

CHAPTER 4

LIVING WITH THREATS AND VIOLENCE

The Salween borderlands can be conceptualized as spaces of exception where contradictory outcomes of state actions lead to state violence (Scheper-Hughes 1992; Watts 1997). The practices of state violence that act on the border people, who live along the Salween River, are the process of commodification of forests and rivers within the “state of exception” (Agamben 2004; Taussig 1992). As the Burmese and Thai states have kept their sovereign power and responded to economic regionalization through violent practices, on the one hand, within the political conflicts between Burmese government and ethnic minorities, the Salween borderlands have become war zones, and on the other hand, the Burmese government in association with the Thai state and transnational dam investors has imposed the Salween dam projects on the Salween borderlands and people, in the form of a terrorizing state. As Decha points out, the real state of exception is confirmed by the situation in terms of displacement along the Thai-Burmese border, where through force, Karen peoples suffer at the hands of the Burmese army in terms of violence and other dehumanizing experiences. The nation-state boundary places them in an exceptional position, such that they are what Decha calls “imperceptible naked-lives” in the eyes of the nation-state. Placed in this ‘no-man’s-land’, where neither the Burmese or Thai state will accept them, these migrants have no identity; they are stateless peoples – excepted bodies, which means that they are nobody in the eyes of the authorities, even though they are human beings (Decha 2003).

Let me give another example of what he means by ‘imperceptible naked lives’. Millions of laborers from Burma live in Thailand illegally, reflecting a de-territorialization of the Thai nation-state. These migrants cannot reveal their identities as Karen people who have been forcibly displaced from Burma, for once perceived as illegal migrants from Burma, they will be deported. Perceptible or not, the sovereign power decides (Decha 2003; 2007a). In addition, state violence is also characterized as silent violence that is concealed behind. It works mentally on the border people in the sense that they despair at how much of their own lives are trapped by war, dearth

of resource access and famine. As Watts states, famine is largely the product of silent violence which primarily affects to the destruction of the forests and environment (Watts 1983).

Like primitive accumulation through enclosure, Nevins and Peluso maintain, violence remains a threat in different forms, produced and reproduced in different epochs and eras through new types of enclosure that enable primitive accumulation (Nevins and Peluso 2008: 4). Capital and state have taken control of the Salween borderlands, and then the border people have been forcibly excluded from their local resources. Hence, the border people have experienced fear, danger and military violence, which have become the violence in everyday life, inevitably violence to be confronted every day. This chapter will elaborate upon the relationship between capital, state, and violence within the framework of frontier capitalization: the process runs through state violence, that, events of discrimination, explosion and death have occurred in a particular place and time on the Salween borderlands reflecting the suffering of the border people, a consequence of the practices of commodification of the Salween River. I begin with military violence at the explosive Thai-Burmese border followed by moments of danger at the Salween borderlands.

4.1 Military Violence at the Thai-Burmese Border

“Phuenti chaydaen thaharn penyai” (Soldiers are eminent at the borderlands).

Ai Birm, a local NGO activist (June 28th 2010)

Tension between nations, states and their citizens often occurs in the form of ethnic conflicts, because ethnic minority groups often refuse to be a part of the nation-state building to which they are subject – Burma being an excellent case in point. As a result, an ethno-nationalist movement has long been mobilized against the project of nation-state building at the Salween borderlands (Keyes 1994; Pinkaew 2008; Rajah 1990), a project long contested and incomplete for the time being. Hence, the Salween borderlands are ambiguous zones of multifaceted development trajectories (Fold and Hirsch 2009) which express the process of political entity expansion in the

stage of state establishment and reveal ethno-nationalist movements against the formation of the Burmese nation-state and national development plans.

The Salween borderlands have become zones of warfare between ethnic minorities and the Burmese military government. Right now, the Salween borderlands, being part of the GMS Power Grid, are becoming sources for cheap electricity production for Thailand and even the region. In other words, practices of commodification of the Salween resources within the “state of exception” stimulate the militarization and conflicts that people are under threat along the Salween borderlands. It can take in several forms as follows:

4.1.1 Temporary Shelter and Consequences

The relationship between the Burmese and Thai states is often not good and this area has been put into a space of war where the Burmese militaries have fought with ethnic minority groups. Thus there are a lot of internally displaced people and refugee camps (temporary shelter areas) along both sides of the Salween and Moei Rivers. On the ground many risks have been emerging. They are in the condition of unstable state policies, especially on Burmese side. Who will govern in this area between Burmese military government (the SPDC) and ethnic minority organizations?

A lot of news organizations reported about development plans on the Salween River and posted on various websites, including the anti-dam networks’ website. One of them I read was about internal refugee camps, and then colleagues of mine and I visited a temporary shelter located nearby the Mae Sa Kerb stream and the Salween River, under control of the KNU, in May 2007.

We talked with a senior KNU officer who was a coordinator and taking care of the internal displaced people in the temporary shelter. He explained that the camp was started in April 2006. At the time there were only 170 families, about 800 people. The number of refugees had surged, within one year there were a lot of new comers. “Actually, there are 587 families and 3,041 people today,”¹ said the coordinator. He also explained that their lives are already hard, caught in the middle

¹ Thailand Burma Border Consortium (2012) reported that there are 4,125 refugees in this camp in January 2012.

of fighting between the Burmese military and minority groups, including the KNU. More and more minorities are moving closer to the border because of military incursions. Most of them are forced displacements from the North part of the Karen State. They moved from Ta Ngo near Pyinmana.²



Figure 4.1 Burmese Border Refugee Sites

Source: Thailand Burma Border Consortium (2012)

² A new capital city is Nay Pyi Taw (Agence France Presse 2006).

The SPDC pushed Shans, Karennis³ and Karens out of their places to be Internal Displaced Persons (IDP). Burmese military has operated ethnic cleansing and clearing the area for their security around Pyinmana. That is why they (SPDC) want to take over the Karen areas. Karen civilians fear danger, so that they move out to the temporary shelter areas because Burmese and Karen never trust each other. They cannot believe Burmese and Burmese also do not believe Karens. The coordinator added, “There are about seven SPDC Burmese soldier units established around here, not far from this shelter. The refugees are nervous because Burmese soldiers with their weapons can walk to the shelter in only two hours. There are also so many landmines around the camp to oppose the SPDC.⁴ This is quite dangerous for civilians. We are always concerned for our security. We have to think and we have to always be alert, take care of our people and always be concerned about arrangements for them. We can’t be sleepy at the night time too much. We are always careful; not like your country (sic).”

They try to run away from the danger coming close to their lives, aiming to seek a safe place (in the eastern part of Burma) – temporary shelters in Thailand. Some of them would like to go back their home because they have property, elephants and land, for instance. Their family stays here and the men go back to take care the properties. “Eventually, they have no opportunity when they step on landmines and die; 17 persons in 2006,” the coordinator mentioned.

Officially, Thai authorities do not allow them to come into Thailand. They thus have to set up this refugee camp in a sensitive site. The coordinator looked at us with determined eyes and said, “There is a lot of fighting between SPDC and minorities. The situation is not stable, fighting and fighting. This camp is not safe for a long time; it is for a while. In so doing, they think that they want to move to the camp in Thailand since this camp is in a bad location. In the future, Thai authorities might allow us to move to Mae La-U, Mae La Ma camps⁵ or they can go back to their

³ Shans and Karennis also affected from the new city building that they moved out of their homeland in Shan State and Kayah State respectively.

⁴ Both SPDC army and KNU use landmines to protect them from each other.

⁵ Thai government does not take those people who suffer and fled the death as refugees who are treated regarding to the United Nations regulations. They are considered as just illegal migrants. Thai

homeland taking care of a piece of land.” They will be sandwiched between dams (Piyaporn 2007). For the coordinator, if dams are built, refugees can go nowhere but to the mountains where it is hard to live. The Burmese military does not have to use force to kill them. There is no need to kill them because these people will be automatically suppressed by the dams.

In summary, I question why they get more and more suffering in their lives? The Burmese military proclaimed nation-state security and duty of nation-state building, but in a violent way, so that people in the borderlands have uncertainty in their lives. The Salween River is a boundary line between Burma and Thailand where complex definitions of security discourse is constructed and implemented as the art of governments. The stretch of river that flows along the Thai territory of Mae Hong Son Province opposite Karen State has long been an on-going war zone fighting between Burmese soldiers and KNU troops. As I have narrated, forcibly displaced people have fled from the danger to temporary shelters at the Thai-Burmese border. Refugees are trapped by war, poor conditions and famine. At the temporary shelter, they have limited rights to resources and cannot travel freely, and they despair at so much suffering and the inadequacy of their lives. I went back to the Thai side looking at whether the situation is getting worse or not.

4.1.2 Thai Soldiers and Villagers

Thai state authorities, such as border soldiers, are more concerned about national security than local livelihoods. Normally, their main tasks are to protect Thai territory and Thai interests on Thai soil. To work well, information in relation to nation-state security is needed to analyze the situation – flow of people across border, military movement, and outsiders come into the border zones. In so doing, a rule to check the people coming into the border areas is established. Outsiders visiting the border villages have to report in person at the check point, located at Bon Bea Luang village, before travelling to their destination. They have to give details of their destination, number of people travelling, their purpose, and number of days staying at

government allows these people live in the temporary shelters along the Thai-Burmese border, from which they are not allowed to go outside. As temporary shelter is not refugee camp, UNHCR is not allowed to control these camps. The main relief agency is an NGO – TBBC.

the village. A leader's name will be signed, and details will be written down in a report note book. Visitors again have to undergo the same process at the destination village's check point before they enter the village. It became the normal rule in the name of national security.

