ Barney used the term "frontier-neoliberalism" to refer to the production of resource frontier. Frontiers can be understood as a legitimating ideological device, used by state agencies, companies, and development banks, to advertise and promote Laos as a 'new frontier of corporate investment' (Barney 2009: 146-47).

² Capitalization, for Appadurai and Ong, takes place along with technological explosion: transportation and information (Appadurai 1996; Ong 1999b).

physical nature (forest), but it was transformed into timber for trade in the market. In the Salween borderlands, teak trees were cut and turned into timber for trade. This chapter illustrates how the Salween resource frontier had been produced. In this chapter, I will trace this history in light of commodification of the forests, elaborating upon the history of the Salween resource frontier, from the colonial period to the post-colonial period. How transnational companies, in association with the empire or states, took control of Burma and through its military forces were able to maximize profits from teak extraction and timber trade. As such I pan my historical lens a bit backward in time – conversion of Thai-Burmese border zones as resource frontier during colonial and postcolonial eras – so as to make sense of the current politics of nature. I begin with the Salween borderlands in the pre-modern state period, and continue to the Salween frontier in the colonial period, in which the British exercised control, trading the Salween forests, and dispossessing the local people. This is followed by the Salween frontier in the post-colonial period, one which is comprised of ethnic insurgents and displacement, state re-territorialization of the borderlands, and the KNU on the decline.

2.1 Salween Borderlands: Pre-modern State, Pre-border

In 2002, Van Schendel coined a term, “Zomia” to refer to the huge highlands of Asia (Van Schendel 2002), and Michaud named a term, Southeast Asia massif (Michaud 2010). The boundaries of *Zomia*, or the highlands of Asia, encompass (i) the western Himalayan Range and the Tibetan Plateau, including Tibet, the mountains of Southwest China, southern Qinghai and Xinjiang within China, (ii) the highlands of Pakistan, Afghanistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, and north India, (iii) as well as the lower end of the peninsular Southeast Asian highlands, including the highlands of north Vietnam, Laos, Thailand, and the Shan Hills of northern Burma (Michaud 2010: 187-88).

Recently, Scott also analyzed the upland Southeast Asia as a *Zomia* space³ (Scott 2009). He opines that, before incorporation by states, the whole areas were

³ According to Scott, *Zomia* is a name for all the lands at altitudes above roughly three hundred meters all the way from the Central Highlands of Vietnam to northeastern India and transverse five Southeast Asian nations (Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, and Burma) and four provinces of China (Yunnan, Guizhou, Guangxi, and parts of Sichuan). It is the largest remaining region of the world whose people

pretty much merely “borderlands.” It was a mixed zone for thousands of years, where there were small groups living here and there, next to each other, and would not be state for two thousand years. This small group could be called “tribe” or “clan.” In this regard, the Salween borderlands as part of *Zomia* are mixed zones of ethnic groups, particularly diverse groups of the Karens⁴ (i.e. *Sgaw*, *Pwo*, *Pa-O*, *Bwe*), Karenni, Shans,⁵ and Mons (or Talaings). They have lived in the borderlands for centuries. For example, *Sgaw* Karens first settled in the watershed between the Sittang and Salween Rivers. They were eventually scattered and driven westward towards the Irrawaddy Delta in the 11th century by the Burmese of Pagan dynasty. Some of them, living in the Shan plateaus, escaped the Burmese of Pagan and moved southward to the mountainous region which later came to be known as Thai-Burmese border zones. In the 13th century, the Shans pushed those who were still left in the Shan plateaus into the hills and southward down the Salween valleys (Candy 1956: 826-30, cited in Decha 2003: 72).

Since principalities were gaining power all the time, little by little principalities developed and moved in to take control of what should have been areas in-between. As Keyes suggests, the struggle between the Tai on one side (Siamese

have not yet been fully incorporated into nation-states (Scott 2009: ix). As Scott argues, the hill people are best understood as runaway, fugitive, maroon communities who have, over the course of two millennia, been fleeing the oppressions of state-making projects in the valleys – slavery, conscription, taxes, corvée labor, epidemics, and warfare.

⁴ The word “Karen” was never used by the groups which constitute the category Karen today until 19th century. Christian missionaries and British colonial officers gave the term respectability (Jorgensen 1997: vi). There were more than twenty subgroups of Karen living in the land later known as Burmese nation-state (Decha 2003: 71). According to dialect differences, the whole group of Karen tribes can be divided into three divisions: *Sgaw*, *Pwo*, and *Bwe* groups. The *Sgaw* group is the largest and most widely scattered. *Sgaws* were found from the vicinity of Prome southward, and from the Arakan coast eastward to the neighborhood of Lakong in Siam and southward to the lowest point of the British possessions (Marshall 1997: 1). Nevertheless, there are other people in Burma who do not call themselves Karen but who are called Karen by various people for sometimes divergent reasons (Renard 2003: 1).

Pwo Karens settled down in two separate areas. One group situated themselves in the centers of the Mon (Talaing) powers in the areas around the present-day cities of Thaton and Amherst located by the Gulf of Martaban, while the other settled down in the Bassein-Myaungmya areas of the delta region (Candy 1956: 826, cited in Decha 2003: 71-72). They are sometimes called “Mon Karen” by the Burmese because of their historic location near and living interspersed with the Mons in Burma (Grandstaff 1976: 113; Scott 2009: 109). However, Rev. Harry I. Marshall states that the *Pwo* were found along the seacoast from Arakan to Mergui and were usually not seen more than fifty miles inland, except perhaps in Henzada. The *Pa-Os* (Taungthu) were found in a section of country running northward from Thaton into the Shan States beyond Taunggyi. The *Bwe* tribes were found in the vicinity of Toungoo, in the territory extending from the foothills, east of that city throughout the Karenni subdivision. This is a very mountainous region (Marshall 1997: 1-3).

⁵ They are Tai speaking people. Burmese call them “Shan” and Thais call them “Thai Yai.”

and Yuan) and the Burmese on the other actually was a struggle between two powerful kingdoms over the question of who should control a particular group of vassal principalities (Keyes 1979b: 36). However, the Karens have organized themselves in very different ways in relation to non-Karen people, and have very divergent relations to the Burma and Saim (Jorgensen 1997: v).

The Karens in central Thailand were spies and frontier guards for Ayutthaya and early Bangkok periods between the 17th and 18th centuries, and the Karens who lived in the hill areas along the borders of the old Yuan⁶ and Siamese kingdoms (Keyes 1994; 2007) began playing significant role in frontier defenses for the Yuan and Siamese during the political upheavals of the 18th century.⁷ *Sgaw* and *Pwo*, together with a small number of Kayah, had been settled, mostly by force, in areas within the domains of the Yuan rulers.⁸ They also helped Yuan and Siamese in fighting against the Burmese, including other small principalities of Kayah or Red Karen⁹ (Keyes 1994; 1979b: 36-43; 2007). Some were given titles, for example, Phra Intharakhiri served in 1776s as the border chief (*Nai Dan*) of Tak, and Phra Si Suwannskhiri (Lord of the Auspicious Golden Mountains), a head of Sangkhlaburi (westernmost *muang* of Siam) was awarded by the King Rama III (Buergi 2003: 46; Renard 1980: 57, 77). In this sense, the Salween borderlands had served as buffer zones between Burma and Siam (Renard 1980). It was one way of living in-between two powerful kingdoms that Karens could deal with such power of kingdoms by using the buffer zone narrative as a political confrontation site to negotiate with Siam

⁶ Northern Thais are known as *Khon Muang* since about 1950.

⁷ Karens along with the Lua' were organized, at least symbolically, into political units (*muang*) of Chiang Mai in the 17th century. From 1767 to 1802 the Siamese fought with their allies to end Burmese domination of the region. Many Karen communities lived along the routes through which the various armies passed. They suffered according to the war. They were forced to provide provisions, were recruited as guides and spies, and were taken as captives (Keyes 1979b: 32-36).