A week-long trip of students from the Center for River Training took place in June 2010. We also followed the soldiers' rules. Decha, a staff of the Center for River Training, went to write down the details at the soldiers' check point in Bon Bea Luang, before we took a boat to visit Muang Mean village. However, we did not report to the soldiers at the village check point again when we arrived at the village. This caused a tense incident between soldiers as government officers and the Karen villagers from different cultures. It took place on June 28th, 2010, in the evening.

After dinner at *Ai Kai's* house, when we were playing guitar and singing songs, we heard gun shots twice. We stopped for a while, and I asked which side it came from. Someone said 'Thai side.' I thought they might be shooting wild animals. We continued playing and singing. At around 8.30 p.m., I asked them to go to bed at *Pi Somjit's* house. As I was walking down to *Pi Somjit's* house, I met two drugged-men, carrying personal gun, in front of *Ai Kai's* house near a wooden fence door. So, I knew they were border soldiers. They blabbered something that I could barely understand. So I told them, "Please you come again tomorrow for talking." After that they went back. I had a talk with *Ai Kai*. He looked solemn and said that soldiers and villagers were in dispute and a soldier shot a gun at dusk.

The next morning, two soldiers drove a motorcycle to meet us at *Ai Kai's* house. Only a Lieutenant and a soldier leader came in to talk and get written report from us, a follower who shot the gun yesterday did not attend. He was waiting outside. After inviting the Lieutenant to sit down, Decha, a colleague of mine, began, "Everyone doubted whether gun fire took place on the KNU side."

The Lieutenant tried to defend himself and his follower. He said that for the gun shot matter, he will talk to a school director when he comes on a workday. "He and I like each other. I don't often go into the village. If it is not necessary, I won't come. But my follower often comes. I told him 'don't disrupt villagers. I come when there is meeting,'" said the Lieutenant.

Decha let him know that our group often visits the village. And then Lieutenant asked him to write down details in his report notebook and said, “We were curious why you didn’t show me when you came yesterday.” Decha then noted down our detail: who we are, how many people, and what we are doing there. And he said to the soldiers, “If you have anything to say, you can come to talk to us during our stay here.” Lieutenant continued, “Just write roughly, it’s okay. Mostly there is no question.”

He let us know that he is Thai from Nakorn Sawan Province (Lower north or upper central of Thailand). I looked at him and asked, “How long did you stay here?”

The Lieutenant replied, “Almost a year. We always circulate troops. I think dispute sometimes takes place among villagers, schoolteachers, and soldiers. My followers, they are *aor sor* (soldier volunteer). Their rights are not equal as mine. I govern them. They are mad sometimes.”

The Lieutenant said that he got a message yesterday from his colleague at Bon Bea Luang unit, that there is a group of people visiting the Muan Mean village. “It was at dusk. So I decided not to come into the village. We used to ask Karen people, but they sometimes didn’t say any word. They all can speak Thai, but why don’t they say anything. They should speak central Thai when someone asking, right? Children should learn Thai language. Then they can go out and communicate to others. Here, we asked them a question, they just walk away, instead,” he defended.

Thereafter, the Lieutenant informed the school director about the incident. The director came to work the next day. I wanted to know how/what he thought about it and I went to meet him at the school. The school director said, “*Thaharn* came to inform me already. Last night, the follower came to ask a villager, a youth, at school canteen. They asked him: How many students came? Who were they? Because they got the report from Bon Bea Luang, that, there was a group of students who came to the village. Did they arrive?”

The director, who is also Karen, approached it in a compromising way, saying that: “We will talk later. I expect that this matter could end in the area and it shouldn’t happen again. This is the dispute between soldiers and villagers, school is not involved with. Otherwise, it will be long matter.” Then I asked him, if such

incident or dispute happens again, when new troop circulates and replaces the old group, what/how do you do? He just smiled and remained silent.

On July 1st, 2010, two days after the incident, I talked to Suchat, a school janitor, and Jordu, a local Karen activist, how they felt about the incident. Suchat is a witness of the incident. In response to my asking, Suchat said, “At around 8.00 p.m. I was playing football in the school pavilion along with an English teacher, (who came from a temporary shelter to teach students) and a 10-year-old-boy. Two soldiers drove a motorcycle to the school. They stopped nearby the pavilion and they came to me, asking about the students. I apologized that I didn’t know them and told them that they should go and ask *Ai Kai* at his house, instead. I told them that ‘He is not here. He is at home.’ Then I walked away from them, but they still followed me. A Lieutenant soldier accused me of insulting them. I said that ‘Brother (*Pi*), I don’t insult you.’ At first, I called him *Lung*. I was upset due to their accusation, so that I boxed a canteen window.”

“Why did you get angry?” I inquired.

Suchat replied, “They aggravated me by saying that I scolded them, but I didn’t.”

“Suddenly his follower drew a gun and shot two times into the sky. I wonder whether his boss ordered him to do,” added Jordu.

Suchat heard that *Ai Kai* already talked to the soldier follower who shot the gun, and soldier follower accepted that his boss ordered him to shoot gun. “Asking Lieutenant, he said ‘I didn’t order it. Just a moment!’ He asked me and I gently answered them. But they accused me. I’m puzzled now,” Suchat said, adding.

According to Suchat, it was the soldiers’ fault. He feels he should not be afraid of them because he did not do anything wrong. In addition, both local NGOs and villagers were disappointed because unpleasant threatening has happened to them. Te Yaw said that this matter will be discussed at a higher level of commander. It should not happen again in the long run. Furthermore, *Ai Kai* vehemently expressed in front of the school director that Karens are discriminated against. As he put it: “If patience runs out, shoot him, and then escape to live at KNU side.”

In the evening, I discussed this issue with *Pi Somjit* when she was sitting in front of her house, expressing villagers’ suppression by the authorities. *Pi Somjit*’s

words: “I know this matter. I feel depressed. *Thaharn*, they might not like students. Villagers don’t like *thaharn*. They pretend to be our boss. Speak unpleasantly at us: *mueng mairujak ku sialaew* (you don’t know me). Do not act good, squeezing money from boat drivers, 100 baht a boat. Boat drivers have to report to *thaharn* when they go to work. *Thaharn* asked them for money for alcohols and cigarettes. That is why villagers don’t like them. In addition, villagers think that *thaharn* take sides *karn fai fah* and also do not like NGOs.” They also presumed that border soldiers might obtained some money from the EGAT. Finally, *Pi Somjit* concluded, “If the dam is built, they may support it.”

In brief, the threat of Thai soldiers to the villagers shows that the border people are powerless and have no protection at the Thai-Burmese border. As they are people with ‘naked lives’, the practice of Thai soldiers redefines their position, and the border people realize that they are weak and powerless.

4.1.3 Burmese Soldiers and Researchers

Conflict inside Burma between KNU and Burmese soldiers is one factor that shapes security discourse in the Thai-Burmese border zones. In the on-going war, in the context of Karen State, along the Salween River, landmines have been used by both Karen armed groups and the Burmese army to protect each other. In other words, the landmine is a weapon against opponent or enemy, to kill who they define as enemy. However, landmine kills whoever steps on to it; those who survive will do so with disabled bodies.

In the morning of February 15th, 2010, at Saw Myin Dong village, Manee and Sowon, research assistants of mine, walked around the village to observe Karens’ livelihood and to interview someone. Their sightseeing was accompanied by *Moh Yupin*, who introduced them to talk to villagers in order to gain information regarding villagers’ livelihood.

It was a rare opportunity to meet and talk to Burmese soldiers. After Manee and Sowon finished the interview, they were then walking back to *Moh Yupin*’s house. On the way back home, *Moh Yupin* wanted to stop at a local shop in the village to buy some stuff. They went in. Sowon and Manee were also buying some stuff at that shop. At the time, they saw four people who were buying food and

drinks. One was sitting in front of the shop before they went in, but at first, Sowan herself did not notice and did not know who he was. Just before Sowan and Manee left the shop, *Moh* Yupin told them that Burmese soldiers, from military base across the Salween River in front of the village, were in the shop. However, they pretended to be as normal villagers and they often came to buy commodities twice a week. Then Sowan thought that it would be a very good chance to get to talk to him. And because he can speak English quite good, so it was easy to communicate with him.

Bo Nu in, a young 23-year-old-Burmese soldier, spoke good English and was friendly enough to talk in a comfortable manner, as if they were not strangers for him. The conversation with him took place in the shop, located near the Salween riverside and just next to a Thai soldier check point. Their conversation was in an open atmosphere where villagers came in and out to buy commodities, and they spent time about 30 minutes with him.

They started a casual conversation telling him that, Manee is from Laos and Sowan is a Thai. And that they were students from Chiang Mai and had come to the village to study environmental and cultural issues. Bo Nu followed by asking them several questions concerning daily life, friends and family, which were not related to any political issue. He told them that he is single. His family is in Rangoon. He then showed his sister's photograph and said, "I miss home very much." He also explained that life in the soldier base is difficult. The camp was very poor, far from the city, no phone, no internet connection to communicate with family at home. There was no place to buy foods and stuff, except the Saw Myin Dong village. "If we go to the city (Papun) we have to walk very far and it is dangerous," said Bo Nu. He seemed to be proud of himself when Sowan complimented him that he was very brave. He responded with a chuckle and said, "Yes, yes, I have to be strong."