⁸ However, it was not all the result of forced migration. During the devastating wars between the Burmese and the Tai, many Yuan who had settled in the border areas fled to safer places or were themselves forced to resettle in Burmese territory (Keyes 1979b: 43).

⁹ Kayah principalities were important to the Yuan due to their political dominance in a border region and their economic significance in the teak and slave trades (Grandstaff 1976: 137-40; Keyes 1979b: 36). Kayah state of Kantarawady, Keyes argues, was considered a vassal of Yuan rather than an ally, a position the Kayah would most probably not have accepted. It had been established on the western borders of Chiang Mai as strategic location that attracted the attention of the Yuan rulers (Keyes 1979b: 42-45). According to "Records of Treaty Making between Chiang Mai and Red Karen Country," the Kayah will provide the Yuan with early warning of advancing Burmese armies (Sanguan 1972: 546). The basis of the relationship was a mutual concern about future Burmese attacks. Kayah ruler wanted to safeguard his small independent state and the Chiang Mai ruler wanted to protect his own borders (Keyes 1979b: 42).

amidst distrust of the Kingdoms of Siam and Burma. However, the situation in the Salween borderlands gradually changed due to concerns of territory defense. The construction of new meaning and significance of “border” had appeared and affected the border people lives.¹⁰

Some Karens were Burmanized. As Marshall notes, some of them (except the Christians) not only wore the dress of the Burmese and spoke their language but also went to the pagodas and participated in Burmese feasts. A number of wealthy Karens, for example, have moved into the larger Burmese towns along the railway lines and lived there in Burmese style (Marshall 1997: 307). In addition, the Karens comprised of subsistence swiddeners in the hill and deep forests, wet-rice cultivators in the plains, specialized cash-crop producers, many kinds of salary workers, functionaries and business people living in towns and cities (Jorgensen 1997: v-vi).

In short, the Salween borderlands are mixed zones of ethnic groups, such as the Karen-speaking people, Shans, Mons, and Karenni. Prior to state formation, they lived in the areas for two thousand years. Small principalities, including Shan, Kayah, Mon, gradually developed and tried to expand by trying to take control of the areas. Thereafter, Burmese and Siamese states contested to occupy the Salween borderlands so that these areas became in-between spaces where the powerful Kingdoms of Siam and Burma tried to take control. Thus, the small principalities, such as Kayah and Shan, had to deal with these powerful kingdoms in order to safeguard their small independent principalities, and the Karens were situated in the warfare zone. Among the diverse Karens, some were on the Siamese side while some were on the Burmese side. Thereafter, a new powerful British Empire (and later Japanese forces) came to take control of Burma and the Salween borderlands. Throughout the region’s history, the Karens have been under various hegemonic powers: the Mons, the Burmese, the Shans, the Arakans, the Siamese, and the British

¹⁰ By 1845, Rama III had strengthened its power in the western frontier where Karens were put in charge of border control, from Tak province in the north to Ratburi province in the west. Since ascending to the throne in 1851, King Mongkut (Rama IV) realized the necessity of working with the British to define Siam’s western border. On the one hand, he considered himself “King of the Karen” to persuade the Karens to be involved in defending the Burma frontier. In foreign correspondence and perhaps in formal Thai letters, King Mongkut signed papers in various ways recognizing the Karens as dependents. Some Karens may have felt uneasy in close contact with the Thai and retreated into the jungle for relief, but many Karens grew close to the Thai king in power and they formed the front line of Thai defenses both during and after King Mongkut’s reign so that the Thai border remained well protected in the west (Renard 1980: 80-88).

(Decha 2003: 78). In the next section I will discuss the situation of resource frontier in the Salween borderlands and adjacent areas under hegemonic power of the British Empire.

2.2 Producing Salween Frontier in the Colonial Period, 1824-1948

The British conquest of Burmese kingdom, then known as Ava, was the culmination of three successive wars which came to be known as the Anglo-Burmese wars (Bryant 1997; Decha 2003; Grandstaff 1976; Renard 1990; Webster 1998). The first Anglo-Burmese war (1824-6) ended with the annexation of Assam (now a state of northeast India), Arakan, and the coast of Tenasserim, including the portion of the province of Martaban east of the Salween River¹¹ (Decha 2003: 68). The second Anglo-Burmese war (1852) ended with annexation of the province of Pegu or Lower Burma (Decha 2003: 68; Bryant 1997: 36). This area was also inhabited by Karens (Grandstaff 1976: 130). Finally, the third Anglo-Burmese war (1885-6) resulted in the conquest of the Burmese state (Webster 1998: 135) with the annexation of Upper Burma and Shan states¹² (Bryant 1997: 77; Decha 2003: 68). Under the British rule, Burma became the easternmost province of British-India until 1937 (Decha 2003: 67, 79). Thereafter, during the World War II Japanese forces occupied Burma from 1942 to 1945: British-Indian government evacuated forest officials to India. It is quite likely that European firms disappeared and Japanese firms dominated timber trade in Burma during this short period. But before Burma could achieve its independence British recaptured it and restored its control over timber trade in 1945, which lasted till 1948 when Burma became independent (Bryant 1997: 148-54, 157).

¹¹ It ended with the Treaty of Yandabu, signed on February 24th, 1826. The Burmese king also agreed to abstain from all interference in Kachar, Jayntia hills, and Manipur (Decha 2003: 68). Owing to this war, the Thais began to prepare for possible armed conflict with the British and enhanced the role of their Karen border guards (Renard 1990: 76). In addition, during the last two wars many Karens served as scouts for and supported the British (Decha 2003: 68; Renard 1990).

¹² Frontier provinces between Lanna and Burma, including Muang Toun, Muang Hang, Muang Joud, Muang Tha, Muang Sad, were disputed territories between Siamese and British-Burmese governments because these areas were did not clearly belonged to any state. A team of British and Siam officials were jointly deputed to demarcate the boundaries in the region. It took one decade to complete the boundary demarcation, i.e. 1885-1895 (B.E. 2428-2438), during Chulalongkorn's reign (Rama V, r. 1868-1910). At one point of time, when boundary demarcation was taking place, Chiang Tung had attempted to be an independent state and tried to gain control over several towns on the eastern Salween River, including Muang Pu, a contiguous town of Chiang Mai (Thongchai 1994: 73; Nakorn 1997: 315-16). Chiang Tung surrendered to the British in 1889 and its municipalities on the west of the Salween River came under the control of British-India government (Nakorn 1997: 242).

The borderlands acquired the status of a resource frontier during the colonial era: vast tracts of land and resources, such as fabulous gems and minerals¹³ (Ehrmann 1957; Mungpi and Solomon 2009) and teak forests (Bryant 1997; Charan 1987; Grandstaff 1976; Marshall 1997; Nakorn 1997; Renard 1980), were enclosed. However, this section focuses only on the Salween borderlands: teak forests were enclosed, and peasants or forest farmers and other forest-dependent people were dispossessed of their rights (Bryant 1997; Nevins and Peluso 2008: 6). In the Salween borderlands, teak trees were turned into timber for trade on the global timber market. The principal forces involved in the commodification of teak were the European timber firms associated with the British Empire and also Japanese timber firms and Japanese army for three years. Therefore, commodification of teak was driven by various actors who were in competition to gain access to resources. They were the British Empire and Japan states, the European, Japanese, and Burmese timber traders, colonial officials, shifting cultivators, and Burmese peasants (Bryant 1997).

2.2.1 The British's Takeover of Burmese Forests

The British Empire succeeded the precolonial Burmese State to exploit the teak forests in Burma from the early 19th century.¹⁴ The teak industry was the principal reason which motivated the British to annexed portion lands of Burma even though this was not the reason for the first Anglo-Burmese war¹⁵ (Grandstaff 1976: 129-30). Moreover, the British were also interested in exploring trade routes between Moulmein and Lanna, the Shan States, and Yunnan (Grandstaff 1976: 117). Notably the British India government went a long way in initiating capitalist development and

¹³ In 1886, the British Government occupied Burma. On March 29th, 1888, the Mogok area was formed as the Mogok Ruby Mines District. Distinct from other areas, it was ruled as a separate entity and controlled solely by the British. In 1889, the Ruby Mine Company Syndicate, Ltd., was formed, capitalized by numerous English bankers and industrialists. It was handled by the management firm of Streeter and Company in London. According to agreement, this company paid the British Crown forty thousand rupees yearly plus one-sixth of all profits accumulated (Ehrmann 1957: 17).