With the intention of extracting more information concerning security situation inside Burma in this area, Sowan expressed her desire to visit Papun and asked him for a possible route to get there. Bo Nu answered her curiosity with a serious tone, "No, you cannot go. There are a lot of mines underneath the ground, in the forest, on the way to Papun District. We have to be very careful on traveling. We travel on foot by taking different shortcuts that have to pass several mountains ranges." He also mentioned that KNU uses groundmines. At the time, it was a

normal communication. His feeling was normal. Bo Nu did not think Sowan and Manee are detectives. Before their conversation finished, they asked him to take a group photo and exchanged contact information with each other. Sowan was quite surprised that he did not refuse. Accordingly, he used his mobile phone to take a photo with them as well.

In the afternoon around 2.00 p.m., on the same day, a man named Po Ma Hae drove a motorbike to *Moh* Yupin's house (where Manee and Sowan were staying) with a hurried look on his face. He conveyed a message from the Burmese soldier they met in the morning, that, he wanted to talk to Sowan at the Salween riverbank. Po Ma Hae did not talk to them directly, but he conveyed the message to *Moh* Yupin in Karen language and so she translated to them.

They asked *Moh* Yupin who Po Ma Hae is. She said that he is her relative who can speak Burmese language well. He is a coordinator of Saw Myin Dong village, who helps communicate and facilitate with Burmese soldiers base located in front of the village.

Sowan personally felt uncomfortable to hear that message. She was pessimistic and thought about their conversation with the soldier – if that had caused him to feel uncomfortable. She was quite worried for their security (to meet the Burmese soldier again) since she had heard many unpleasant stories about Burmese soldiers, and which kept coming into her head. She wondered why the Burmese soldier wanted to meet them again, their conversation, in the morning, had just finished a couple hours ago. Sowan discussed this matter with Manee. For a time being, Manee too was very horrified. He was so scared. “Oh,” Manee said, “why do we have to go to talk with him at the waterfront.”

There was an abandoned house at the waterfront. However, Sowan thought that, at least the meeting with the Burmese soldier had taken place on the Thai side. Thus, their security in Thai territory should be protected at a high level. She was more concerned about the relationship between Burmese soldier and Saw Myin Dong villagers. She wanted to find out what was his purpose since they are outsiders and are not long-term residents in the village. Therefore, to show their willingness and sincerity in agreeing to meet the Burmese soldier again, she did not want to keep a

messenger waiting for too long for them to make a decision, whether or not they would meet the Burmese soldier. Finally, they decided to meet Bo Nu.

Sowan asked *Moh* Yupin to translate their response to Po Ma Hae, that, they would take a short moment to walk to the meeting location. They discussed their concern along the way as they walked to the riverbank. It took them around ten minutes to reach there.

They went to meet him in a house at the riverbank. Manee heard someone said, "I am very angry." Meanwhile, Bo Nu was waiting in the house, drinking beer. His face became red because he was a little bit drunk. He smiled when they went into the house. Their conversation took place in a comfortable atmosphere. He was the first who began the conversation. "Thank you my friend, you are my friend, uh!" Bo Nu said and offered them some soft drinks.

"Thank you too, we are glad to come and meet you," Sowan and Manee responded to him in a comfortable manner.

As the conversation went on, Sowan noticed that Bo Nu was a bit nervous and seemed tense. "You know," Bo Nu said, "landmine is my security, it's my security." Manee interpreted what he just said meant that it was a secret he didn't want outsiders know. It involves his security. Bo Nu was worried and wanted them to delete what they wrote that he spoke to them in the morning, but he didn't say it directly. Sowan's strategy, to make him feel at ease and let him rely on them, was to show him her ID card and the address where she lives. He asked her to take a look at her notebook, because, he didn't want them to write about landmine. She allowed him to see it. He then talked about himself again. "I miss my parents in Rangoon. Staying at Rangoon is comfortable, staying here is suffering," said Bo Nu.

After that, he said to Sowan, "You are so beautiful." He asked her to let him keep her ID card. "You have a nice card. Can you give it to me?"

Sowan smiled and refused. "I have only one. You can keep my address," she replied.

"What can I do with this?" Bo Nu complained.

"You can write letter to us when you have time," she told him.

"Yes, yes, yes I don't know when I will go to my home in Rangoon. Next week I will move to Papun." Bo Nu added, "It is very hard. We are very poor. We

have to walk through many mountains to Papun. It is very dangerous. The mine in the ground is a concern for our Burmese military security. In the jungle there are enemies.”

They spent time, talking with Bo Nu, around half an hour and they felt it was time to end the meeting. They told him that they want to go back as they had work to do. Then the meeting ended. But before they could leave, this time Bo Nu asked them for taking a photo with him and they did not refuse. Sowon used her camera to capture his pictures. He then suddenly cuddled Sowon and took photos with his mobile phone while Sowon tried to protect her body. At the moment, Manee loudly uttered. “No, no, no.”

After they walked back to *Moh Yupin*’s house, Sowon felt that she would get the terrible threatening if she had gone to meet him alone. He could overpower her easily in that house. There was no one close by. His followers were far away and Thai soldiers were very far. Actually, Manee thought that Bo Nu definitely did not want him to accompany her there. He just wanted Sowon to come alone. “If I was alone, I would not go,” Sowon said. “Surely, I would have been molested. See! I barter myself to get the information.”

The conversation with the Burmese soldier offers an insight into the security concern along the Salween border. Firstly, the afternoon meeting requested by the Burmese soldier shown a hint of worry about information he told outsiders, in Thailand where he has limited power of control over the conversation situation.

Secondly, the Burmese soldier mentioned about danger of landmine and enemy in the forest inside Burma. It implies that the conflict between KNU and Burmese soldiers is under the absolute control of Burmese Junta. The Burmese military government concerns national security. National security along the border is their internal affairs that they have to protect and maintain their forces. The Burmese soldier’s statement, “Landmine is my security!” showed the significance of life-insecurity, because the personnel mines which are prohibited at the international level are laid underground. Therefore, the Burmese soldier tried to convey his idea to them that the issue of landmine is secret and national security. It is not permitted to disclose this information to other persons.

Thirdly, it bared the other side of the Burmese soldier – a young man in a remote border area, who when he meets (and talks to) a young Thai woman stimulates his base desires. And he may have attempted to act upon it under the influence of alcohol (inviting her into an abandoned house). As such, in the end, his overtures towards the girl – cuddling her and capturing it in his mobile phone – are tantamount to sexual harassment.

As I have narrated the Burmese soldier's threat to my research assistants, it indicated that even outsiders, who came in the Salween borderland, can be threatened by brute force. This practice emphasizes that people in the Salween borderlands, not only the border people but also outsiders, are powerless. By going there, they will recognize that they are unprotected persons.

To sum up, the commodification of the Salween River and military violence are related. As I have shown in the three cases above, physical and mental violence has characterized the conflicts between soldiers and civilians at the Salween borderlands. On the Burmese side, the Burmese government has used dam construction projects, along with militarization, as a political tool to take control of the conflict zones, simultaneously suppressing local people and promoting dam construction plans. As a consequence, the number of refugees and internally displaced persons has surged, and temporary shelters along the Thai-Burmese border continue to exist. These people suffer despair – trapped by war, a dearth of rights to resources, poor conditions and famine. On the Thai side, the border people and outsiders (such as researchers) are also under threat, for the military has taken control of the border areas and operates surveillance and border protection activities, with people at the borderlands are also threatened by force. Indeed, these practices of threat and violence have redefined the people living around the Salween borderlands as being powerless and unprotected; they live 'naked lives'. Eventually, these conflicts between soldiers and civilians go beyond state boundaries, and unfortunately, military violence further develops, leading eventually to human deaths.

4.2 Explosive Border

[T]heir bodies, their lives, and their deaths are generally thought of as dispensable, as hardly worth counting at all.

Nancy Scheper-Hughes (1992: 216)

Explosion incidents leading to violence have happened along the Thai-Burmese border. Those are related to expansion of state power, national security, and the Salween dam projects. I would like to discuss cases of explosions that took place at the Thai-Burmese border zones, in which traumatic deaths have become significant in relation to the sovereignties of Thai and Burmese states rendering frontier capitalization. The incident I call ‘artillery death of EGAT staff’ took place on the proposed Hatgyi Dam site located in a war zone, and the incident I call ‘bring him back’, in which a Burmese soldier stepped on a landmine on the banks of the Salween River in front of a Burmese troop camp.

4.2.1 Artillery Death of the EGAT Staff

This storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress.

Walter Benjamin (1968b: 257-58)

National progress is the underlying logic of development and its driving force pushes the institutions, such as the EGAT and TNCs, to run power development projects even while facing risks. At the beginning in January 2006, the EGAT began to survey the Hatgyi Dam site inside Burma. Following that, a feasibility study of the 36-billion-baht Hatgyi Dam project (US\$1 billion) was done in June 2006. Previously, this area was under Karen National Union (KNU) control, in Karen State, but it was taken over by the Burmese army and an allied army, the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA). The Karen Rivers Watch reported that there are six military bases of both Burmese army and DKBA set along the Thai-Burmese border from Thai Village to the Hatgyi Dam site at Kamamong Village in Burma since 2007 (Artit

2008). However, the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Team of Environmental Research Institute of Chulalongkorn University, which has been commissioned by the EGAT since last September 2006 to conduct the Hatgyi's EIA, was unable to access approximately half of the stretch of river that will be part of the projected flood area in KNU's control (Salween Watch Coalition 2007).

The EGAT's own staff members who had done surveys on the proposed Hatgyi Dam site, in a war zone of Burma, have directly suffered from the conflict. Two staff members were killed in two separate incidents at the dam site in 2006 and 2007 by landmines and artillery attacks (Salween Watch Coalition 2011a), which was the first time Thai dam building had resulted in death (Pianporn 2007). The EGAT teams were assigned to do feasibility studies and to survey the dam site. In 2007, the scoop of *Kom Chad Luek* newspaper reported that 30 engineers and employees of EGAT went to the Hatgyi Dam site in Karen State, Burma to continue with the feasibility study. Engineers and employees of the EGAT always faced the danger and brutality of war. The group stayed overnight in Pa-an town located on the left bank of the Salween River and traveled to the dam site during the daytime to measure the water level in the rainy season (Anonymous 2007a; Salween Watch Coalition 2007). A geologist died when he stepped on a landmine near the project site in May 2006 (Supamart 2007).

Later, the artillery death of the EGAT staff happened. At about 7.00 p.m. on September 2nd, 2007, two armed men on a motorbike threw two grenades (K. 81) into the EGAT worker camp (Anonymous 2007d). The Burmese guards suddenly opened fire back with no shooting from the enemy. Unfortunately, the next day, after soldiers and policemen cleared the surround area, they found that Mr. Samarn Kantameun, a 53 year-old-Thai engineer, from Phrae province, died in the incident. He was hit by pieces of bomb. His corpse was sent back to the homeland in Song District, Phrae Province via Myawaddy and Mae Sot (Anonymous 2007a). According to field reports from Karen Rivers Watch, due to two bomb explosions in the dam construction area, the numbers of military troops have increased to provide security at the construction site. The LIB 548 has been replaced by LIB 549 led by Hlaing Kyi, which is responsible for security at the dam construction site alongside battalion No. 555 of the DKBA. The number of troops will increase by 800 in the summer

(Salween Watch Coalition 2007). In addition, the 42 EGAT workers were evacuated to Thailand following this incident due to fears for their safety (Anonymous 2007d; Pianporn 2007; Tunya 2007). A worker said that, “The area of proposed dam site is a war zone. If they still keep fighting and the situation is unstable, nobody from the EGAT will dare to go to work. The remaining Thai workers at the construction site are reportedly on their way home” (Anonymous 2007a).

Due to the incident of the artillery death of the EGAT staff, construction work on the Hatgyi Dam scheduled to begin in 2008 was temporarily suspended until the Burmese regime can assure safety (Anonymous 2007c; Tunya 2007). The EGAT has not sent any employees to the dam site since the artillery attack, citing safety reasons. The EGAT governor then called for increased security measures at the site, thereby condoning greater military presence and exacerbation of the conflict and abuses in the area (Salween Watch Coalition 2011a). The EGAT official said that the decision on the status of the Hatgyi Dam is likely to be made when the new EGAT governor takes office (Tunya 2007).

Salween Watch, the environmental group, insisted that the EGAT must be held responsible for the death of two staff members (Supamart 2007). In addition, Thai NGOs called for the government to consider the human cost, saying that the dreadful outcome is a result of the EGAT’s choice to build the dam in a war zone, ignoring pleas from civil society organizations both in and outside the country. In fact, the Salween dams are being used by the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) as another weapon in their war against local populations. And knowingly or not, the EGAT and the Thai people will be liable for supporting these dam projects on the Salween River, which is contributing to an environmental and social disaster (Pianporn 2007).

However, the dam developers are continuing a field survey for the Hatgyi Dam project. This takes place whenever the situation is under control of Burmese military. Salween Watch posted that from March 3rd-13th, 2010, Hydro China Zhong Nan Hatgyi PMO, Sinohydro International Engineering Co., Ltd., Sinohydro Foundation Engineering Co., Ltd., the EGAT, and Burma IGE Co., Ltd. jointly surveyed to investigate the topographic and geologic conditions of the dam site, quarry and access road to find out the site conditions for supplementary engineering

survey to preliminarily determine the route, measures and logistic guarantee necessary for the survey; further understand the natural conditions and social customs of Burma and Thailand; discuss with the various parties on the physical quantities of supplementary survey and field testing, schedule and work division; investigate the cement production level, yield and quality in Burma; and select the sites for new hydrometric stations (Salween Watch Coalition 2010).

In summary, as I have shown, the artillery death of the EGAT staff member indicates a clash between the sovereign power of the state and the sovereign power of the ethnic insurgencies, and led to violence which implicates everyone, including soldiers on both sides of the border, ethnic armed groups, and civilians. They became the people with 'naked lives' in the political conflict and war fighting situations at the Salween borderlands. The death of the EGAT staff members as Thai civilians reflects a violent development for the national progress of Thailand and Burma. They are victims of dam building for GMS regional power security. At this time, the Hatgyi Dam will be located in the conflict zone between KNU and Burmese military and violence will be inevitable. On the Burmese soldiers' side, they took charge of the security of dam building in the conflict zone. In turn, the Karen armed groups have tried to protect their lands and people. Even though the Royal Thai Rangers are responsible for Thai border surveillance and protection, they were not directly involved in this case in particular, because it took place outside Thai territory. The incident described below directly implicates the Thai Military Rangers.

4.2.2 Bring Him Back: the Traumatic Death of a Burmese Soldier

During the first week of January in 2009, I attended the Stateless Children's Day festival organized by the Community Development Center in a district of Mae Hong Son Province in Thailand. Here, I heard of an incident in which a Burmese soldier was injured by a landmine in front of the Burmese military camp that stands on the River, opposite Bon Bea Luang village. I intended to investigate, interviewing people in the village who heard about the accident in order to understand the case from a local viewpoint. Even if the incidents cannot portray the whole picture of the Salween frontier at the Thai-Burmese border, it can in some ways show the situation of insecurity and violence among the border people in relation to the state power and

territorial border. In so doing, this section examines what the violence, in terms of conception and this specific incident, means at the border.

I heard about this incident from Samai who is a staff-member at the Community Development Center. I decided to gather information on this case and as a result, asked him to go to the village in question with me. Two days later, he picked me up and took me to the village by motorcycle, where I took photos of the site where the incident had taken place. After that, Samai and I met Amnuay, who was at that time staying in the village. I asked Amnuay to talk about the case, after which he said “I heard the sound of an explosion in the morning. There was a Burmese soldier laying down and crying. I thought they (the Burmese army) would bring him to the public health center here. I waited to see, but they did not bring him; they left him there. Thai soldiers brought a speed boat across the River to the Burmese side, without having been asked to by the Burmese soldiers, as the Thai soldiers were willing to help him. However, they could not take him back across the River to a public health center because they had to wait until noon for orders from the colonel at another military camp.”

Amnuay explained that his symptoms were very serious. “His leg had been blown off and his face severely injured. It was a close call, and if he had not been sent to the hospital – if he had been made to stay here – he would surely have died.” When the boat crossed the River back to Thai side, laborers helped the soldiers carry him from the boat and send him to a public health center. “He was mutilated; no one could recognize him. He then got primary treatment at the Public Health Center in the village and was then referred to Mae Sariang Hospital,⁶ and he was again referred to a hospital in Chiang Mai on the same day,” Amnuay added.

At the time I thought that if he were sent to the hospital in Chiang Mai, I might be able to get more information through my contacts in Chiang Mai itself. After returning from the village, I still thought about how I could get access to information about the soldier at the hospital; however I knew it would be very difficult because I did not know his details – only the date he was referred to the hospital. With little hope, I asked a friend who was working at the hospital whether she could ask someone about this case. As a result, she talked with a nurse and fortunately was able

⁶ Mae Sariang is about 50 kilometers from the village that the trip takes about one and half an hour.

to give me the hospital report. Knowing nothing about the medical terms it contained, I asked her to explain the case to me.

The inpatient card I looked at reported that the soldier had stepped on a landmine at about 6.00 a.m. on December 24th, 2008, then was sent to Bon Bea Luang Public Health Center at about noon by Thai military rangers under control of the Department of the Army Rangers unit 36th, after which he was referred to Mae Sariang Hospital. Later, he was then referred to the hospital in Chiang Mai and admitted to an emergency room at 6.50 p.m. His name was Mr. Htun Min and he was 31 years old when the incident happened. A surgeon diagnosed that he had a blast injury plus facial injuries; his injuries included traumatic amputation of the lower right leg, a severely ruptured left cornea, a fractured nasal bone, open fractures to his mandible and his right hand, and an open fracture of his right middle finger.