¹⁴ Precolonial Burmese State played a central role in the teak trade in which Burma's rulers developed a complex regulatory system designed to maximize revenue and control. As teak was most easily transported by river, revenue and customs posts were an effective method of control, as well as girdling method was central to regulate teak extraction from the forest (Bryant 1997: 39-40).

¹⁵ Conflicts over territory between British-Indian government and Burmese empire caused the first Anglo-Burmese war which took place on the Arakan and Assam borders during 1823 (See more detail in Webster 1998: 140-45).

expansion of teak production in these areas¹⁶ (Marshall 1997: 304). Hence, Tenasserim forests came to be monopolized by British-India government¹⁷ (Bryant 1997: 24).

Under the British-India government, Burma's teak forests were extracted by the European timber firms, particularly the Bombay Burmah Trading Corporation Limited (BBTCL),¹⁸ and the British Empire. They gradually accumulated benefits from the teak business. At the beginning of teak extraction, a system of *laissez-faire*¹⁹ predominated forest management in pre-scientific forestry period (1824-1855), and the British Indian government opened Tenasserim teak forests to private enterprise. At that time, the triumph of economic liberal ideas led to the introduction of *laissez faire* practices which promoted free trade, comparative advantage, and a limited state control. Between 1829 to 1857, timber private firms were thus free to extract Tenasserim's teak forests. Forest then had been cleared of marketable teak, and *laissez faire* forestry resulted in extensive overharvesting, and colonial officials were slow to intervene to regulate the trade. Therefore, forest management in Tenasserim was characterized by the absence of state authority in the forest (Bryant 1997: 17, 22-27, 42).

¹⁶ The British Empire involved the commercial venture generally known as the 'East India Company' though its original name, when founded by royal charter on the very last day of 1600, was the *Governor and Company of Merchants of London Trading into the East Indies*. Supposedly a monopoly, the company eventually faced competition from another group of English investors and merchants, and the two merged in 1708 as the *United Company of Merchants of England Trading to the East Indies*. The British government began to reign in the company by the late 18th century. The British government took away the Company's monopoly in 1813, and after 1834 it worked as the government's agency until the 1857 India Mutiny when the Colonial Office took full control. The East India Company went out of existence in 1873 (Landow 2010).

¹⁷ Teak forests in India, such as in Malabar in southern India, were depleted which pushed British to seek a new place of teak exploitation, and Tenasserim forest was one of their target. Much of the timber was exported to Europe and India to be used for shipbuilding or other purposes (Bryant 1997: 23, 27).

¹⁸ The Scottish-born William Wallace became involved in the Moulmein teak trade in the 1850s. He worked the Ataran and Pegu forests, and won a lucrative contract with King Mindon of Burma to work the Pyinmana forests just north of the border in 1862. In conjunction with other family members and Indian financiers, he found the BBTCL in 1863. Wallace led the campaign by European timber traders to end the contract system. He blamed the poor financial performance during the 1850s on the Forest Department's incompetence and overregulation, which unnecessarily diminished the quantity and quality of timber supplies (Bryant 1997: 64).

¹⁹ Victorian (notion of) *laissez faire* referred to the policy based on the idea that governments and the law should not interfere with business, finance, or the conditions of people's working lives (Collins COBUILD on CD-ROM, n.d.). It means policy of allowing individual activities, especially in commerce, to be conducted without governmental control (Hornby 1974: 478).

By the mid-19th century, teak extraction centered on two regions: the mountainous Salween watershed separating Burma from Siam, controlled by local rulers; and the low-lying Pegu hill between Irrawaddy and Sittang valleys of southern Burma (Bryant 1997: 36). The British saw the potential of timber industry in Salween frontiers. Hence, the English wanted to demarcate the boundary.²⁰ In 1849, the British successfully marked the Salween River as boundary, on its own volition, without any interference from Chiang Mai and Bangkok²¹ (Thongchai 1994: 68-69).

British began to expand its colonial control over new territories in Burma. Pegu was annexed by British after the second Anglo-Burmese war. Since the British conquest of Lower Burma in 1852, the European timber traders anticipated new opportunities in these areas and the invocation of the *laissez-faire* principle freed Burma's teak wealth from Burmese ruler's monopoly (Bryant 1997: 36). Thereafter, the British-India government tried to turn *laissez-faire* practices to scientific forestry,

²⁰ The boundary issue became a controversial topic between British and Siam in the 19th century. The territorial controversy at the upper Burma and Siam is mostly related to the teak trade. At the lower Burma areas tin mining contributed to the territorial dispute between Siam and British-Burmese government, because the boundaries were still ambiguous and ambivalent. The southernmost frontier of Tenassarim province was traversed by the Pakchan River, both sides of the river was rich in tin and other minerals. When the Siamese local chief extended his authority by levying a share of revenue of the tin miners on both sides, the miners refused to be double taxed, by British and Siam. When some Chinese tin miners requested British protection these areas were claimed to be within Burma's boundary. E. A. Blundell, a commissioner of Tenassarim Province, sent a letter to Bangkok saying that the Siamese local chief had made incursions into British territory. The court replied, at the end of that year, that no boundary had been fixed yet, implying that Brundell's claim was unacceptable (Thongchai 1994: 65).

²¹ The boundary as understood by the British and Siam was a similar thing but not the same. The British held the concept of a modern boundary, but Siam held a premodern one. The former is a fixed national boundary, a line to indicate its sovereignty. The later, so called *Khetdaen*, characterizes as zone or "border without boundary line" in which the kingdom's power could be exercised. The change in attitude towards the boundary question was in fact one among many changes that appeared in the last decade of the reigning Siamese King, Rama III (r. 1824-1851). For Siam, it was local people's responsibility to protect the borders. In this sense, the question of boundary should have been a matter for the local people, not of those officers in Bangkok. It implied that the distinction was already clear without the British kind of boundary. The existing boundary was not at issue and nothing needed to be done (Thongchai 1994: 64-67, 75).

During 1834-1836 the British had prepared for negotiation of boundary between Tenasserim province and Lanna. By studying local records, they found evidence of Burma's rights over the eastern side of the Salween River. They prepared to propose the Salween as their boundaries. The boundary agreement between the British and Chiang Mai was done in 1834. However, Chiang Mai, like Bangkok, was not interested in marking boundaries. In 1847, the British urged Chiang Mai to mark out the boundaries as agreed in 1834, but Chiang Mai replied that let the British do the job themselves. The British then had surveyed every fork of the Salween River in order to identify the main stream as the boundary. Following this survey, in 1849 the British cartographers finished the job of marking the modern-style boundaries with the assistance of the five oldest Karens along the Salween River (Thongchai 1994: 68-69).

based on state intervention, in order to organize forest use and control teak extraction and ensure future timber supply, guaranteed through strict rules by forest officials.²² However, the forest rules undermined the existing pattern of peoples' access and use. Thus, the imposition of state forest control through introduction of scientific forestry in the mid-19th century prompted opposition from civil officials, European and Burmese timber traders, shifting cultivators, and peasants (Bryant 1997: 16, 18, 127).

The British-India claimed that Tenasserim's teak forests would be destroyed by private enterprise and shifting cultivators. State intervention was then required to protect the forest from depredations by both loggers and hill Karens. Thereafter, the colonial government also blamed Burmese by accusing them of overharvesting the Pegu teak forest when the forest was managed by the precolonial state (Bryant 1997: 32-33, 38). As a consequence, the Forest Department replaced the permit system (teak lease), which was promoted by the private enterprise, with the contract system.²³ However, European timber traders, particularly the BBTCL, campaigned to re-open the Pegu forests to private enterprise under the permit system. They thought that private enterprise would girdle, fell and extract the trees under minimal rules. By pressure of European timber traders, the government of India opened the Pegu's teak forest to European firms in 1861 (Bryant 1997: 62-65).