Because of these traumatic symptoms, he was admitted for surgery and looked after by the trauma center, along with a team of physicians, a team of orthopedic doctors and a team of plastic surgeons. The record I looked at shows that the following treatment took place:

1. Amputation of right leg above the knee on December 24th
2. Debridement and k-wire fixation of the 3 and 4 metacarpal fractures of the right middle-finger bone; removal of foreign bodies from both hands, on December 25th
3. Debridement and suture wound on face on December 25th
4. Removal of foreign body from right cornea and both eyelids, plus evacuation of the left eye, on December 25th

Even though his life was saved, the procedure was interrupted when Thai military rangers wanted to send him back to Burma, probably as the result of orders from higher-ranking officers, who wished to speed up the surgery. The trauma team disagreed with the Thai soldiers; arguing that the patient should continue to be treated at the hospital. They tried to convince the soldiers to change their minds, but failed, and in the end the soldiers took the patient back to Burma during the night, immediately after the surgery detailed above had finished. The in-patient card reported that he was discharged on December 26th, 2008, having not consented to

treatment. A Master Sergeant and Sergeant, both Thai soldiers, signed the therapy release form, plus paid cash in the amount of 70,933 baht for the surgery performed to that point.

My question was and still is: where did that money come from? I wondered whether it came from the Burmese military or the Thai army, but did not know. It is a confidential issue, but I wondered this indicates that there is, somehow, a connection between the Thai and Burmese military.

The patient was not a Thai citizen with no right to claim the cost of the therapy from the Thai government, so would normally have had to pay for it himself. However, he could have received his treatment free of charge by taking his case through the social welfare system, though the social welfare service in the hospital told my friend: “If he is unable to pay for the cost of therapy, he will have to go through the social welfare system and will pay nothing, because he has no money. If patients are foreigners, but not from a camp, such as Burmese patients referred from Mae Sariang Hospital, they contact the social welfare center, who pay some of the costs of the treatment.”

However, the Thai military rangers wanted to return him to Burma as quickly as possible, so decided not to engage the services of the social welfare system, even though they could have done so. “In this case,” she added, “the Thai soldiers decided that because the patient had not consented to treatment, he wanted to go back; normally the decision of relatives would be used to give consent to treat him.” I thus wondered whether, since the soldiers were not his relatives, did they have the right to make the decision for him. She then explained the discharging process: “The Thai soldiers who signed the rejected treatment form knew they would be responsible if something happened. So, the actions taken on behalf of the patient were guaranteed by their official status as soldiers.”

When he was discharged at about 2.00 a.m., he was again in-between life and death; his life being in the hands of the Thai soldiers. As my friend at the hospital pointed out, “This case is very strange. Why did they hurry to return him?”

After talking to Amnouy at the border village, we found out the reason. The Burmese government did not want outsiders engaged in this incident; they wanted to keep it secret. They did not want to let people know about it, particularly journalists.

“As I understand it, the Burmese Major would be responsible if the soldier passed away on Thai territory and would be sent to a military court, so he was afraid to let the patient stay in the hospital. The Thai soldiers were forced to take him back to Burma,” Amnouy explained. He also said that the situation at the village after the incident took place is not normal. When a Burmese military commander crossed the River to buy something, he did not really want to talk to anyone; he walked back and forth and kept quiet. His manner, for Amnouy, was strange, given the incident with the soldier stepping on the landmine, as it was not appropriate that such an incident should take place in front of a military camp.

I cannot imagine what took place after Htun Min was taken back. His situation could either have gotten better or worse, a nurse explained, saying “He had just been operated on. His leg was a tied-up as a stump and bandaged with gauze to stop the bleeding. Normally, he would have stayed at the hospital for about a month to recover from his wounds, and then receive rehabilitation as well. He might now be blind. If he had stayed, the doctor would have followed-up on the case later, and the plastic surgeon would have assessed whether he could breathe [with the injuries to his nose]. He would be alive for sure if he had stayed, but as they hurried to take him back, I am sure he is not alive now.”

This assumption is not so different to what I heard later, as someone told me he was killed by a gunman after reaching Burma. Another rumor was that he died of his injuries after crossing the Salween River – back on the Burmese side. “At the end of the day, this Burmese soldier was shot,” Ai Birm, a Community Development Center staff member, told me. “After he got his feet back on Burmese land, the Burmese killed him. They did not want him admitted to a Thai hospital, because they feared the news would leak to the media.”

The cases of Htun Min and others are very important in helping us to understand what is taking place at the Thai/Burmese border. The assumed death of Htun Min reflects upon the concepts of military discipline (Saw Tun 2009) and the mentality of the state that he learned and perceived. Within this concept, he should have been proud to sacrifice his life for the country, yet his death caused a problem for the authorities in both countries. The Burmese soldier-patient was a Burmese subject, but he was treated in Thai territory. Rather than letting him receive treatment

at a hospital that had already saved him, the Burmese army major ordered him to be returned with the help of Thai soldiers, preferring him to die in order to protect the secrecy surrounding the Burmese government. Though silent, his death is a political crime carried out by the state in the name of national security, and its sovereign power came over the Thai boundary through the Colonel in command with the help of Thai Border Rangers. This rapid and violent deportation of the Burmese soldier-patient back across the border represented the certain sovereign affects of violence through the collaboration between the Burmese soldiers at the border and Thai military rangers.

In short, these incidents show that the Burmese and Thai states have acted to maintain their sovereignty over the Thai-Burmese border where this violence has taken place. This violence works, not only on the border people, but also against outsiders who come to the borderlands for either national security or dam construction activities. The traumatic death of a Burmese soldier is an issue of national security for Burma, while the death of the EGAT staff represents the price to pay for the national progress of Thailand. During the course of their daily lives, the border people perceive this kind of violence, understanding that even civil servants and company staff (the Burmese soldier and EGAT staff, for instance) are not protected when they come to work at the Salween borderlands. In this way, the border people realize that they have the least power and have to obey the demands of state authorities. In addition, violent incidents have become more and more dangerous; an inevitable part of life along the Thai-Burmese border. After my study visit, I heard of more deaths from artillery fire along the border and around the Salween borderlands, as violence continues in this war zone.

4.3 Moments of Danger at the Salween Borderlands

The conflict and political problem inside Burma is well known. However, the Thai government grabbed the opportunity to take advantage over resources of Burma, and only thought of benefit of the energy business from the big dam projects. The government did not care about the have-nots in Burma who are living under the government of Burmese military regime. The way of life of ordinary people, who live along the River, is one of being marginalized, to be imperceptible naked lives so as to

legitimize dam constructions. Even though it is the cheap price of power energy, because the lives of ordinary people are not taken into account (Jeerawan 2008), Salween Watch Coalition insists that Thailand has to bear thousands of displaced people affected from dam building. They have called for the abandonment of the dam projects because of the current renewed intensification of fighting in the area, the attendant human rights abuses and continued refugee flows. The massive forced relocation in Burma has increased. Many of ethnic populations have to flee to Thailand, causing a social and economic problem in Thailand (Pianporn 2007; Salween Watch Coalition 2011a; The Irrawaddy 2008).

This section concerns the unintended consequences of state violence that military violence and war fighting between Burmese government and ethnic insurgents are intensifying in the Salween borderlands. This violence has dramatically affected the lives and livelihoods of many people. Of course, the natural resource exploitation has the inevitable consequence of violence in various forms. Indeed, the border people have stayed in the tough war zone in which they suffered torture, forced relocation, forced labor, rape and even death. In addition, they have been fleeing from risk and danger into Thailand for safety and some are hiding in the jungle.

I attended a meeting on July 7th, 2009 – “Salween River and Thai-Burmese border” – held at Chiang Mai University by Friends of Burma and alliances. The report updated the news that 3,542 civilians were evacuated from their houses and fled (to save their life) into Thailand since SPDC and DKBA attacked KNU no. 7 in the early of June. For me, it was strange that they started fighting in rainy season. Normally, they did not fight in the rainy time because it is very difficult to stay in the forest covered by the rain.

Later, I found the reason why this incursion occurred. The SPDC really needed to meet the aim of national election in 2010 and wanted to suppress the protesting ethnic insurgent groups as much as they can. In particular, Burmese army attempted to purge KNU and KNLA out of their place in order to totally control the entire Hatgyi Dam construction site. They attacked the Karens in the area in-between Moei and the Salween Rivers.

Pi Sawang, a Thai environmental campaigner, presented in the meeting that the battle at the borderland, opposite of the Tha Song Yang District, in Tak Province, was because the Burmese troops attempted to clear area by getting rid of the opposition party. The fighting zone was planned to be the transmission line area from the Hatgyi Dam passing Mae Sot to Thailand. The EGAT had already planned to build this transmission line. The war situation in this area normally brings local people many troubles. But the Hatgyi Dam will bring about even more troubles for them. Many of those whose homes are upstream of the dam, on the Burmese side, have already been displaced and dispossessed.

Dam investors have tried to convince the KNU to support the Hatgyi Dam project. They have tried to contact and negotiate with KNU's high ranking leaders, to allow them to use the road leading to the dam construction site. The KNU stated that in the early August of 2007 Thai official have asked them to have a secret negotiation (between Thai officials and the KNU administrative committee) at Mae Sot. However, the KNU still sticks to the same answer: refusing to open the route to the dam area (Living River Siam, et al. 2008: 97).

I met *Ai Chang* again in late January 2010 and shared him some ideas. "The Hatgyi Dam was already put in the Thai Power Development Plan. Thus, the Thai government wants to build it. However, if I am the EGAT, I will first invest to build dams in Laos, because there is no war, even protest is limited. It is more possible and easier. The Laos government doesn't care about the international NGOs, let them shout outside country."

Ai Chang amusingly said, "Thai and Laos NGOs should protest together, right!"

I wondered how Karens in Burma coped with violent situation. I said, "Burmese Karen want to get support from Thai people!"

"Yes," *Ai Chang* suddenly replied, "Burmese Karen cannot talk to the government. The government suppresses them. Only the people on Thai side can fairly talk with them."

Burmese Junta has stepped up its campaign against opposition politicians and activists before national election on November 7th, 2010 (Brand 2009). There have been many fights between SPDC and ethnic insurgent forces. Surprisingly, the

fighting has intensified in Karen, Karenni and southern Shan States, around the five planned dam sites, along the Salween since the election⁷ (Salween Watch Coalition 2011b). Conflict has greatly escalated along the entire borderlands, as many ceasefire groups have refused to come under the regime's direct control as Border Guard Forces. Many units of the DKBA, headquartered adjacent to the Hatgyi Dam site, are now actively fighting the regime's troops, and they together with the KNU, now control large swathes of territory in Karen State, including key areas in the vicinity of the dam" (Salween Watch Coalition 2011a). According to Capt. Bu Paw of Battalion 201 of the KNLA, some of the remaining DKBA soldiers have already contacted the KNLA for assistance in case fighting breaks out. "We have communications. We have made contact and talked about how to help each other if something happens," said Bu Paw (Saw Yan Naing 2010).

On January 15th, 2011, fresh fighting between the Burmese troops and the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA), and those associated with the Karen National Union (KNU) troops, erupted on the Burmese side near the Thai-Burmese border. *Prachatham* (www.prachatham.com) reported that: "It started at 7.00 p.m. After the clash flared, shells were fired into Muang Mean village. Hundreds of residents were forced to leave the village and fled from death in disarray into the forest area at night. A villager said at the time: "We have been living in fear because...two shells were fired into the village on January 2nd and again this time. Today the KNU troops warned us to be careful; to avoid danger and damage because fighting has continued during the day. It scares us. Driving boats up and down the River between Muang Mean and Bon Bea Luang villages has been prohibited since the clashes started at the beginning of the new year" (Anonymous 2011b). The boat service stopped for more than a month, causing problems for local people in terms of traveling and living.

⁷ On March 13th, 2011, Burma's military regime broke its 22-year-old ceasefire with the Shan State Army-North, and mobilized over 3,500 troops to launch a fierce attack in central Shan State, shelling civilian targets, committing gang-rape, and displacing thousands of civilians. The fighting has now spread across northern Shan State, to areas adjoining the two planned upper Salween dam sites. The attack is part of a systematic campaign by the regime to wipe out all ethnic resistance forces, including ceasefire groups, which have refused to come under their control prior to the November 2010 election (Salween Watch Coalition 2011b).

Ai Chang clarified the DKBA's and KNU's standpoint against the Hatgyi Dam. *Ai Chang* said, "Both the DKBA and the KNU oppose the dam for two reasons. Firstly, they worry that if the dam is built, Burmese government will reinforce its position by sending more troops and weapons into the Karen land. So, they will lose their lands. Secondly, they will not receive benefit from the dam project. If Burmese government has not cleared the issues, they will not let the dam to be constructed. The Burmese government has obviously tried to incorporate the KNU and DKBA, but the KNU and DKBA were unwilling to negotiate. So, the Burmese government is trying to get rid of them all."

The proposed dams along the Salween River are linked with incidents of forced relocation, forced labor, and the logging of community forests (Thailand Burma Border Consortium 2006: 2). According to Clause 338 of Chapter VII of Burma's 2008 Constitution, titled "Defence Services," all armed forces in the union shall be under the command of the defense services. It also states that the *Tatmadaw* in Burma is the main armed force for the defense of the union (Saw Yan Naing 2010). In June 2009, the *Tatmadaw* troops have collaborated with the DKBA to penetrate into KNU's territory in Pa-an Township of Karen State. It is the biggest case in a decade. The fighting between SPDC/DKBA and KNU/Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA)⁸ took place nearby Moei River on Burmese side which led to displacement of over 3,000 refugees into Thailand (Salween Watch Coalition 2011a). Those ordinary people (mainly women and children) were evacuating from their homes and fled to Thailand by crossing Moei River. They had to live at the temples of Ban Nong Bou, Ban Thung Tham, Ban Ta Wor and other places in Mae U Su, Tha Song Yang District, Tak Province located at the west of Thailand.⁹

The Karens have tried to retaliate against military junta associated with TNCs. They did not give up, even though they have been defeated many times.

"The Karens can move to other place if they lost a fight. Why do they still fight, even though they cannot win? Is this the common character of people who have

⁸ The KNLA is the military branch of the KNU. It was previously called the Karen National Defence Organization (KNDO) which was formed by the KNU in 1947 to defend Karen communities and interests. It is nominally divided into seven brigades and a 'Special Force' (Wikipedia 2011a).

⁹ The fighting zone is close to the Hatgyi dam site, about 17 kilometers and nearby the road line cut into the dam site from Thailand for transportation and power transmission line to transfer electricity in the future.

been suppressed for a long time? There might be other reasons. In your idea, what are the other reasons?" I inquired.

Ai Chang explained, "They were educated because they had previously worked with the English. Therefore, they have called for freedom so that they can stay in the same society with Burmese with equality and human dignity."

In 2009, the EU ministers met in Brussels and discussed about increasing sanctions against Burma's junta. Sanctions against Burma were imposed in 2006 after the junta's crackdown on pro-democracy groups. In 2007 EU added other economic sanctions, including a ban on imports of timber, gemstones and precious metals (Brand 2009). However, Burmese's neighboring countries, including China, India, Korea, and Thailand still support Burmese government for their businesses and investments, such as energy construction development projects inside Burma. In addition, transnational investors backed up by Thai and Chinese governments associated with Burmese junta have planned to construct the Salween dams.

In contrast, many sectors such as local/Thai and international NGOs, some of academia and some local groups disagreed with the plan and protested against these mega-dam-projects, because the dams will cause flooding and relocation of local people, and many unintended consequences. For example, in the case of Three Georges Dam on the Yangtze River, millions of Chinese have been forced to relocate, as well as an elderly women committed suicide (Jing 2007), there were many incidents of rape, murder, torture and forced labors inside Burma (The Karen Women's Organization 2007).

Inside Burma, the Karenni National Progressive Party (KNPP), an ethnic armed group, has recently allied with the Kachin Independence Army, New Mon State Party, Shan State Army-North, Karen National Union and Chin National Front. They have been fighting against the *Tatmadaw* to protect their lands where the Burmese government has tried to take control and imposed development plans, such as dam constructions inside Burma and on its border. In 2010, the Karen River Watch, a transnational NGO, reported that there was a new dam project in Bawlake Township, eastern part of Kayah (Karenni) State, that more information about the project has been investigated by the organization (Sai Zom Hseng 2010).

In August 2009, the regime's military attacked Kokang in northern Shan State¹⁰ to secure and control the areas around the Kunlong Dam which has been planned by Chinese companies. Heavy clashes have taken place just east of the town of Kunlong, about 15 kilometers from the planned dam site, which drove over 37,000 refugees into China. Fighting broke out after the regime deployed thousands of troops to seize control of the Kokang territory, shattering the 20-year ceasefire. Kokang forces have sought to repel the Burma Army troops (Anonymous 2009a; 2009c).

Speaking to *the Irrawaddy*, Khu Oo Reh, a joint secretary of the KNPP said, "We are investigating the information about this dam construction project, including what company is investing in the project. We learned that the regime began its secret surveys four years ago. At the beginning, we thought that they would construct the Weigyi Dam and didn't expect that they plan to build a new dam in Ywathit" (Sai Zom Hseng 2010).

In October 2010, KNPP troops attacked Burmese troops based at Pon bridge near Pruhso Township, which was located between Loi Kaw and Shar Daw, Karenni State. As a result of the attack, the bridge was destroyed. KNPP troops further ambushed 20 Burmese government military convoys transporting technicians to a dam construction project on December 24th, 2010, killing at least three persons including foreign technicians. "We attacked the convoy because it brought the persons who can harm local people by building a dam. The convoy came from Loi Kaw, the capital of Karenni State, and was headed to the dam project in the Ywathit area of Bawlakhe Township, Karenni State," Khu Oo Reh said (Sai Zom Hseng 2010).

Another similar case, in Dooplaya District, was reported in Karen Human Rights Group website (www.khrg.org). People continue to be impacted by the conflict between the *Tatmadaw* and armed Karen groups, which has intensified since November 7th, 2010. The situation remains highly unstable and varieties of conflict-related human rights abuse have taken place. People are moving frequently between

¹⁰ The Kokang Special region is a self-administrating area in northern Shan State; it has been ruled by Chairman Peng Jiasheng since its establishment in 1989, and is populated mostly by Kokang people, the name for Han Chinese living in Burma (Wikipedia 2011b). For nearly 20 years, there were internal conflicts among Kokang leaders. Some prominent commanders were killed or removed from the leaderships during the conflict. And then Kokang power was weakened. Burmese troops took over areas of the Kokang region (Wai Moe 2009).

their homes and fields and more safe locations outside the village, along the Moei River in Phop Phra District, Tak Province, western part of Thailand. Male villagers face serious threat of being forcibly recruited as porters to support re-supply operations of *Tatmadaw* units deployed in the area. Others are seeking protection: that they are given refuge in Thailand until they feel safe to return home.