2.2.2 Trading the Salween Resource Frontier

Since the 1840s, there had been a spurt in the cross-border teak logging business in which a great portion of timber were felled from parts of the Salween borderlands which belonged to Chiang Mai (Iijima 2008: 43). At that time, the European timber firms had not yet moved into Lanna, a tributary to Siam, later known as northern Thailand. By the mid 1880s, British teak firms moved directly into Lanna, from both sides of the Salween River. Two of the main European firms were the Borneo Company, which had been engaged in sawmilling in Bangkok since 1868, and the BBTCL, which had mills in Moulmein and Rangoon in 1887.

²² To carry out this task or purpose the British Forest Department in Burma was established in 1856.

²³ Under the permit system, the European timber traders can directly access Pegu's forests. But, for the contract system, Burmese contractors extracted timber on the Forest Department's behalf and the European timber traders could only purchase teak at the government auction in Rangoon (Bryant 1997: 62).

Correspondingly, massive teak devastation in the areas, bounded on the east by the Ping River and on the west by the Salween River, had been carried out by these private firms (Grandstaff 1976: 147).

After the third Anglo-Burmese war, Shan States and Mandalay (in Upper Burma) were annexed by the British in 1886²⁴ (Charan 1987: 52). In 1890, the British annexed the Kayah State (Kantarawaddy principality) located on the west side of the Salween River. By doing that, the Salween River was to be made a boundary.²⁵ For many reasons, however, the British later on annexed the area on the east bank of the Salween²⁶ (Charan 1987: 59) and fixed the Salween watershed as boundary line instead of the River (Charan 1987: iii-iv). In effect, the frontier between Lanna and Upper Burma became a problematic territory as the region was within the spheres of several powers. Two major areas in question were the Kayah state along the Salween River and the chiefdom of the Shans and the Lues between Chiang Tung and Lanna²⁷ (Thongchai 1994: 107). Thereafter, the territorial dispute was later put to a final joint survey in 1892 and the boundary and map of the western front between Siam and Burma were finished in the following year (Thongchai 1994: 128). British-Burma acquired the five Kayah towns which had rich forest on the east of the Salween, while the Siamese gained Muang Sing (Thongchai 1994: 108; Renard 1980: 194).

²⁴ There were two main causes motivating the British to annex Upper Burma after the third Anglo-Burmese: firstly, the English feared France's increasing influence in the region and therefore wanted to secure its position in the region. Secondly, the commercial interest of the Burmese Government meted out unfair treatment to British traders, particularly the fine levied against the BBTCL for failure to pay royalties on teak trade in Mandalay. There was also a great deal of pressure on high British officials from various chambers of commerce to annex the whole of Burma (Charan 1987: 50-56).

²⁵ In 1882, representatives of Kantarawaddy and Chiang Mai met in Mae Hong Son and signed a new treaty. It specified that the Salween River was the border between Kantarawaddy and Chiang Mai. However, the British-Burmese was skeptical about this treaty (Keyes 1979b: 47).

²⁶ The British thought that if the Salween River became the Anglo-French border in Southeast Asia, a worsening relationship with France was inevitable. Another reason was that, as the Salween River was a timber highway, it would create many problems if it were used as a boundary. When logs, while being floated down the River, drifted to the Burmese side, British traders had to pay an expensive salvage fee to the Burmese to retrieve the logs. Finally, the British preferred to use watershed rather than the River itself as boundary (Charan 1987: 62-63).

²⁷ Siam and the British decided to settle the problem by setting up a commission to interrogate local people and survey the areas. The case of Muang Sing is the most controversial issue, because the chief of Muang Sing, who was a relative of Chiang Tung's ruler, submitted to Nan and paid the gold and silver trees as tribute to Bangkok, but he also offered the same tribute to the British for British suzerainty when the dispute occurred. The agreement with maps was formally ratified in 1894 (Thongchai 1994: 108).

After the British-Burmese-Siamese boundary was settled, the forest officials gained more power to control forest use in the Salween borderlands, and opened teak extraction to the European firms. These areas were previously controlled by prior local rulers. They were, for example, Red Karen chiefs, who were the owners of the land, and initially leased the teak concessions but eventually took over the trade themselves (Grandstaff 1976: 149). Teak trade pattern, in the early days, before the expansion of the teak industry was peculiar. For example, Karens paid tax to the chiefs of Chiang Mai or Yuan rulers who were the owners of the forest lands, and then they paid tribute in teak to the King of Siam²⁸ (Grandstaff 1976: 132, 146). Despite Lanna rulers' subservience to Bangkok, they maintained independent rights of control over forest land. They constantly made improper logging concession to timber traders and that resulted in overlapping concessions²⁹ (Pinkaew 54-55; cf. Sarasawadee 1986: 84-85). To deal with logging disputes and overlapping concessions in the border zones, treaties between Chiang Mai (via Siam) and British known as the Chiang Mai Treaties were signed in 1874 and 1883 respectively.

As the British moved in to take control of the Salween borderlands and the adjacent territories, the European timber traders had exerted enormous influence on the timber extraction from the teak-rich Salween forests³⁰ (Bryant 1997: 78-79; Grandstaff 1976: 130). The BBTCL was a very powerful company with strong influence in the British Indian government, and it succeeded in negotiating with the

²⁸ In addition, the *Sgaw* and *Pwo* Karens in northern Thailand were the victims of the raids in the days of slave trade (Grandstaff 1976: 149-50).

²⁹ Tactically, timber traders bribed the Lanna rulers to obtain logging concession. In 1873, 42 cases in Chiang Mai's forests were filed in the Bangkok court to sort out disputes between British-Burmese, Mons and Chiang Mai rulers. Thirty-one cases against Lanna rulers were dismissed, and in eleven cases were found guilty. The significance of the case was that the Chiang Mai ruler, Inthawichayanon, was found guilty and fined 466,015 rupiah. However, the Bangkok government helped him to pay this amount, because he was unable to pay, on the condition that he will return it within seven years (Sarasawadee 1986: 86).

³⁰ In the early 1830s, the British-Burmese interests had not yet penetrated the extensive teak forests on the east bank of the Salween watershed in northern Thailand (Grandstaff 1976: 131-32). However, the teak industry had already expanded to cover these areas. Burmese teak traders moved into Karenni lands and they also moved into northern Thailand in the 1850s (Grandstaff 1976: 145). It is worth noting that the movements of timber traders on the Salween borderlands went further than the political power of the British. It was similar to how, before the British's invasion of Upper Burma, the European firms already moved into the trans-Salween territory (Charan 1987) to work in Salween forests and to operate timber trade.

government to exploit timber in the Upper Burma's teak forests until the last century³¹ (Bryant 1997: 79-81).

Following the lead of the BBTCL, many other private firms, such as Steel Brother, Macgregor and Company, Foucar and Company, and T. D. Findlay and Sons, acquired long-term leases over areas encompassing Burma's key teak forests. These companies came to dominant the teak trade at the expense of Burmese timber traders and the Forest Department (Bryant 1997: 99, 101, 105). In early 20th century, the British Indian government introduced diarchy reforms which transferred forests to Burmese control in the sense that Burma was granted autonomy within the British Indian Empire. By so doing, Burmese advancement in the European firms was under diarchy reforms during 1923-1942,³² but the diarchy reforms were cut short in 1942 by Japan's invasion of Burma (Bryant 1997: 128-44). Therefore, the dominant role of European timber firms and the British Indian government in teak extraction, in the Salween borderlands and the adjoining areas, was on the decline and was soon replaced by a new powerful Japanese force. Even though it provided new opportunities for nationalists to get rid of the British control and European timber traders in forest economy, Japanese firms came to monopolize the timber trade in Burma. Under Japan's invasion of Burma between 1942 and 1945, four Japanese firms, led by the Nippon Burma Timber Union (NBTU), monopolized the timber trade, and extracted timber from accessible forests. As a result, Burmese timber traders were unable to take advantage of the absence of the European firms to expand their operations (Bryant 1997: 154).