The case of violence on the Salween borderlands is also not exceptional. As Benjamin points out, the violence is not an exception but the rule of state and security (Benjamin 1968a). Hence, the anti-Salween dam campaigns and transnational movement has raised the issue of human rights violations, by the military regime, which has occurred at the proposed dam sites. The battles between the Burmese troops and ethnic forces have continued for six decades (Pianporn 2007). It would be even harder for people at the borderlands to cope with tremendous impacts that could be caused by the dams when the human rights abuses have not stopped yet.

Since the war fighting between Burmese SPDC and KNU has increased at the Thai-Burmese border, it is very difficult for the border people to travel to visit their relatives. The Burmese military told the villagers that the military does not allow them to work and visit each other during the night time. *Moh* Yupin, a 60-year-old-Karen in Saw Myin Dong village, had received news from her relative who currently lives in the temporary shelter. Her nephew in Burma was shot dead by Burmese soldiers because he came back from the field at dusk, even though his parents had already informed the Burmese soldiers about his travel in advance. This shows that human right violations often occurs, and as a result, the villagers have to take refuge in the jungle, in spite of the high risk of landmines, malaria, diarrhea and other serious diseases.

Victims of the conflicts have been fleeing their villages. They are compelled to live/hide in the jungle or take shelter in refugee camps or migrate to Thailand, to be classified by the by Thai government as ‘stateless people’. *Ai* Boon, a Shan resident of Bon Bea Luang village, expressed his feeling and experience, “I have migrated to Thailand for more than 30 years, but it is very hard for me to visit my parents in Papun Township, Karen State. Because, you know, it is dangerous to travel. There are Burmese troops along the way and landmines are planted. So, I visit my parents just in case of emergency. However, I keep in touch with them by writing letters.”

As the conflicts between ethnic armed groups and Burmese troops rage on, the contact among the border people are closely watched by Thai military in Saw Myin Dong village. Ai Srithong, an assistant village headman of Muang Mean, said, “If I often cross to the Burma side, the authorities might suspect that I’m cooperating with the Burmese or KNU military.”

In February 2010, Ai Prasong, a resident of Saw Myin Dong, expressed his fears, the ever present dangers in their daily life. He said that local people normally do not go across the River to the Burmese side if it is not necessary due to the danger of landmines. However, the Burmese soldiers come across the River, to the Thai side, to get some food and necessary things. He also referred to the incident of a Burmese soldier stepping on landmine on the opposite side of the Bon Bea Luang village. “I think they, themselves, set up the landmine, and then they forgot. The unlucky soldier went to take a bath at the riverbank, then, stepped on it. Just in case, if it happened here, they will communicate to Thai soldiers and sent the injured person to the hospital in Mae Sariang,” said Ai Prasong.

They are concerned about the danger of landmine. As *The Irrawaddy* reported, nearly five million people in Burma are affected by landmines... Thousands of civilians, mainly ethnic minorities, have been killed or injured by ordnances in townships that contain mine-contaminated areas (Anonymous 2011a; The Irrawaddy 2011a). Thereafter, the *Bangkok Post* reported that: “Innocent victims trod on landmines” (Anonymous 2011a).

For me, the most sophisticated description of a soldier’s mindset when governed by military rules and discipline is the text by Saw Tun, who wrote an explanation in *The Irrawaddy* of how the Burmese military government has learned so effectively to hold on to power. Burmese soldiers, like those of all nations, are disciplined to follow an order without thinking, but Saw Tun says that the Burmese military mindset is comprised of additional characteristics, and says: “We work harder than others for the sake of the country, we sacrifice our lives to work for the sake of the country, our comrades are injured or killed by our enemies, the enemies who injure or kill us are supported by a part of the population, we must follow orders, live under the discipline of the army at all times and as soldiers, serve the country 24-hours a day” (Saw Tun 2009).

Guns and anti-personnel mines are common weapons used by armies to protect themselves as they fight politically opposed groups, and around the Burma-Thai border and the eastern parts of Burma in general, personnel mines are scattered everywhere. Muthaw, an officer in the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) for over twenty years, told me why landmines are used to protect villagers from the enemy and danger. In his words: “We use home-made mines that only stay active for a few months. We do not target civilians, but they (the Burmese army) do. We use mines to protect our villagers, our land and our camps; in our case they are a necessary evil... Our people are subjected to forced labor, are hunted down and killed plus forced off their land by the Burmese army... Three or four soldiers deploying mines can hold off one Burmese army battalion until villagers can be moved to safety. It makes sense for us to use them. Villagers ask for our help to protect them, and if the Burmese army attacks a village, they have to first get through our mines. This gives our villagers enough time to get to safety” (Anonymous 2011a).

However, their destructive nature is not only felt by soldiers and troops, but also affects the lives of ordinary people who are not involved with the fighting. The *Bangkok Post* newspaper interviewed a farmer, Hsa Moo, a Karen man who lives close to a conflict zone on the Thai-Burmese border. The newspaper reported that: “He was out hunting when he triggered the mine. His leg was amputated just below his right knee. Even though his swollen knee has been heavily bandaged, blood seeps through the layers to form small stains. His left leg has scabbed where the mine scorched his flesh and pitted the skin with rocks and dirt. Rivulets of blood run down to his remaining foot... His mental anguish has been driven deep behind eyes now dull with pain and loss” (Anonymous 2011a).

Farmer Hsa Moo recalled his incident, “We farmed this land without trouble, four years ago we worried about mines, but in recent times we felt safe.” “Nine days ago, on a Monday, I was returning from hunting... I was watching the sun play in the trees. It was about 11.00 a.m., I was tired and looking forward to getting home to eat and be with my baby boy and wife. I was walking on the path. The blast was strong – it lifted me. I was scared. Some nearby farmers heard my screams and cries. I blacked out,” he added. Later, the farmers took Hsa Moo by a small tractor to a

local hospital in the Thai town of Mae Ramat and the local police helped transport him to Mae Sot Hospital (Anonymous 2011a).

Internationally, and in response to the issue of landmines, a treaty banning their use was established in 1997,¹¹ with a campaign organization saying of this treaty at the time: “the most comprehensive international instrument for ridding the world of the scourge of antipersonnel mines. It deals with everything from mine use, production and trade, to victim assistance, mine clearance and stockpile destruction” (International Campaign to Ban Landmines 2009c). As of March 2008, 156 states had made a political commitment to join the 1997 Mine Ban Treaty, and those that sign have a legal obligation not to take actions that would violate the treaty. Thailand signed the Mine Ban Treaty in 1997, and ratified the treaty a year later (International Campaign to Ban Landmines 2009b); however, there are 39 states that remain outside the treaty, including China, Egypt, Finland, India, Israel, Pakistan, Russia and the United States (International Campaign to Ban Landmines 2009d). Burma has also not signed the treaty (International Campaign to Ban Landmines 2009a).

By choosing not to be party to the Mine Ban Treaty, the Burmese state has retained its absolute power to continue to use anti-personnel landmines within its territory. *The Irrawaddy*, in an article published on its website, reported that “According to ICBL, Burma has the highest rate of landmine casualties in Southeast Asia, followed by Cambodia and Laos. It is also one of the last countries in the world where landmine production and use is still widespread... Burma had at least 438 new casualties caused by landmines in 2007, up from 246 in 2006. Many more casualties went unreported. The ICBL condemned both the Burmese government and ethnic rebels for using landmines. Burma has the longest-running civil war in Southeast Asia. Both government and anti-government forces use landmines” (Lawi Weng 2009).

¹¹ The Mine Ban Treaty is the international agreement that bans anti-personnel landmines. Sometimes referred to as the Ottawa Convention, it is officially titled: the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction (International Campaign to Ban Landmines 2009d). In December 1997 a total of 122 governments signed the treaty in Ottawa, Canada. In September the following year, Burkina Faso became the 40th country to ratify the agreement, triggering entry into force six months later. Thus, in March 1999 the treaty became binding under international law, and did so more quickly than any treaty of its kind in history. Today, the treaty is still open for ratification by signatories and for accession by those that did not sign before March 1999 (International Campaign to Ban Landmines 2009c).

The political conflict between the powerful armed forces of the state and the ethnic insurgents has created danger and caused many deaths in the border areas, and as a result, abnormal state violence has become the violence of everyday life and the norm. The broader practices of violence at the borderlands have become normal. Having discussed the incident involving Mr. Htun Min and the landmine, the wider practices of violence at the border become important. I asked Amnouy more about the landmine:

“As far as I know, he (Mr. Htun Min) went fishing at the river bank every day. That why someone set the mine on the riverbank.”

“Who did it?” Samai asked.

Amnouy said, “I don’t know for sure...if it belonged to the Burmese army, they would know the locations where landmines are set. They have to recognize the dangerous areas containing landmines...so they will not tread on them. It seems to me that another group set the landmine near the troop camp, to make them lose face.”

No one knows whether this is right or wrong; however, other cases have been reported, such as those by the *Bangkok Post*, of instances where soldiers have trodden on landmines laid by their own people. The *Bangkok Post* reported that Toh Po, 30 year-old with two young children, had resigned from the KNLA to be a farmer, but rejoined part-time after fighting broke out again along the Thai-Burmese border. Unfortunately, he stepped on a mine after having returned to the fighting for just four days. He recalled the incident: “The fighting in the last few months between the KNLA and the Burmese army has forced many of our villagers to take refuge in Thailand. I decided I wanted to help out. I went on a few patrols, acted as a night-watchman and did some cooking. It was just before Christmas. I was looking for leaves to wrap tobacco in when I triggered the mine. I was shocked and scared. My friends stopped the bleeding and villagers helped me to the river. I was fading in and out of consciousness. I don’t remember how I got to Mae Sot Hospital.” Sadly, his own friend had laid the mine. “He forgot he had laid it under the tree I was gathering leaves from. Of course, I feel sad, but what can I do? There’s nothing I can do to change what happened. If we forget where we lay them and we step on them, there’s no one to blame” (Anonymous 2011a).