³¹ For Forest Department, such extraction was incompatible with scientific forestry due to overharvesting by private firms in both Lower and Upper Burma prior to 1885. However, the BBTCL's senior managers succeeded to lobby the government of India to permit BBTCL to continue extracting teak in Upper Burma (Bryant 1997: 101-02).

³² Formal control of the Forest Department passed to the Minister of Agriculture, Excise and Forests who was appointed by the British Governor from among elected members of the Burma Legislative Council. However, the Burmese Forest Minister had limited power to effect policy change. Burmese politicians and nationalists used this claim to challenge imperial forest policy. Thus, control over the allocation of teak leases remained under the firm control of the Secretary of State in London and the Governor in Rangoon. Similarly, the Minister had no say over forest management in Shan States and other excluded border areas. The Japanese had developed contact with young nationalists, for example, Our Burma Association members, opposed to British rule. They mounted a campaign as a nationalist movement for independence (Bryant 1997: 131-35).

2.2.3 Dispossessing the Karens

As I showed in sections 2.2.1 and 2.2.2, the colonial state expanded their activities in Burma through annexation as policy of internal territorialization, while the forest officials were assigned the task of protecting reserved forests. The internal territorialization policy became the principal means of asserting control by Forest Department by the second half of 19th century³³ (Bryant 1997: 84-85, 95). However, forest use by local people in Thailand was widely unrestricted by forest legislation until the middle of the 20th century (Buergin 2001: 9). The establishment of the RFD marked the end of the northern rulers' control over the forests (Pinkaew 2005: 55), and it controlled concessions for teak extraction which was predominantly executed by British timber firms during the first half of the 20th century (Buergin 2001: 9).

The commodification of the Salween forests by the state was a part of a modernization project which required centralized power to control forest resources, maximize the benefit from timber trade, and reduce British monopoly in the teak business (Pinkaew 2005: 56). To deal with the timber industry's expansion, the British-India government established the Forest Department in Burma in the mid-19th century, and later Siam established the Royal Forestry Department (RFD) in 1896 under the supervision of the British forester H. A. Slade (Buergin 2001: 9; Pinkaew 2005: 55). The latter initially attempted to regulate only teak logging, but later on began to bring within its purview swiddening, parks and forests.

Constant commodification of the forests by capital and/or state had affected the Karens in the Salween borderlands (both Burma and northern Thailand) in numerous ways. It mainly dispossessed them of their traditional rights over land and forest. Whereas the British considered themselves to be 'good' ecologists, the Burmese were viewed as being 'wasteful.' Shifting cultivators were condemned even more vigorously. The latter were accused of perpetrating massive deforestation and other ecological crimes (Bryant 1997: 18-19). In this regard, there were perceptual differences between Karen shifting cultivators and timber traders and forest officials that led to conflicts over resource access during the colonial era (Bryant 1997: 67-68).

³³ While the Burma Forest Act of 1881 facilitated expanding state control over forest, passage of the Burma Forest Act of 1902 was designed to consolidate such control which was the dominating rationalization of forest use in the early 20th century (Bryant 1997: 99).

In terms of ‘first space’ or perceived space, the Salween frontier, namely teak and other forest species, was perceived by hill Karens as source of nutrients for agriculture. In terms of ‘second space’ or conceived space, however, the Salween frontier was imagined by colonial officials and timber traders (many lowland Burmese as well) as a valuable source of timber that tended to be damaged by shifting cultivation. Therefore, the forest officials restricted the Karens from doing shifting cultivation in teak tracts, and they did not allow or limited the people’s access to reserve forests for collecting non-timber forest products. In so doing, forest officials and timber traders were in favor of teak trade and benefits, at the expense of Karen shifting cultivators and peasants. From 1856-1942, this pattern of state forest control has been contested by popular resistance (Bryant 1997).

In summary, there were transnationals in the Salween borderlands since 1880s. In the colonial era, European timber firms, such as the BBTCL, Borneo Company and others, had exploited the forests for at least a century, along with the British-India government. These firms came in the Salween borderlands, cut at least teak trees down and floated them down the rivers, particularly the Salween River, to export. The British-India government set up the Forest Department and created laws to regulate timber trade on the Burma side. The RFD, on the Siam side, had powers to exclude local people so as to allow the transnational timber traders even though they competed against each other in some ways to transform the Salween borderlands and the vicinity into a resource frontier. In light of this commodification of the forests, teak in particular was turned into timber for trade on the timber market. European firms were replaced by the Japanese firms during the Japan’s invasion of Burma between 1942 and 1945. As a result, the control natural resources, at least control of teak trade, was not in hands of local people. In this sense, transnationalism along the Salween Borderlands, did not just erupt recently, it is as old as the beginning of timber extraction.

2.3 Salween Frontier in the Postcolonial Period

Following the end of British rule in Burma in 1948, U Nu became the first Prime Minister of independent Burma. Unfortunately, his 10-year government had to face tough challenges: rebellion (1948-1950), economic decline (1951-1956), and

political trouble (1957-1958). During the political unrest, diverse political and ethnic groups had challenged the authority of Burmese state (Bryant 1997: 157), territorialization was reversed in ways that communist and ethnic insurgents overran much of the country. Hence, civil society groups captured control over people and resources from the state (Bryant 1997: 16). In 1958, General Ne Win took over power and ruled till 1960, and U Nu came back again in 1960. In 1962, Ne Win again took over power. He and the military led a coup d'état to remove U Nu from power, and he introduced socialism – the revolutionary Burmese Way to Socialism.³⁴ These political and economic conditions have affected the policies and practices of the Burma Forest Department throughout the postcolonial era (Bryant 1997: 157). In light of the Burmese state's attempt at re-territorialization, to restore order and commodification of the forests, this section examines the commodification of the forests at the border regions in the context of the political unrest then prevailing in postcolonial Burma.

2.3.1 Ethnic Insurgents and Displacement at the Salween Frontier

“[D]angerous zone! We cannot go back. If we go back, we will be killed. Military government doesn't recognize us as Burmese citizen. We are stereotyped as illegal immigrants if we go back to stay in Burmese side.”

Amnuay, a Muslim in Bon Bea Luang village (June 9th, 2007)

At the Thai-Burmese border regions, Siam and Burma did not take full control of the border which made insurgent groups become powerful (like mini-states). In the Salween borderlands, the Karens have been engaged in rebellion for over sixty years; and not just the Karens, there were other groups in this area, such as, Shans, Mons, Karennis, and different smaller groups³⁵ who have been waging armed movements on

³⁴ The Burmese Way to Socialism refers to the ideology of the Socialist government during 1962 to 1988. It was instituted by the Revolutionary Council to remake Burmese politics and society in the sense that the government centralized the economic development and reduced foreign influence in Burma, and increased the role of the military. Therefore, land and wealth were to be redistributed, foreigners stripped of their assets, and self-serving politicians and capitalists replaced with loyal army men dedicated to serving the nation (Fink 2001: 32).

³⁵ Small armed groups of Muslim known as Rohingya were operating in Arakan State (Fink 2001: 47).

the borderlands for decades. Even the Pa-O and Palaung forces were fighting for autonomy within Shan State (Fink 2001: 47). Therefore, there are numerous struggles, some which are violent, taking place on the border zones which have their roots in the conflict over access to resources, embedded in the context of a wider armed struggle (Fink 2001: 197). The Burmese military government views them as ‘insurgents’ who are out to ruin the Burmese nation-state. This representation of Karens justified the Burmese Junta³⁶ incursions into Karen territory and exploitation of their local resources. Therefore, there was conflict on the border for decades, and that political conflict reflected insurgent histories and experience of displacement of ethnic groups, including Karens at the Thai-Burmese border.

In early 1949, Burmese troops under General Ne Win attacked Karen inhabited areas. The military government unleashed attacks on Karen dominated townships around Rangoon, and the Karen political leaders were arrested. The Karen National Union (KNU) declared armed struggle against the Burmese government with the objective of establishing *Kawthoolei* (Karen Free State), which was proclaimed by the KNU President Saw Baw U Gyi in June 1949³⁷ (Bryant 1996: 32).

During the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s, the Burmese socialist-oriented regime under General Ne Win ruled Burma (Karen Rivers Watch 2004b: 17). In 1962 the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC)³⁸ was formed by *Tatmadaw* (Defense services or armed forces) officials.³⁹ Following this, the current junta came to power in 1988 after crushing a pro-democracy uprising⁴⁰ (Brand 2009).

³⁶ I was researching and writing thesis in a transitional period and thus I refer to the military junta and Than Shwe as the rulers of Burma throughout.

³⁷ In 1976 the KNU changed its aim of ‘independent state’, and joined a new alliance, the National Democratic Front. This alliance of armed ethnic political parties supported a federated union State of Burma.

³⁸ The SLORC was renamed as State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) in 1997.

³⁹ *Tatmadaw* is the military organization of Burma and one of its major tasks is defense services. The instance of operations, to defend its country soil, was in northern Burma in 1950s. After Mao Zedong took power in 1949, anti-communist Kuomintang troops fled to northern Burma. Hoping to regroup and launch counter-offensives into China. They operated in Burmese territory with the covert support of the United States’ military but without the Burmese government’s permission. Meanwhile, the Chinese government was printing maps showing large parts of northern Burma as belonging to China, and Mao Zedong’s troops were making incursions to chase down the Kuomintang. The government in Rangoon tried to use diplomacy to settle its problems with China, while also sending Burmese troops on operations to root out the Kuomintang in Shan State (Fink 2001: 24). It ended in humiliating defeat for the *Tatmadaw* (Wikipedia 2012).

⁴⁰ SPDC created three zones which indicated the intensity of its control: White Zone, Brown Zone, and Black Zone. White Zone indicates that area is already controlled by the SPDC, such as town areas.

In the civil war that ensued, about sixty thousands armed troops from 12 ethnic rebel groups fought for autonomy against government troops⁴¹ (Al Jazeera 2011), including Karens. In the meantime, the Thai military assisted the antigovernment movements in Burma, as well as in Laos and Cambodia, by providing material assistance and refuge in order to curb or preempt the threat of communist infiltration in Thailand. In so doing, the Thai military cooperated with the KNU using it as a “buffer” or “guard” to secure Thai border (Battersby 1999: 474; Karen Rivers Watch 2004: 17).

On a sunny day in July 2009, I attended a fieldwork presentation of students from Burma which takes place once a year at a temporary training center, located in one of the secluded corners of Chiang Mai. This corner few people recognized but I knew it. It was at that event where I first met *Ai Chang*, a Burmese Karen activist who was a former KNU soldier. He is a key person of the organization and has stayed in Thailand for over ten years after resigning from the KNU. Right now, he has been working for an international NGO.⁴²

I had communicated with *Ai Chang* for many times. One time, *Ai Chang* said, “Many other ethnics in Burma have been fighting with the central government of Burma after it gained independence from British in 1948. The ethnic groups have fought with Burmese troops to constitute autonomy in a way of the federal union of Burma, like the United States... Fighting started at the center of country, from Rangoon and expanded into the east of Burmese border since the last 40 years, so that the resistance of Karens has been over 60 years,” said *Ai Chang*.

However, people worry about forced labor and soldiers who can kill without any question. Brown Zone indicates that area which is controlled by the SPDC, but ethnic armed groups cluster together in small areas, such as the construction area of Hatgyi Dam (Living River Siam, et al. 2008: 99). Black Zone indicates that area is controlled by ethnic armed groups, the area that the SPDC cannot control or force people to be porters and laborers. This zone is in decrease, the SPDC has expanded its power to control along with several strategies. One strategy that the SPDC has used to infiltrate into Brown Zone and Black Zone controlled by ethnic armed groups is the ‘Four Cuts Policy’ (food, funds, information and recruitment) that government has practiced to weaken resistance since 1970s (Wai Moe 2011).

⁴¹ Ethnic armed groups, such as the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA), a Kokang cease-fire group of Wa troops, had started as liberation movements from the Communist Party of Burma (CPB), which has been dominated by the Chinese Communist Party for the last 20 years. Their rebellions against the Burmese Communists had a significant impact on the Burmese army’s anti-insurgency operations. From 1989 to 1995, the Burmese junta signed cease-fire agreements with 17 insurgent groups. The Burmese military focused its offensive towards winning more cease-fire pledges and to isolate other insurgents in different parts of the country. Following the cease-fire, the Kokang, Wa, Mongla and New Democratic Army-Kachin (NDAK) formed an alliance group, the Peace and Democracy Front (PDF) in November 1989 (Wai Moe 2009).

⁴² I omit the name of organization for the safety of many of them who are involved.

Thereafter, I was watching a documentary film broadcasted on a program 101 East, titled, *The World's Longest Ongoing War*, produced by Al Jazeera (Al Jazeera Satellite Channel).⁴³ KNU's leaders have coordinated their campaign. They are keeping their close eyes at political development in Rangoon ever since Aung San Suu Kyi's release from house-arrested in November 2010. David Tharckabaw, one of KNU's vice presidents, said, "What the ethnic people want is federalism, and what Aung San Suu Kyi wants is democracy and ethnic people also need democracy, because genuine federalism can only exist in the democratic society. So, we support her stand, you know, the democratic change" (Al Jazeera 2011).

The tape ran a comment which stated that opposition leaders were trying to incorporate with ethnic minorities in pushing the political reform, but ethnic minorities, like the Karens saying the Burma new government is unwilling to negotiate. "We still can carry on this war forever, you know. But, of course, we have to look for peace and that why we open the door. We keep the door open to dialogue, we always ask for dialogue (sic)," said David. Additionally, Cynthia Muang, a founder of Mae Tho Clinic located in the Thai border town of Mae Sot, said, "It is a very big dilemma for the Karen community because they feel that until there is no agreement, like troop agreement, like cease fire agreement, and then must start dialogue. So, without dialogue, putting down arms is out of the question. I think dilemma among different ethnic groups. So have to start dialogue (sic)." But dialogue is still absent. The Burma armies are stepping up their fight against different rebel groups instead. In the olden days, it was all about fight for independence. But now, the reason most of the insurgencies which continue to fight inside Burma is owing to human rights violation. They resist against the Burmese military (Al Jazeera 2011). As a consequence in 2006, approximately 500,000 people are internally displaced persons, who have been forced or obligated to leave their homes and have not been able to return or resettle and reintegrate into their society⁴⁴ (Thailand Burma Border Consortium 2006: 3). Some of them have spent a life time behind barbwire,

⁴³ Al Jazeera is an independent broadcaster owned by the state of Qatar.

⁴⁴ This population is comprised of approximately 287,000 people currently in the temporary settlements of ceasefire areas administered by ethnic nationalities, while 95,000 civilians are estimated to be hiding from the SPDC in areas most affected by military skirmishes; and approximately 118,000 villagers have followed SPDC eviction orders and moved into designated relocation sites (Thailand Burma Border Consortium 2006: 3).

waiting for the day they can return home safe. But the civil war continues and the mistrust between the ethnic leaders and the government is the worst in decades (Al Jazeera 2011).

2.3.2 State Re-territorialization of the Salween Borderlands

“Joint development will make border areas more open and help eliminate bad people, minority people and bad things hidden along the border and ensure greater security... Minority people were cleared from border areas through peaceful means.”

General Chavalit Yongchaiyudh, a Thai former defense minister⁴⁵

(Cited in Tom Fawthrop 2003)

Conflict over resource access has been closely associated with the political and military struggle between the Burmese state and insurgent groups since 1948 (Bryant 1997: 192). The KNU have struggled for control over forest lands and revenue. After the mid 1950s, the Burmese army gained more power and pushed Karen forces out of the Irrawaddy delta. By the mid 1970s the KNU forces were restricted to the mountainous areas along the Thai-Burmese border. After the Burmese army pushed them from the plains into border areas, they came to depend more heavily on forest revenue⁴⁶ (Bryant 1997: 166-67, 197).