A KNLA officer responded to this issue at the time, saying “We warn villagers not to go to mined areas, but sometimes they ignore the warnings. It is not only villagers who do not heed the warnings. Our soldiers forget about the danger, or where they have placed the mines” (Anonymous 2011a).

“Returning to the case of Htun Min, Amnouy explained that people were prohibited to cross the Salween River to earn a living in that area, opposite of their place, but it was not an absolute prohibition. “Fishermen are not restricted from fishing on the river bank; however, for those cutting wood for house building, the Burmese restrict the cutting of trees near the camp. We can cut the bamboo trees next to the River, but we cannot climb up the mountain ridge or go far away from the River. In the past, we did not dare to go up there because we feared the problems that some of us had already got into there” Amnouy said.

People around this border know their lives are in a precarious situation, one which includes violence, as there have been many injuries and deaths, such as the cases of Mr. Terd – who stepped on a landmine in 2000, Mr. Hey San – who stepped on a landmine in 2007, and the case of Uncle Poh – who stepped on a landmine in late 2008. Amnouy told me about those cases: “Molah – who was Terd’s older brother, and a friend, went fishing in 2000. Both were kidnapped by an unknown group of people. Their boat was stolen and left to drift down the Salween River. My brother-in-law saw the boat with nobody in it and he pulled the boat back to the village. We could not find either of them. After we prayed for Allah’s kindness on the Friday, at about 2.00 p.m., we went out with the border policemen to find them. Terd saw his brother’s flip-flops and ran to them, but stepped on a landmine, and his body was thrown into the air. He lost a leg then.”

They were not able to find them. Molah’s body was found about nine months later. Both he and the friend had been killed. “Molah was killed in the jungle under a Bodhi tree, or at least that was what we assumed from his green clothes and pants, and his friend was forced to swim to escape and was gunned down in the River. A man who was a member of an unknown group told Mr. Terd this while he was receiving treatment at the same hospital,” Amnouy said.

The second case was Mr. Hey San. In 2007, he and his two friends went fishing up a tributary of Salween River close to the Salween National Headquarters in

Saw Myin Dong village. On the way back he stepped on a landmine that was set on the riverbank beneath a rock. After Mr. Hey San had stepped on the landmine, his brother took care of him by using a wet sarong tied around the injured leg, to stop the bleeding. After that he hurried to take the boat back to the village, but they saw a bigger boat and asked for help taking them back. The boat driver was very kind and helped them.

Amnouy also told about the case of Uncle Poh. He had been cutting wood at a Burmese site for house pillars. The explosion occurred in Mae Pua, less than one kilometer away, and they could see it. Unfortunately, Uncle Poh had stepped on a landmine and the rest tried to escape. They brought the boat back. A wounded Uncle Poh was picked up and sent to the hospital.

Let me turn back to my discussion on Saw Myin dong village. On a sunny day in a rainy season, during the mid of the year 2009, I was following *Lung Yadee* who was visiting his farmland in the forest area outskirt of Saw Myin Dong village. Along the way, when we were walking back, *Lung Yadee* pointed towards a mountain, opposite the village far away, and said, that, there is a cave on that side. In the past, English set up a military camp nearby the cave during the war period. But nobody stays there right now. Villagers used to go there when KNU controlled this area. “After that Burmese soldiers occupied this area. They set up a military camp as well. However, villagers and Burmese soldiers are afraid to go to the cave because landmines were set up around this area by KNU troops. We are Karens so KNU soldiers let us know and made us aware of danger of landmines,” said *Lung Yadee*.

I was excited and scared by what he said. Then *Lung Yadee* added, “There was an incident of landmine explosion about seven years ago. Jor Mu and his friends went across the Salween River, to collect wild products during the early rainy season in June. Jor Mu walked to get mushrooms. Unfortunately, he trod on a landmine. He injured his leg and part of his body. Immediately, his friends carried him and took him back to the village by boat. They carried him to the public health center and asked someone there to give him first aid, to stop bleeding otherwise he will die. His leg was cut, just bone. His foot bones were crushed. The Border Soldiers who worked at the military camp located in the village area communicated and sent him to Mae Sariang Hospital. His symptoms were very severe.”

Lung Yadee ended his talk in this way: “The sound of explosions was loud and explosions always happen. Wild animal sometimes steps on it, but no one dares to cross the River to get it to eat. I avoid going to that side. If it is necessary to go, you have to go along with a person who knows the area. It might be a former soldier who knows where the landmines would be. If you hire me to go there, I won’t go for sure.”

The next day, I met Jor Mu in his home. He told me that he was a former KNU soldier. He was a KNU soldier for seven years and had joined the resistance/revolution when he was 15 years old. He moved to stay in Saw Myin Dong Village for 30 years. Nowadays, he has been running a grocery store to earn money. His old family has been at Pathein, Myaung Mya where his grandparents lived. However, he has never gone back and did not write letters to them. Jor Mu’s words: “I don’t recognize them. I hesitated to go back.” Here, he has a wife and three children, two daughters and one son. His wife has lived in Mae Hong Son with his elder daughter. He is about to get a Thai ID Card. Jor Mu said, “The situation on the Thai side is better than inside Burma. His life in the village is more suitable than Burma. He heard about Burma from radio that the government took the land from villagers.”

How has he faced difficulties under the ambivalent situation of war and violence? Jor Mu explained, “My friends and I, five people, went across the River to collect *hed tob* (Mushroom). Only I stepped on landmine in the morning. They carried me to a small boat and brought me back to village. At that time, I still was conscious of my hurt. They used a big boat and took me to Bon Bea Luang village and then *thaharn phran* sent me to Mae Sariang Hospital and they admitted me to Mae Hong Son Hospital then. I was still conscious of what they did. After medical team brought me to operation room, I was not conscious until the operation was over. I stayed at the hospital for two weeks, if I am right. The treatment cost over ten thousand baht. But I didn’t pay for the service charge. Instead, social welfare service of the hospital government paid for me. I went back home to recover. Now, I sometimes use an artificial leg, but I still cannot walk.”

In summary, these are the lived experiences of the border people; their facts of life, including their perceptions of violence and fear of danger, a fear created by

kidnappings, death and injury. Anti-personnel landmines, gunshots, injuries and death have become common along the Salween borderlands; violence is an everyday life experience – a part of their lived experiences. As I have related here, the physical violence experienced in the area is rooted in the conceived space of the border and its place in the production of military violence. The border people recognize that their lives are in a state of real naked-ness, that they are powerless and vulnerable and that no one can protect them from threats and violence. These incidents confirm that they are people living ‘naked lives’.

4.4 Summary

When looking at the Salween dam projects, the Thai and Burmese states have reinforced their power through use of a development discourse, as a sophisticated form of technology (as discussed in Chapter 3), but a discourse that in general has failed due to the border people’s resistance. In order to overcome and eliminate the border people’s struggles and implement the Salween dam projects, the states have used brute force and violence, and reinforced the state of powerlessness felt by the border people as part of their ‘naked lives’. In other words, the mechanisms that have driven the commodification of the Salween River at the Thai-Burmese border are discursive practices, using both sophisticated technology and brute force. As I have shown, the Salween dam construction activities and accompanying threats, danger and violence cannot be separated. The commodification of the Salween River is embedded in the wider ethnic politics of the Salween borderlands. However, the dam projects are extending the political conflict that already exists between the ethnic armed groups and the Burmese troops, as well as the conflicts over resource access between the corporate sector, states and local people. As war and hydropower dam development become entwined, so the border people on both sides of the Salween River are more and more under threat of danger and violence.

Threats, danger and violence in the everyday lives of the border people refer to the brute force used by the states, or the military violence, that works directly on the border people, to confirm that they are indeed powerless. In addition, brute force leads to ‘silent violence’, in the sense that it works mentally on the border people’s feelings of nakedness. The forcibly displaced persons and refugees who live in

temporary shelters are in poor conditions and exposed to famine, lack rights to resources and have no rights to travel freely, so despair of their lives and feel hopeless. The state authorities have been able to proceed with their plans to make the border people submissive, for when submissive they can be excluded from access to resources. Therefore, the silent violence inherent in the commodification of nature represents the threatened or actual use of brute force against the border people and/or the Salween River and forests.

Actually, the border people are not submissive, even if they live with ‘naked lives’. They have retaliated against the proposed Salween dam projects due to the state’s appropriation of natural resources. Natural resources, for them, are the basis of life: it is their livelihood. The Salween River, for example, is a river of life, one that provides them with the land, food, fish, wild animals and fertility, that they need to survive. They attempt to contest to get back natural resources. The border people produced livelihood, another meaning of ‘socio-nature’, to contest hydro-electricity produced by the capital market and state. In this sense, livelihood generates a ‘double movement’. They have struggled against the capital/states capitalization of nature – transnational enclosure in which they are excluded from their local resources. In the next chapter I will analyze the interaction between threatening border livelihoods and contesting border identity in the Salween borderlands.