In the mid 1990s, the Burmese state had abandoned socialism in favor of gradual opening up to the global capitalist economy (Bryant 1997: 177). Burmese and Thai states expanded control into the Salween borderlands. Since 1988, the SLORC regime has been bent on re-orienting the Burmese economy to global market and the role of private enterprise has been emphasized. But private extraction occurs in keeping with the policies of the state.⁴⁷ Even though Myanmar Timber Enterprise⁴⁸

⁴⁵ In 1988, General Chavalit Yongchaiyudh visited Rangoon to make a new strong relationship with SLORC in order to cut a diplomatic path for Thai businessmen to gain access to natural resources under Burmese army control (Battersby 1999: 477). Hence, he has links with Thai logging companies and other private business interests in Burma (Fawthrop 2003).

⁴⁶ A small share of forest revenue mainly derived from teak extraction is controlled by the KNU. Another one is tin mining. It was significant in 1970s, but collapsed with the price of tin in the early 1980s (Bryant 1997: 168).

⁴⁷ The SLORC has invited foreign investment in the form of joint ventures with the Myanmar Timber Enterprise or local Burmese timber traders (Bryant 1997: 188).

retained control over much of the timber trade, Thai timber traders and politicians were influential in the border logging trade. In early 1989, Burma announced twenty logging concessions to Thai timber firms after Thailand's senior general, Chaovalit Yongchaiyuth, visited the SLORC leader General Saw Muang in Rangoon in 1988 (Bryant 1997: 177; Butler 2004). Logging and timber trade were the goals of the visit along with the campaign to eliminate ethnic insurgents, especially Karen forces along the Thai-Burmese border, known as the "teak war" (Bryant 1997: 179).

Border logging trade is not only about political issues, but also about environmental issues; it involves environmental degradation, since particularly, illegal logging in the Salween forest occurred around the same time Thailand began its commercial logging, and under similar circumstances in other frontier areas. This is because of weak control measures and it is being driven by log traders. In the border area and about 100 kilometers deep into Burma, the forest became denuded (Veerawat 2005: 7-8, 14). Due to the illegal and unsustainable practices of Thai loggers, the SLORC suspended the Thai deals in December 1993 (Bryant 1997: 179). (However, illegal logging in the Salween forest has still continued, but in sophisticated ways). The Burmese regime gained more and more political power,⁴⁹ and could anticipate huge benefits from the cross-border logging in the Salween borderlands. Thai owners of logging companies and influential politicians are involved with it. In contrast, by this teak war, the insurgent groups, such as the KNU forces who have fought to protect their homeland and local resources, were badly weakened.

2.3.3 The KNU on the Decline

The Karens are not homogenous. There is a lot of diversity within Karens in terms of different groups of Karens and different ideas. There are Karens who follow KNU, and there are a lot of Karens who do not; and there are many other Karens who do not care. They just want to do farming, eat rice and be happy. There are also Karens who are friendly with the Burmese government. They are fighting for the

⁴⁸ Myanma Timber Enterprise is a trading organization of the Ministry of Forestry. It is powerful agency in teak extraction and timber trade. However, teak overharvesting was a feature of Burmese forest management in the socialist era so that the Myanma Timber Enterprise undermined its moral authority (Bryant 1997: 185).

⁴⁹ By 1993, the SLORC's financial position had improved as Burma benefited from the constructive engagement policies of its Asian neighbors (Bryant 1997: 180).

Burma armies, and do not agree with the KNU. They think that the Burmese government has some reasons for fighting against the Karens.⁵⁰ However, we do not hear much about them because the KNU is very effective in encouraging people to concern atrocity and many NGOs are sympathetic to them.

In refugee camps on the border, there are many young people who are more interested in their future than they are about the Karens fighting on the border. Indeed, for them, the big issue is their lives, and the Karen fighting with the Burmese army is all right. People in refugee camps are sympathetic with the KNU, but mostly they are interested in their own futures. The issues are about, for example, what they are going to do; thinking about the change in Burma; are they going to the United States or France or somewhere else or they are going to stay in the camp; or they are going to live in Thailand; or do they want to go back to their homeland. Most of them want to live in peace. That is not exactly a branch of the KNU. Hence KNU is not the only issue in their lives.

In addition, the KNU itself developed internal fractions that made them weak. The Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA)⁵¹ broke away from the KNU to side with Burmese military in 1994 and the DKBA signed a ceasefire agreement with the Burmese junta.⁵² The aim has been to lure the groups into becoming business-oriented, thereby eroding their commitment to their original political goals, and neutralizing their resistance movements. Between 1989 and 1992, precisely while the regime implemented its ceasefire strategy with armed groups in Shan State, it launched full-scale attacks against resistance bases of the KNU. Since 1992, the regime has been seeking to establish control over Karen State (Karen Rivers Watch

⁵⁰ For example, Muang Muang is Karen and he grew up in Pa-an, the capital of Karen State. He joined the *Tatmadaw*, not to reach a certain rank or make a certain amount of money; fighting was what he was interested in. He wanted to be a good soldier and sacrifice for the country. When he was young, he was inspired by what he read at school about the important role the armed forces had played during Burma's independence struggle. He served in the army for eleven years. However, he was upset the officers abused their power. Finally, he ran away and came over to Thailand as a migrant worker. There were also other cases (See more detail in Fink 2001: 148-54).

⁵¹ A leader of DKBA is Saw Ba U Gyi and the influential abbot, Ashin Thuzana, is a spiritual leader.

⁵² Since 1989, the regime has also used the promise of "development" to help convince various ethnic armies to sign ceasefire agreements. The strategy of persuading the ethnic groups to sign ceasefires was led by the Directorate of Defense Services Intelligence. Under the agreements, the ethnic armies have been granted no political concessions, but have merely been allowed limited control of certain areas and various economic concessions. For example, the Yadana gas pipeline construction was made possible by the ceasefire agreement between the Mon resistance army and the regime (Karen Rivers Watch 2004: 9-10).

2004). Burmese military has diminished KNU's power. As a result, the KNU suffered a military defeat when Mannerplaw was captured by the Burmese army in late January 1995⁵³ (Bryant 1996: 32).

On August 5th, 2009, I met Ai Chang in Chiang Mai city to discuss about situation along the Thai-Burmese border. Ai Chang made this analysis, "It is not good situation because of the war condition. At the border (nearby Moei River), Burmese soldiers set up the military camp on the top of the mountain where they can easily see the movement or activities down at the riverbank. Thinking about that is terrifying; if Burmese soldiers want to do whatever they will. It is very easy for them."

"The hill possessed by Burmese soldiers is *Kowthoolei* territory isn't it?" I inquired.

Ai Chang pointed his finger and explained, "*Kowthoolei* located on the top of mountain on Burmese side nearby the Salween River, and the area at the confluence of Moei River. *Kowthoolei* is beside Moei River where Burmese and Karen soldiers cannot see each other. On the right side of the Salween River is controlled by KNU, but on the left side is controlled by DKBA. They are not fighting against each other right now. Actually, nobody wants to fight. They want to stay peacefully. When the fight took place, they both all lost. The Burmese government has their own strategy that they try to divide the groups of people. Even DKBA, they themselves do not know each other from different units. If the Burmese government knows someone goes to meet people from outside the unit to try to make an alliance, that guy will be killed."

The DKBA has wilted under the pressure of the military junta since signing the agreement with the Burmese military regime and joining the border guard force (BGF).⁵⁴ The DKBA is being touted by Naypyidaw, that its soldiers will receive the same salaries as Burmese government forces. Nevertheless, Aung Naing Oo, a

⁵³ Mannerplaw was established as headquarter near the Thai-Burmese border since 1974 (Bryant 1996: 32).

⁵⁴ According to the planned structure of the BGF, each battalion will consist of 326 soldiers including 18 officers. Thirty Burmese staff officers with significant roles in the command structure will be posted to each battalion. More armed conflicts and internal divisions within the ranks of the BGFs are expected when the Burmese authorities follow through on their agenda of subjugating the ethnic groups. The DKBA has enjoyed a lucrative trade on the Thai-Burmese border for some 15 years after breaking away from its mother organization, the KNU, in 1995. Not only will the DKBA and any other ethnic BGF be controlled by Burmese officials, but they will lose their business concessions within their respective regions (Saw Yan Naing 2010).

political analyst who has been spending time with the KNU, said, “I don’t think the DKBA will fall strictly under the control of the Burmese regime. The DKBA soldiers will be reluctant to accept orders from their Burmese superiors and will retaliate.” It is common knowledge that many DKBA troops are unhappy with the BGF plan.⁵⁵ The vast majority of regular troops within the DKBA will never surrender their arms or their business deals to the *Tatmadaw*. While low-ranking DKBA soldiers will be unhappy within the BGF, some DKBA leaders, most notably Gen. Kyaw Than and Col. Chit Thu, who vociferously support the plan, will expand their business empires in the border region⁵⁶ (Saw Yan Naing 2010). For example, the Burmese military authorities ordered the Friendship Bridge between Mae Sot and Myawaddy closed in July 2011 in an apparent attempt to pressure the Thai government, which has long allowed Burmese armed ethnic groups, including the KNU to operate along its border (The Irrawaddy 2011b). Ai Chang confirmed, “Even though the Burmese government closed Mae Sot-Myawaddy border, commodities are brought across Moei River illegally, everyday. Smuggling goods from Thailand is the profit of DKBA.”

In response to my question about the relationship between KNU and DKBA, Ai Chang said, “There are various forms of relations, you know, in the past, they *kin khao mor deaw kan* (the same family). They often visit each other. They sometimes don’t get involved with one and another.” The relationship is very ambiguous.

To sum up, in the postcolonial era, Burmese forces replaced the power of the British Empire in controlling the resources and use of resources. At that time, Burmese government encountered political and economical turmoil after independence. The government centralized power to deal with economic depression, incursions of China, on the one hand, and to control resources and maximize benefits,

⁵⁵ The DKBA has six brigades and an estimated 6,000 armed fighters. A large faction is from Brigade 5, led by Col. Saw Lah Pwe, also known as Na Kham Mwe, who led a split from the DKBA in late July, due to the BGF issue, by taking some 1,500 armed soldiers with him. The Burmese authorities are worrying about his troops and they are now trying to persuade Saw Lah Pwe to re-engage with the regime on his own terms. But Saw Lah Pwe refused to have talks with them (Saw Yan Naing 2010).

⁵⁶ Since the DKBA split from the KNU, there have been many assassinations between the Karen groups, the most prominent being the killing of Mahn Sha, the former general secretary of the KNU, in Mae Sot on February 14th, 2008. Many of the remaining DKBA troops are still unhappy about their leaders’ decision to join the BGF. The DKBA leaders were aiming to increase their business activities in the area with the cooperation of Myanmar Federation of Chambers of Commerce and Industry. They planned to construct a road connecting DKBA headquarters in Myaing Gyi Ngu to the Thai border, as well as expanding ventures in logging, mining natural resources such as zinc and tin, and building an infrastructure of factories and business enterprises (Saw Yan Naing 2010).

on the other. Insurgent groups struggled for control over forest lands and revenue. Socialism was practiced by the Burmese Army and they push the insurgent forces from the central areas into the remote-bordered areas. At that time, Burma and Thailand did not take full control of the Salween borderlands, and the insurgent groups and the KNU accumulated power and forces to launch a counter-offensive toward the central Burmese government from the margin. However, later, Burma and Thailand expanded control into the border areas through military operation and business, and the KNU became weak owing to both internal and external factors. Internal factors included fragmentation of the organization into smaller groups and the diversity and differences of Karens. External factors are, for example, that Thai government was reluctant to support them. More and more, its territory is penetrated by Burmese armed troops, and the Salween borderlands became attractive for the states of Burma and Thailand as locations for resource extractions (timber and mine), hydropower dam construction, and other activities (settlement of people, development of tourist resorts and golf courses). Thus, the Karens are now seen as obstacles both to the rational use of the forest as well as to the conservation of the remaining forest ecosystems (Jorgensen 1997: vii). Resources are increasingly turned into commodities and local people are dispossessed of their local resources.

2.4 Summary

The Salween borderlands have been resource frontiers, in terms of commodification of the forests, since the colonial era. Capitalists and states have targeted the borderlands to generate the capitalist expansion and maximize profit from resources. The main actors that began the frontier capitalization were the Empires and their timber enterprises. They have taken control of the Salween borderlands by force, and the local people have been excluded from their local resources. Thus, the Salween borderlands are formulated as spaces of exclusion from which the border people are prohibited.

The Salween borderlands have been mixed zones of ethnic groups, prior to state formation. Diverse groups of Karens have lived there independently for centuries. Little by little states have developed and moved in to take control of borderlands. States have gained more and more power and small states have had to

deal with bigger states. The Karens have had to deal with hegemonic powers of Shans, Mons, Burmese, and Siamese, and later the British Empire (and later still, Japanese forces) in the colonial era, as well as the Chinese in the postcolonial era in the context of a more complicated process of commodification of nature done by transnationals.

Transnationals have been in the Salween borderlands for over 120 years. During the colonial era, the European timber traders, as transnational companies, along with the coercive power of the British Empire, mainly had exploited the teak rich forests in Burma and in the border regions, as well as the Salween borderlands and adjoining areas. Colonial officials, the European firms, local rulers, and local people had tried to contest each other in order to gain access to resources. Under the coercive power of the British Empire, the European firms had gained benefit, but Burmese timber traders, Burmese peasants, and Karen shifting cultivators had been excluded from these forest lands, previously had used by them (In the precolonial era, local people had paid tax to local rulers, and the local rulers had received revenue from teak trade.). In this situation, the Salween borderlands became resource frontiers where the globally powerful British Empire used military forces to take direct control over Burma's forests, the Salween borderlands and the vicinity. It had maximized profit by turning forest into timber for trade. They had also excluded the local groups from these forest lands by convicting local rulers accused for overharvesting of the teak forests, due to faulty precolonial forest management. It had accused practitioners of shifting cultivation for perpetrating massive deforestation and other ecological crimes. In the meantime, the British-Indian government had rationalized forest management by establishing the Forest Department and applying the scientific knowledge to control and manage forest use. In the late colonial era, the coercive power of the British-Indian government and the European firms had been replaced by a new Japanese force and its companies. They had taken control of forest lands and maximized profit and revenue of timber trade. Throughout the colonial period, the control of natural resources, at least teak, had been not in the hands of local people.

In the postcolonial era, the situations at the Salween borderlands and inside Burma have become worse. There are political movements of ethnic minorities to defend their territories. Meanwhile, on the one hand, the attempt of the Burmese state

has been to penetrate its military into the margin of Burma with the objective of restoring power and re-territorialization over resources (and even people). On the other hand, Thailand has opened the gate of border regions and facilitated capital to expand towards the areas. Since the Burmese forces has pinned down the KNU forces from time to time, the Karens as border people have increasingly faced difficulties. The KNU and other insurgent groups are declining, in terms of their fire power to control their territories. As the Thai and Burmese government have resorted to centralization of power over the Salween borderlands, the intensification of commodification of nature at the border regions is increasingly practiced with a new force, new actors, and new form of legitimacy.

The transnationals and states are becoming more and more powerful in the Salween borderlands. In the next chapter I will elaborate their practices in commodification of the Salween River, as a form of frontier capitalism, at the Thai-Burmese border. They organize natural resources by transforming the Salween River into hydro-electric production for purchase in the regional energy market. In so doing, the Salween borderlands are in the hands of transnational capitalists who are aiming to exploit natural resources, and of states that are trying to territorialize the border regions, and the border people have become people who are merely 'naked lives.'